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Jane Rule: traversing (re)courses

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
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ABSTRACT

Perhaps no lesbian author understands the dangerous territory of writing diversity as well as Jane Rule. In my thesis, I suggest that the novels and essays of this Canadian writer create bridges which cross and double-cross the landscapes of politics, morality, and literature. Rule traverses the categories of lesbian, author, and critic in order to resist the static containment of a singular subject position, and, thereby, to articulate a complex fictional/critical vision of lesbian material realities. I incorporate contemporary lesbian theory, such as the inside/out paradigm of Diana Fuss, Judith Butler's notion of ambivalence, and Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the mestiza queer, to demonstrate how Rule's texts embrace contradictions as she blends individual and community concerns into a fluid notion of lesbian identity. With the exception of *This Is Not For You* and *Contract With The World* I examine all of Rule's novels, as well as her three collections of essays, in their respective lesbian historical/political moments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For sisters, sexperts, dykes, and queers

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I venture to know better (other than in opposition; in process, rather) the different layers in me. I make discoveries through language. Through language I open myself unprotected. A space for breathing, the other for looking. And it crosses over, converges; makes itself fully sufficient for exploration.

--Nicole Brossard, *The Aerial Letter*.

INTRODUCTION

The specific anxiety inhibiting the production of this introduction became clearer to me after a week's procrastination during which I wrote a list of everything I felt I needed to read first--two hundred entries long. I'm a bit anally fixated, I'll admit, but Lesbian Theory is also rife with its own insecurities: its practitioners are acting under a compulsion to tell the truth, to record, to evangelise, and to be politically correct. It's a balancing act of celebration and self-criticism, of construction and deconstruction, requires of its practitioners, always already working under censure, a dexterity exhausting in its exactitude. --Sally Munt, "Introduction," *New Lesbian Criticism*, xi.

I share Munt's anxiety as I begin the task of introducing a thesis which, like its subject, embraces contradictions and searches for a non-programatic telling of truth. Writing and reading my text requires that you and I embark on a shared journey into territories that may be as uncomfortable and inhospitable as they are rewarding and celebratory. I stress the collective effort of our journey because this thesis is not written in individual isolation. I create out of a lesbian and feminist community of influence insisting on a reader/writer collaboration with the hope that phrases or ideas will spiral off the static confines of the page into new places of action. This thesis is written, but not finished. Yes, it physically closes some one-hundred pages from now, but I will offer no conclusions. The conversations generated amongst texts and readers clearly have no material limitations. I hear many different voices and see several diverse media in this work. Jane Rule, lesbian activists, song

lyrics, poetry, novels, lesbian and heterosexual theorists, critics, personal revelations, popular culture items, and fictional events all blend and mingle with each other, yet maintain autonomy and assert their own, independent usefulness. The often ambivalent interaction of these categories is increasingly foregrounded in my thesis as a useful paradigm for understanding not only the work of Jane Rule and my reactions to it, but also the tentative and contradictory spaces which lesbian subjects inhabit.

What do I mean when I write of the "contradictory spaces" of lesbian identity? This phrase signifies, to me, a dynamic interaction of community and individual, as well as all the possible variations within these two categories. That is, lesbian identities highlight the ambivalent relationship between community affiliation and the recognition of individual diversity. I strongly agree with lesbian literary critic Reina Lewis when she writes, "[w]e deserve a complex and nuanced critical framework, and to see ourselves as part of a diverse group--not just as the unified 'other' of heterosexuality locked into heroic combat with patriarchal straightdom" ("The Death of the Author and the Resurrection of the Dyke" 19). Lesbians do, indeed, deserve a complex critical and fictional accounting of our differences. However, in a heterosexually-constructed society, we must necessarily maintain activist desires for community and solidarity. We cannot afford--politically, legally, socially, or morally--to act out only one or the other binary position. Hence, lesbian material realities encompass contradictions and ambivalence.

My thesis asserts that Jane Rule's novels equip us with a practical understanding and acceptance of ambivalent relationships. She deliberately

places herself, as well as her readers, in this awkward and uncomfortable territory for the purpose of what she terms, "speaking truth" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 43). Her desire to portray people as they really are does not imply she holds a naive view of language or critical expression and is, instead, an ironic reversal of traditional notions of the 'real.' Hence, the choice of my title: the courses of Rule's writing are deliberate (re)courses. My work employs the trope of place and location to illustrate Rule's movements inside and outside of several subjectivities. According to Bonnie Zimmerman, lesbian criticism in the nineties necessarily relies on these tropes as we deconstruct the essentialist lesbian and reconstruct her as a subject position. Zimmerman comments, "[t]his shift in emphasis is reflected in the tropes we now use; they refer less to the act of seeing than to the place from which one sees. Metaphors of position and space now dominate in the way those of sight did a decade ago" ("Lesbians Like This and That" 3). I chose to describe my own movement along Rule's (re)courses, as well as her shifting position within these frames, with the word "traverse." "Traverse" embodies both the emancipatory and restrictive aspects of writing from a marginalized position. That is, it signifies multiply as "something that crosses or lies across;" "an obstacle, adversity;" "a route or way across or over;" and "a protective projecting wall or bank of earth in a trench" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). As a bridge, barrier, path, and protection device all in one, "traverse" may mean "to go against or act in opposition to," or "to deny" (*OED*). These sometimes contradictory definitions illustrate the difficulties inherent in writing about the place or situation of a lesbian subjectivity. My thesis shows how Rule combines and connects communities, as well as individuals, as she traverses traditional boundaries of gender, sexuality, race, class, and age in her novels

and critical essays. I will argue that she makes these connections by focusing on the edges of subjectivities that blur and overlap. Rule's categories of identity are never entirely separate nor fully joined, but exist, instead, in mobile relationships of connection. Uncomfortable with the narrow confines of labels, Rule uses both her fiction and essays to expand the perceptions of her audience, and to demonstrate the links which are made possible when categories of existence are constructed with flexible borders rather than rigid walls.

"Delta"

*If you have taken this rubble for my past
raking through it for fragments you could sell
know that I long ago moved on
deeper into the heart of the matter*

*If you think you can grasp me, think again:
my story flows in more than one direction
a delta springing from the riverbed
with its five fingers spread*

--Adrienne Rich, Time's Power, 1987.

Similar to Rule's movement across the barriers of individual and community communication, the structure of my thesis fluidly traverses the boundaries of fiction, theory, criticism, and personal observation. My decision to employ these elements is not arbitrary, nor done in the name of

postmodern political correctness. Rather, these elements find their origins in the methodology Rule espouses. Just as Rule exposes our expectations of a coherent, unified, and relatively simplistic lesbian subject, my thesis questions the conventions of an academic text. Yet, to discard entirely the linear logic of traditional texts, or the idea of a unified subject, may render a work unintelligible or inaccessible to a great many readers. In the process of writing this thesis I have often felt trapped by these contradictions of identity. Again, I turn to Reina Lewis who comments on this dilemma: "A postmodernist approach would welcome the insertion of the writer's subjectivity but use it to undercut the fantasy of a unified and controlling authorial voice, whereas in identity politics, subjective experience is often offered as the validation of the authorial voice" (18). The (dis)comfort of theorizing the subject, from both inside and outside the academy, becomes an energizing force in Rule's texts. Throughout the (dis)course of my thesis, her work opens, again and again, a space for my writing. Rule's insistence on the connections between disparate categories of existence constantly propels me to locate creative spaces in the borderlands outside of dichotomies. Visually, my thesis emphasizes the shared borders of textual elements as pieces are contained by broken lines of demarcation. This permeable boundary allows for a flow both inside and outside, while simultaneously demonstrating the autonomy of each element. This is not a traditional thesis in either form or content. Be forewarned: you are now entering the territory of perverse reading which Bonnie Zimmerman describes as "the rewriting of cultural stereotypes and literary conventions by reversing the values attached to the idea of lesbianism" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 143). It is my intention not only to highlight Rule's reversals of moral judgements, but also to insist on a

perverse reading of my own text. You must be a versatile reader, able to accept incongruity and instability as useful ways of being.

This thesis really began in 1985, the year of my first visit to Galiano Island. I had heard that Galiano was a lesbian lotus land, a modern day Lesbos, so when my parents planned a family trip to this west coast island I was ecstatic. As a young, not yet out lesbian, I fantasized about the meaningful glances I would secretly give or receive in the general store or at the local restaurant. I imagined the woods to be dotted with lesbians, tucked away in comfy cabins planning a separatist community. Of course, in this fantasy world my parents would conveniently disappear from sight whenever a cute dyke appeared. Needless to say, Galiano did not, could not, fulfill my hopes of a lesbian paradise, nor did my parents exit the scene on command. But in the midst of my sexual angst, I discovered a tiny store that was home to the products of various artists living on the island. Prominently displayed in the centre of the shop, a book glared out at me with its bright purple cover and bold black lettering. There, out for all the public, including my parents, to notice, were the words "LESBIAN IMAGES." Afraid that my interest in these books would be detected, I quickly turned away to study, in detail, a ceramic vase. With much trepidation, I snuck back to the store later in the afternoon to purchase my first lesbian novels. I knew this was the beginning of a lasting friendship with the books of a Canadian writer named Jane Rule. In her own words, "The real power of books is in their deep companionability. We learn from

them as we learn from the deep companionability of love to know our own hearts and minds better" (A Hot-Eyed Moderate 112).

Born in 1931, Jane Rule is the author of seven novels, two collections of short stories, two compilations of essays and fiction, and one critical study of lesbian writers. It is disheartening to realize that such a prolific author has been largely overlooked in Canadian literary scholarship. I am not surprised that Rule, as a lesbian author, has been ignored by the literary establishment. I am, however, shocked by the lack of attention she has received in lesbian and feminist literary studies. Previous critical work on Rule is difficult to locate and, when found, is often plagued by a description of her humanist vision that consequently ignores the complex motivations behind Rule's communities. Lesbian and gay critics, as we shall see, are often uncomfortable with Rule's inclusion of heterosexual characters in her work. These critics fail to understand that Rule's characters undo stereotypical representations of gays and lesbians when they inhabit a variety of communities. Paradoxically, heterosexual audiences fear precisely this undoing of identity categorizations and frequently dismiss Rule because she gives lesbian and gay characters a prominent place in her novels. My thesis takes to task these rejections of Rule's work and demonstrates how her relatively unexperimental style enables a vast readership to access the radical, revisionary communities she creates. The inability of lesbian critics to shatter patriarchal models of resistance--models that insist on the 'us'/'them' dichotomy--has deprived Rule of the recognition she deserves. For too long, lesbian literary scholarship has demanded a 'positive images' approach which insists on the primacy of

lesbian characters that, as Lewis tells us, are "locked into heroic combat with patriarchal straightdom" (19).

My thesis demonstrates how recent theorizing by two lesbian academics, Diana Fuss and Judith Butler, may provide a framework in which to understand the complexity of human interactions Rule describes. Fuss and Butler set the stage for a refusal of the binary structures perpetuated by both essentialist and anti-essentialist texts. I find these scholars particularly useful in their examinations of contradictory spaces; Fuss contributes the inside/out paradigm to lesbian identities, and Butler re-values ambivalence as a creative flow between and amongst subject positions. Using the work of many lesbian and feminist writers, academics, and poets, I argue that Rule is (mis)read as a-political when, in fact, she promotes a version of truth whose very existence is revolutionary. Feminist theorist Nancy Hartsock has noticed that "it is no accident that subjectivity, history, representation and truth are being dismantled and questioned by white male intellectuals just when they are being utilized by minority groups for the purpose of oppositional struggles and the development of emancipatory strategies" (Przybylowicz 291). I argue that Rule's work opens the concept of 'truth' to include lesbian material realities, and for this reason, must be seen as intensely political.

I cite, in my thesis, primarily female and, most often, lesbian critics and theorists as a calculated political tactic. This text asserts a visible lesbian presence in order to undermine our continual erasure in academic institutions. I heed the advice of lesbian theorist Biddy Martin who stresses the perils of denying lesbian identity. She writes that there is "a certain

danger, given the institutional privileges enjoyed by those who can afford to disavow 'identity' and its 'limits' over against those for whom such disavowals reproduce their invisibility" ("Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]" 275). I am unwilling to perpetuate lesbian silencing or stereotyping, and I use the fiction of Jane Rule to emphasize the width and breadth of our existence. Throughout my thesis I am always aware that "[l]esbian fiction . . . provides unparalleled source material with which to explore the ideas and beliefs of the lesbian community" (Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women* 2). Lesbian theory, criticism, and fiction occupies a primary space in my text, not in the service of a 'positive images' approach, but as an alternative to a conventionally heterosexual critical base. My project is one of coming out; coming out of the *straight* jacket of traditional literary criticism to fashion a world that values diversity and encourages community. I am aware that my emphasis on lesbian texts may alienate or anger some readers, or function to discredit my scholarship as 'marginal;' however, I challenge readers to establish their own points of connection with this text and I am confident that our journey through Rule's work will crack open some previously closed or resistant spaces in critical readings.

In order to promote both diversity and community, the "you" that I address throughout my thesis shifts between several different figures. "You" is alternately reader, judge, therapist, examiner, wise woman, male authority, myself, Jane Rule, familial influence, and lover. I write within hearing distance of these many conflicting, overlapping voices and, as a result, feel a need to talk back, criticize, evangelise, celebrate, or simply dialogue with their influential statements. This is not to say that I or my thesis suffer from a

multiple personality disorder, but only that I choose not to submerge these elements under a body of conventional criticism. I subscribe to a notion of text that lesbian writer Gail Scott observes. Scott writes, "The words revealing the possible richness in the reading/writing relationship of a work that crosses cultures, sexual boundaries, or that is merely transmitted from one individual to another, each reading affected by the readers sense of place, her sexuality, among other things" (*Spaces Like Stairs* 45). My thesis strives, as does Rule's work, to make connections with a variety of readers. It is my desire that the multiplicity of genres, theoretical approaches, and fictional material which I present will open spaces for further comment and criticism on this important writer. In writing this thesis I have come to realize, with both joy and frustration, the limitations of my work; frustration because my paradigms are often inadequate to describe Rule's novels, and joy because I have always wanted this thesis to be a starting point rather than a definitive or closed text. Two of Rule's novels, *This Is Not For You* and *Contract With The World*, are absent from my critical study precisely because they refuse containment within the paradigms of my thesis. These novels traverse the borders of my text, initiating (re)courses and expanding the possible ways of reading Rule's work. Perhaps, fittingly, the absence of these novels exposes the need for a fluid and contradictory lesbian critical approach more adequately than any overt assertion of complexity could accomplish. They prevent my models from taking up a privileged position in current criticism of Rule's work and, instead, insist on the diversity and range of her texts. Rule deserves further literary and public recognition for her pioneering journey across our many different worlds of experience.

My thesis moves through many of Rule's novels and critical essays, spanning nearly three decades of her writing. Chapter one dialogues with Rule's first novel, *Desert of the Heart*. I examine this text in its mid 1960s historical/political moment to underscore Rule's initial interrogation of the convention of marriage, as well as her refusal of lesbian relationship stereotypes. Chapter two looks at Rule's refusal of monolithic communities in her novels *Against the Season*, and *The Young In One Another's Arms*. I argue that her communities establish a useful balance between individual concerns and communal activism. Using Diana Fuss' inside/out paradigm, I demonstrate how Rule, because she is freed from the restraints of a heteropatriarchal construction of difference as always other, takes on the project of creating textual communities that value the importance of individual experience while simultaneously maintaining diversity. I move to Rule's essays in chapter three to further understand how she traverses the categories of author, critic, and lesbian. I argue that Rule engages in a process of 'double movement,' which allows her to initiate a conversation with multiple identities that may overlap, collide, or fuse in an often paradoxical manner. Furthermore, I assert that Rule's movement replicates lesbian everyday lives in its insistence on flexibility and stamina. The final chapter looks at Rule's most recent novels, *Memory Board* and *After The Fire*. Judith Butler's current work on ambivalence provides a frame for my discussion of these texts. I refer, as well, to the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa in order to comprehend the ambivalent identity-performances of Rule's characters. I believe that Rule's recent texts enact interconnected narratives which link her fictional characters and resonate with the multiple and layered nature of lesbian realities.

CHAPTER ONE

Opening Signs: Coming Out Into Conventions

Calgary -- It appears that a prankster has been at work in the city overnight. According to local police reports, as well as unidentified callers, several road signs have been uprooted from a number of neighborhoods. Residents say that some of the signs were replaced with new, altered versions, while others were taken away altogether. In an interview this morning, Constable Box said these "hooligans" will be severely punished for violation of Bylaw 12 - the Classification and Placement Act. "This has motorists and pedestrians alike totally confused. There have been several sightings of people driving or walking in circles. Apparently they can't find the proper road," Box commented. One of the unidentified callers claimed responsibility for the damage. She/He said, "I just wanted to find out what would happen when these people woke up and found their streets altered. I never meant to cause any harm." Box and many of the local residents believe the neighborhood will experience chaos for some time. Individuals entering the affected areas are asked to use extreme caution. Said Box, "Without these markers, it's too dangerous for the average person to negotiate." Once caught and identified, the vandals will face 2-5 years making road signs in a Canadian prison.

Imagine it is 1964. You are a young, or middle-aged, or older woman falling in love (you think) with a young, or middle-aged, or older woman. You know this can't really be happening. You deny that it is. We're just very good friends you think. We're so much alike. We're too much alike? Then you read about it. The article beats up your heart. The previous evenings events are told with threatening clarity. The police have raided a club frequented by women who say, like you, that they just happen to love another woman. And they were arrested for it. And they are slandered by the newspaper for it. And they have lost their jobs because of it. And their families are shocked, outraged, hurt, angered by the humiliating horribleness of it. And they will probably end up on a shrink's couch or in a mental ward for it. Love? Obviously, this is not who you are. You don't even like to go to bars. And you certainly wouldn't dress like those women in the newspaper photo. It's like they believe they're men. And the other women in their fluffy dresses clearly aren't you either. You're an aberration of sorts. Just to be on the safe side, you rationalize the existence of your love for her firmly out of your mind. You couldn't be that way. After all, you are not perverted or deviant or queer. But your body still yearns to feel close to her. So, what are you? Who are you?

In the year Jane Rule's first novel *Desert of the Heart* was published, many lesbians grappled daily with these complex questions. Activists Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen emphasize the anxieties and stigmas attached to lesbianism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Gittings remembers "a genuine fear that we would be raided by the police, even at our most distinguished public events where we had name people from the law and the ministry and the mental health professions" (Marcus 115). So too, Lahusen recalls the

homophobic tendency to 'normalize' one's sexual orientation: "Most gay people in New York who had any kind of income were going to a therapist in those days to get straightened out, and most therapists were trying to cure them" (Marcus 116). As Gittings and Lahusen demonstrate, the tentative creation of a lesbian identity meant engaging and resisting the conventions of morality and heterosexuality that the dominant culture perpetuated. Similarly, this chapter will cross the boundaries between academic convention and my desire to write in and write out of my lesbian self. That is, I come out as a lesbian into a traditionally heterosexual writing space (a heterotext). Chapter one will be a blend of literary criticism and an eclectic array of non-conventional material. Just as Rule expands the content of the novel to include lesbian realities, I intend to re-define the boundaries of academic structure and form. I want to open a new discursive process of blending and blurring categories of analysis, autobiography, and fiction in a partial attempt to side-step the writing form I've been given.

In *Desert of the Heart*, Rule undresses convention, lays it bare, and redresses it with complexly woven combinations of traditional morality and lesbian desire. She exposes the contradictions of coming out into this world of ready-made conventions. Conventions become sites of exploration, open to examination and interrogation. A conventional lesbian novel--an oxymoron, indeed--would simply substitute a boy meets girl relationship with a girl meets girl love story. However, Rule is uninterested in replicating the content of heterosexual novels and, instead, looks into and through tradition to reveal its shortcomings, as well as the unavoidable contradictions that surface when heterosexual conventions are employed in the search for a

lesbian identity. *Desert of the Heart*'s central characters, Evelyn Hall and Ann Childs, expose the difficult moral dilemmas faced by lesbians coming out into an America of the 1950s and 60s. Throughout the novel, it is increasingly clear that lesbian material reality simply does not fit into the containers of heterosexual tradition. Evelyn and Ann, like most other lesbians, realize they must create their own space of existence that is both inside and outside of their oppressive society. At this site of contradictions, the cold logic of the trained academic mind conflicts with forceful desires of the body. This is a place where the dogmatically preached evils of homosexuality collide with the reality of love for another woman. A place where passion and rationality vie for control of identity. Rule's answer to these dilemmas is to open up the signs of conventionality; to rethink the categories we are given and to expand their borders. She comments in a 1976 interview that, "I learned very early what a great many people thought of as 'values' were really 'manners,' and that manners shifted radically from community to community" (Hancock 60-61). This recognition of the subjectivity of morality allows Rule the opportunity to engage with the realm of 'normal' in order to partially deconstruct the walls of categorization and classification that have been built up. Critic Marilyn Schuster describes this process as "subtle subversion:" "[Rule] adopts a strategy of subtle subversion: social and literary conventions are put to the service of their own destruction" (433). Within the context of coming out into conventions and developing a lesbian identity, I want to focus on Rule's interrogation of the convention of marriage; her refusal of lesbian relationship stereotypes; and the central role of the landscape as site of re-vision.

She told me I was evil. At first I was too shocked to respond. Then, thankfully, anger kicked in and I retaliated with a barrage of impassioned, yet logical, argument. You think it's ridiculous I should have to explain? How can you fight the tradition and convention of religion? She had an answer for everything. It was the same answer over and over. She said I was evil and doomed to a life of unhappiness that would culminate, of course, in eternal damnation. I could shut my ears off to this condemnation. I could sing a song, whistle a tune, recite a poem. But, somehow the words penetrated through to a place deep inside of me. I screamed, "Get out! Leave me alone! I don't want you in here!" The words remained. I was evil. Caught in this contradictory space between assumption and reality I said, "Grandma, GET OUT!"

The process of moving through conventions in *Desert of the Heart*, replicates the process of a lesbian coming into identity. Dealing with contradictions is a reality on the journey toward self-identification and self-affirmation. Perhaps the constant pressure to identify with previously existing categories, roles, rules, and morals is nowhere more evident than at the time of the novel's writing in the politically and socially conservative 1950s and early 1960s. Coming out meant entering a hostile world where your very existence was considered subversive. In her history of twentieth-century American lesbian life, *Odd Girls And Twilight Lovers*, Lillian Faderman comments on the radical power that loving another woman embodied: "Not by virtue of what they did, but just because of who they were, lesbians were subversive, and no

action against them by the police was considered excessive" (150). Simply living out your passion for another woman often forced you either into a world of silence, alienation, and ostracism, or placed you in a potentially dangerous and violent situation. Rule's assertion, then, that her role as novelist is to "speak truth" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate*, 43) cannot be read without an understanding of how revolutionary that truth was to the audiences of the 1950s and 1960s.

We must not underestimate or dismiss the boldness and courage Rule displays in her vocalization of the forbidden territory of lesbian love. Rule recognizes how threatening her writing is to a heterosexual audience:

I think one of the most offensive things in my work for people who are defensive about it is that the people I write about who are homosexual, are not ghettoized, are not excluded, are not strange, peculiar, sick people. That's very scary. It's like saying 'These are human beings.' And that's the one thing you musn't say. (Hancock 90)

By writing and publishing this novel, Rule places her private I in the homophobic and dangerous public eye. Lesbian silence was standard, and indeed encouraged, in this era of frequent police raids on gay bars and continual confiscation of the mailing lists of lesbian and gay organizations (Faderman's *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* details the extent of lesbian silencing and the continual fear of public revelation). Situating lesbians in the mainstream world, indeed, even in everyday life, was a risky and complicated task. For this reason, Rule's novel is such a breakthrough text. Published less than a decade after the Daughters of Bilitis -- America's first lesbian

organization -- was formed, the appearance of *Desert of the Heart* not only challenged the silence of lesbian writers and readers, but also became one of the first texts to persistently and eagerly engage with the dilemmas of coming into a lesbian identity. The vast majority of lesbian texts available to a wide audience in the 1950s were of the drugstore pulp novel variety. Generally, they offered prescriptive solutions to lesbian love -- usually death, marriage, or celibacy, with the odd happy ending -- steeped with the moralizing of heterosexism. Sensationalist titles such as *Odd Girl Out*, *Edge of Twilight*, and *Strange Are The Ways Of Love*, (photos in Faderman) emphasized the 'otherness' of lesbian life, its marginal existence, and its qualities of strangeness. Although the titles and contents were, for the most part, exaggerations, they did highlight the societal ostracism faced by most lesbians.

Lillian Faderman writes:

It was not true, of course, that lesbians during the 1950s invariably paid for their non-conformity through misery, as the pulp novelists said they did. But whatever joy they found had to be procured outside of the main social institutions, and they had to be clandestine about it in a society that withheld from them the blessings it gave freely to all heterosexuals. (*Odd Girls And Twilight Lovers*, 148)

Desert of the Heart landed in the midst of these lesbian 'love' stories as a much more realistic and affirming presence. Importantly, it interrogated the social institutions described by Faderman, and in this process, created its own text of lesbian lives; a text that embodies the struggle to articulate and accept lesbian desire.

Did you see that woman on the far wall. Ya, the one with the purple boots and ripped jeans. Isn't she cool? You think she's what? No way! Well, that

doesn't bother me. No, honestly it doesn't. I think it's fine for her to be like that. Well, maybe not fine. More like . . . like it's probably not her fault or anything. And it's probably just a phase. I remember she had a bad relationship with some guy. She's probably just sick of them for a while. Maybe she hates them. No, I think it's ok as long as she doesn't try to hound me. Is it true they wait for you in the washroom? I mean, that's just sick. But, she has cool boots.

Desert of the Heart opens with the early stages of Evelyn Hall's struggle to accept her pending independence. On her way to Reno for a divorce from her mentally unstable husband, Evelyn is both firmly rooted in the conventions of marriage while simultaneously questioning their control. Relaying the conversion of conventions into enforced strategies of living, Evelyn compares their power to that of mastering a foreign language: "Conventions, like cliches, have a way of surviving their own usefulness. They are then excused or defended as the idioms of living. For everyone, foreign by birth or by nature, convention is a mark of fluency" (7). Convention, then, is an exclusive club where admission is controlled by those who are already inhabit the inside. Like the immigrant who is embraced only when she/he learns the language of the new country, Evelyn feels judged for her lack of fluency. She has learned, like the immigrant, the futility of attempting to maintain her own language in a site that demands conformity. She is literally bound by convention in the form of her wedding band. Despite numerous attempts to remove its presence, "soap and water would not ease the ring over a joint thickened those sixteen years into an obstacle. It would, she supposed, have to

be cut off" (7,8). The inscription is so complete that her body physically conforms to its existence. Inscribed by convention, Evelyn struggles to remove the years of molding. At this early stage in her journey toward self-knowledge, Evelyn sees the end of one convention as the beginning of another: "She was to be divorced, a convention that might be as strange to her as the convention of marriage had been" (8). However, there is also an ambiguity in this statement that leaves room for enjoyment of her divorced status. There is the possibility that this new convention need not be as restrictive or defining as the marriage had been. What is destructive is the suspension of movement created by the legal constraints of the divorce. Forced to wait the mandatory six weeks before her suit can be filed, Evelyn is immobilized. With her meagre allotment of books,

she was conscious of measuring out the vital supply, rationing the hours that would keep her alive. Why did she feel so trapped? At any other time, six weeks would have seemed a gift. Now, because she had no choice, they were a sentence. (59)

The option of choice denied, Evelyn feels the heavy weight of convention push her into a cell, lock the door, and throw away the key. However, she finds liberation from this sentence through her discovery of the bookshelves lining Ann's room above her. It is significant that she locates a place of refuge while continuing to serve out her six weeks. In the physical space created by another woman, Evelyn finds a comfortable site in the midst of discomfort.

Evelyn's search for a place within convention replicates the historic lesbian struggle to create an identity from within the confines of heterosexual conventions. To avoid marginalization, one must always know the relevant

codes of heterosexuality. But what happens when one is simply incapable of replicating the patterns of speech demanded by a convention? As Evelyn tells us, "she has never been able to pronounce it properly and has committed continually its grossest grammatical errors" (7). Her inability to reproduce the language of the convention leads Evelyn to assume, as many lesbians have done, that the only place she will be allowed to occupy is one of desolation and despair. Evelyn comments, "For such a woman marriage remains a foreign tongue, an alien landscape, and, since she cannot become naturalized, she finally chooses voluntary exile" (7). She becomes, in other words, the *Odd Girl Out* of the pulp novels who has to "carry the mark of a strong, intelligent woman like the brand of Cain on her forehead" (58). With this statement, Evelyn sets up her existence in a binary pattern that chooses only to see the possibilities of being in or out of conventions, rather than choosing to recognize the possibility of being both in and out concurrently. As we will see, Rule transforms this structure of categorization by recreating the place of exile as one of beauty and desire rather than isolation and damnation.

Sept 10 -- Why do I always feel like I'm speaking another language? I talked to B. this morning and he couldn't understand a single point. Or didn't hear them. Perhaps my mouth was moving without sound. That would explain his lack of response. It was like I didn't exist. Or didn't fit the direction he wanted his argument to go. I often think I'd be better off living the life of a hermit--at least it would be my choice. Or am I being too self-indugent? I'm told to buck up and plow through this alien-nation daring anyone to stop me. The thing is, I can never see the rest-stop beside the road, and I'm tired.

Rule's use of a dual narrator structure in *Desert of the Heart* rejects the dictates of marriage that have rendered Evelyn speechless. With this technique, Rule undermines the monolithic, unified voice that is conventionally advocated and assumed in marriage. When the preacher says, "You two are now one in God's eyes," he places a clamp on individual speech and promotes, instead, a singular voice of unity. Rule resists this silencing structure by alternating the narration of the novel between Evelyn and Ann. In this manner, she prevents assimilation while simultaneously emphasizing their connection to each other. They exist side by side in the text, yet speak in their own distinctive voices. I would argue that this narrative technique undercuts any expectations of sameness the reader may expect from these two women. Evelyn's sections are rich with philosophical dilemmas and psychological explorations such as, "She would not cluster fragments of memory into fixed shapes of fear and failure. If she had been wrong before, the error was in her nature, not her will" (129). Ann's narrative, on the other hand, is structured more by the events that take place in them, such as the arrival of the Club's new employee, Joyce; Virginia's attempted suicide; and Silver's wedding. These obvious differences deny the reader any attempt to stereotype all lesbians into a monopoly of sameness.

Just as the narrative structure prevents a homogenizing of lesbian identities, Rule presents various stereotypes of lesbian relationships in order to undermine them. Critic Marilyn Schuster comments on Rule's strategy: "Her literary strategy is to speak a recognizable language with familiar terms (mirrors, doubles) and then to deconstruct the terms in order to reconstruct new, unexpected meanings" (434). Rule plays with the codes in heterotexts to

engage them in a dialogue with lesbian material reality. Take, for instance, the role of the mirror. Traditionally, women were thought to be involved in same-sex couples because they had either a narcissistic bent, or were looking for a strong mother-daughter bond. In order to later dismiss this reductive view of lesbian lovers, Rule must first set up Evelyn and Ann in conventional terms. Ann is given the role of the child through her last name (Childs) as well as the fact that she is 15 years younger than Evelyn. Even her younger brother, Walter, refers to her as "girl Childs" (15), in a dually infantile naming. Conversely, Evelyn is constructed as the childless woman who fears the implications of her attraction to a woman who could be her daughter: "only a parent could be allowed to feel tenderness for his own likeness. . . Evelyn had learned the even less flattering names applied to the love a childless woman might feel for anything. . . she was not afraid of the names themselves, but she was afraid of the truth that might be in them" (20). Hence, we have a stereotypical view of the lesbian relationship as one of incestuous desire. This mother-daughter bond appears to be further secured by their similarity of appearance. Evelyn quotes Cummings in her description of Ann: "Hello is what a mirror says"(12). But appearances can be deceiving. Rule immediately calls into question the conventionality of their similarity. When Ann exclaims, "We do look alike," the reader is invited to make familial connections. Yet, we are told by Evelyn a few sentences later that,

There was no family resemblance, a turned eyetooth or a surprised left eyebrow that siblings share from a common grandparent. It was rather an impression which, when analyzed seemed to have no firm basis. *Ann's face was, for Evelyn, a memory, not a likeness.* (emphasis mine,12)

Rule then, refuses to ignore the similarities of the women, but instead of forcing them into the traditional mother-daughter bond, she employs their similar appearance as a tool Evelyn may use to find the memories of her Self. But Evelyn, along with heterosexual society, doubts the morality of her attraction to Ann. She questions her desire: "'What on earth does my love for you mean? Isn't it some final perversion of inadequacy and need?'" (105) Ann will not provide Evelyn with an easy, conventional reading of meaning. Much surer of her identity, she responds, "'You've been talking about the sin of putting moral names to immoral behavior. Perhaps you can make the same mistake in reverse, call love perversion'" (105). The only answer for Evelyn then, is acceptance of the subjectivity of morality; a "mistake" that turns her traditional view of reality inside out.

The directions said: Fold this flap last. Fold this flap next. Fold this flap first. Insert reinforcing liner before folding flaps. Turn on its side. Turn upside down. Set upright. Square up the shell. Re-insert liner. Turn on its side. Turn upside down. Set upright. Square up the shell. Fold this flap last. Fold this flap first.

Lesbian identity is multiple and complex in *Desert of the Heart* because Evelyn and Ann are not easily slotted into expected roles. Evelyn makes this complexity clear in her description of Ann:

The pieces of Ann did not quite fit together, the several separate worlds she seemed to live in, her amoral behavior and her moral judgement, her sympathy and her rage, her brashness and her delicacy. Who was she? (179)

Seen in a binary light, the character of Ann has only a fuzzy indefinable glow. As I have argued, the text resists and rewrites categorical definitions of its characters; Ann comments to Evelyn, "You're not as simple as that. You're not in a textbook. You're a human being" (187). The older woman, Evelyn, learns and is guided by the younger woman, Ann. It is Ann who awakens in Evelyn the knowledge contained within the neglected desire of her body. Evelyn is both aroused and liberated by this revelation:

Extraordinary . . . not that she should feel desire but that she should not have felt it, consciously, for years. And with the awakening of her body had also come passions of other sorts which were not really new because she dimly recognized them as belonging to a person she had almost grown into before her life had taken the long detour of marriage. (179)

Once again, Ann as mirror reflects a previously existent knowledge in Evelyn. Although it is difficult to leap over mediums, I think it is important to listen to the reading of sameness Judith Roof presents in her critique of *Desert Hearts*, the movie version of the novel:

The fear of no sexual difference triggered by the same-sex couple is alleviated by the compensatory marking of this difference through sets of physical oppositions that overinscribe contrasts. (55)

Unlike the movie, Rule's original text is not motivated by a "fear of no sexual difference." On the contrary, it is the sexual sameness that makes possible awakenings of desire. However, Rule does, quite effectively, employ difference to dispel the myth of lesbian sameness. We are, after all, an incredibly diverse community, and to show too much sameness is to erase our very real differences. If we locate *Desert of the Heart* in its historical context, we see that the 1950s and early 1960s were periods of extreme division

within the ranks of lesbians. Faderman comments, "Despite heterosexuals' single stereotype of 'the lesbian,' lesbian subcultures based on class and age not only had little in common with each other, but their members often distrusted and even disliked one another" (160). So, for Rule to bring together women who are neither butch nor femme, and have differences in age, class, and experience, is to bridge many of these gaps and divisions. It is also a strategy that upholds the validity and importance of sameness while deconstructing the straight culture's monolithic notion of lesbian identity. In the 1976 interview, Rule comments on her strategy of subversion:

I suppose the difficulty in understanding my fiction is, if you come to it with a number of clichés about how people relate to each other, you will be in a world that doesn't make any kind of sense at all. (Hancock 107)

Making non-sense is essential for Rule. Her job is to mix up, confuse, and represent the conventions of 'normalcy.' The uncommon suddenly seems very ordinary in *Desert of the Heart*.

Once upon a time and not very long ago in a far away very near place lived a rather average-looking girl. Everyday she would get up in the morning, put on her uniform, eat a nutritious breakfast, and head down the street to school. On her walk she would see the rows and rows of neatly kept gardens and many freshly painted houses. She often waved to her neighbors and they smiled back, happy to see her ordinary face. Then, one morning this rather-average looking girl thought it would be fun to wear her school jacket inside out. Well, you can probably guess the reaction she got. Suddenly, all the

people behind their neatly kept yards and houses jeered and taunted her. It was a very long and sad walk to school that day, and just as this ordinary girl was about to put her jacket on rightside out a smiling face appeared. Finally, someone who enjoyed her jacket. She looked a little closer and saw that this person with the smiling face wore her shoes on the wrong feet. After smiling back, this rather average-looking girl continued her walk and felt the happiest she ever had.

Perhaps the most convincing and symbolic subversion of convention occurs in Rule's transformation of the desert. Evelyn's view of the natural landscape changes in accordance with her progression through the nature of lesbian identity and relationships. As the novel opens, Evelyn allies the desert with "an alien landscape" (7). Her initial descriptions endow this world with a violent force and an almost unbearable discomfort. She must wait in a "slow humiliation of heat," where the "flies were terrible" and "settled with indifferent intimacy in the hair, on the face, refusing to be brushed away"(8). However, these conditions pale in comparison to her description of the desert itself: "There the sudden brutality of heat made her sweat with a threatening nausea" (8). Evelyn's forboding desert resonates, of course, with the barren landscape outside the biblical garden of Eden. As 'Eve' she is banished from the privileged land, doomed to live out the end of her marriage in a desert of divorce. Comfortable only on carefully plotted and sectioned streets, and most at home "in control of the day," (49) Evelyn is threatened by this unknown and unreadable territory whose lack of familiar structure creates chaos in her otherwise neatly ordered world: "At the end was the desert, sudden, flat, dull miles of it until it heaved itself upward and became the mountains. An

irrational fear, as alien to Evelyn's nature as heat lightning seems to a summer sky, struck through her body" (22). The desert landscape forces Evelyn to reconsider the naturalness of her desire for control. Her body responds, in this unfamiliar land, to desires quite outside of the realm of her logical, academic knowledge. When Evelyn recognizes Ann's desire for her she understands that, "In her office, she would have known just how to behave. She would have assigned an extra essay on Donne and turned the longing into scholarship. Now, without a role to play, she was uncertain" (75). This foreign landscape clearly does not admit conventional roles or expectations. In another example of its power, we see how ridiculous the traditional Southern manners of Evelyn's lawyer, Arthur Williams, look in this desertscape: "He was a caricature of a Southern gentleman. The manners of his background had become in this climate almost hysterical mannerisms"(52). The desert does, however, permit non-traditional entrances onto its soil. Take, for instance, the flourishing city of Reno. This icon of prosperity arose out of nothing more than sand and tumbleweed. This setting, then, provides a perfect site of disruption and contradiction in which lesbian love, with all of its 'alien' qualities, may also flourish.

Gillian Spraggs, in her article on *Desert of the Heart*, accurately observes that Rule appropriates this desert image of hell and recreates it into her own territory of lesbian desire:

Rule's strategy, at once daring and conservative, is to appropriate Hell, to incorporate its images in her fiction and reshape them to her own purposes, and so to change its meaning. (119-120)

It is Ann who recognizes that "the desert's beautiful" (118) and provides a home for women and men outside of the mainstream of tradition: "The men who stayed either knew they were damned or didn't believe in damnation. It's still so" (118). In this site of moral ambiguities, Evelyn is unsure of her footing. She comments,

'I'm not sure I'd like a world without guilt or goodness. It might seem very empty.'
 'Like the desert?'
 'Yes,' Evelyn said. (123)

But it is precisely this lack of guilt and goodness that allows, and even encourages, an awakening of Evelyn's bodily desires. Freed of moral codes, and "the conventions of time and space," (75) Evelyn can no longer designate her physical response as "no more significant than a hiccup, a sneeze, a twinge of gas, functional disorders which caused discomfort but not alarm"(125). Instead, the forbidden, empty, and desolate site of the desert becomes, by the end of the novel, an eroticized landscape where enactment of passion occurs. The desert of the heart is "a valley of brilliant, burning sunlight, arched with rainbows, edged with lightning" whose "beauty broke into Evelyn's vision like an explosion" (126). She can now remain, "a voluntary exile, a permanent resident" (129) freed from desire for moral validation and saved through damnation.

I don't think I'll ever forget that sun-filled afternoon. On the quiet patio of my parents' house I tentatively opened my first 'real' lesbian novel. I fell in

love with it and couldn't stop re-reading its scruffy pages. At first I skipped through page after page hungrily searching for the sex scenes. Don't laugh, we've all done it. My curiosity satiated, I relaxed into the lives of the characters who, to my surprise, experienced the same traumas of identity I was going through. And here I'd thought my struggle was unique. What a relief to unburden myself to this validating novel. It was a place of energy and a source of comfort from that moment on. This 'fictional' text gave me insight into the truth of my existence when the truths around me just didn't make any sense at all. I still return to that original text when I lose contact with that secure place inside of me that knows my life is valuable. It's like coming home to a warm fire and a soft easychair. Conventional? Yes. Cliched? Yes. But sometimes it's necessary to relax in the comfortable pages of an other convention.

Rule does not re-box Ann and Evelyn into a static ending, but instead, refuses closure as a textual gesture toward lesbian material reality. The novel readily acknowledges identity-making as an ongoing, continuous process of creation and re-creation. We are left to draw our own tentative conclusions from this ambiguously hopeful ending: "And they turned and walked back up the steps toward their own image, reflected in the great, glass doors" (251). That Ann and Evelyn forge their "own image" from the conventions surrounding them, and reshape it into a union of otherness, is clearly seen in this reflection. They will continue to walk the fine line between sameness and difference, struggling "For an indefinite period of time" (251) to be accepted without losing their powerful differences. And Rule will continue to write

her way into and through and out of convention as her novels come out into worlds of expectation.

CHAPTER TWO

Inside and Out: Connecting Worlds In Against the Season and The Young In One Another's Arms

Only a strong-willed lesbian could read the message and not be shaken. It's the kind of writing that rams its way into my deep-down space of fear and insecurity. The construction is simple enough: A rectangular sheet of white paper carefully mounted to a plywood back. No stylish graphics or innovative lettering. Only bold, simple letters in red and black crafted, unsuspectingly, into an ideology of intolerance. The white man in his red baseball cap and black shirt stands to the side, a mirror image of his placard. With one crooked finger and a large grin on his face, he gestures to the slogan: "GOD HATES FAGS --ROM.9:13." For days his faulty translation stays lodged at the front of my eyes. I blink and blink again. Always the image returns. I tell myself he's only a lunatic, a fringe right-winger with too much time on his hands. If I try hard enough I can rationalize his message out of existence. But what do I do with all the other slogans; the daily taunts, the political jeers, the unfunny jokes, the unwanted morality? His simple letters construct me -- I am one of 'them.' Those others, those aliens, those misfits, those deviants. Everyone knows the names. But I know differently. I am one of us; one of a community. He is one of them. Or is it so black and white and re(a)d?

Coming out as a lesbian, acknowledging to yourself and others that you love women, rarely takes place without community support. Individuals are rarely secure or brave enough to admit their sexual orientations without the existence of a community to provide the necessary moral, emotional, and physical validation. Locating a group of other like-minded individuals who will offer guidance on your foray into 'forbidden' territory is essential once lesbian sexuality is acknowledged. Ruth Baetz, in her 1980 study of lesbian lives, articulates the initial desire for community: "As you begin to explore your lesbian identity, a crucial question is often: How do you find other lesbians you can relate to and get support from? Is there a 'lesbian community'? If so, will you feel comfortable in that community?" (*Lesbian Crossroads* 245). Providing this necessary validation and encouragement was the focal point of lesbian studies in the 1970s. Works such as *Sappho Was A Right On Woman* and *Lesbian Nation* aim to create a base for lesbian support, and to disseminate the vital knowledge, to lesbians around North America, that they are not alone. The dedication in *Sappho Was A Right On Woman* expresses the horrors faced by individual lesbians and stresses the possibility of a safe future within a community of lesbian expression: "To those who have suffered for their sexual preference, most especially to Sandy, who committed suicide . . . and to Lydia, who was murdered; and to all who are working to create a future for Lesbians"(5). As it recounts real-life stories, this dedication links its readers to the struggle for community. The potential for a loving, nurturing, and secure future meant, in these early expressions of lesbian lives, the creation of a large and powerful group of lesbians to act as a vocal community for rights and freedoms. Connections and networking were possible only in a group of individuals who shared experiences. The common

ground of sexual preference was often enough to bond white women into a politically active community.

In our own words:

"It's provided the kind of support group that I certainly never had in high school." -- Carol Queen (246)

"Once I knew I was a lesbian, I realized that the small redneck farm town where I lived was not a good place to come out. It was also not a good place to get the emotional support I needed growing up lesbian at thirty-six years old." -- Mary Howland (260)

"It was like a whole new world opening up to us to find out that some of our feelings were the same feelings other women were dealing with and to start feeling better about ourselves." -- Jeri (249)

All quotes from Lesbian Crossroads.

This strong focus on community building in the 1970s was heightened by the antigay backlash. According to gay historian, Eric Marcus, the backlash acted as a catalyst for community formation: *"The antigay backlash erupted nationally in 1977 with a campaign led by Anita Bryant . . . Bryant's success galvanized gay rights organizations, forcing them to set aside differences and work in coalitions to challenge the antigay tide"* (Making History 258-59).

The importance of coalition building to combat attacks from Right-wing fundamentalists cannot be underestimated. It is in the creation of community that gays and lesbians achieve a voice powerful enough to demand equality. However, in this initial articulation of voice, diversity of individual experiences was often subsumed under the call for unity. Deborah Wolf's 1979 study, *The Lesbian Community*, exposes the homogeneity demanded by early lesbian organizations: "The terms 'community,' 'lesbian community,' and 'women's community' are commonly used by the women themselves to refer to the continuing social networks of lesbians who are committed to the lesbian-feminist lifestyle" (73). Wolf's reference to "*the* lesbian-feminist lifestyle" as the defining characteristic of lesbians who belong to communities is not only misleading, but serves to erase a variety of dyke lives that are not 'politically correct'. A singular version of lesbian feminism, and a belief that individual lesbians participate en masse in a recognizable lifestyle functions to smother diversity under a blanket of conformity. Lesbian literary critic Martha Shelly espouses this view as she comments, "I have met many, many feminists who were not Lesbians -- but I have never met a Lesbian who was not a feminist" (*Sisterhood is Powerful* 308). This naive and isolated attitude subsumes many ordinary dyke lives. The same attitude shuns lesbians who may have strong bonds with men as the prevailing slogan becomes: "as long as you collaborate with the enemy, and we do have to realize men are the enemy, you're not doing anybody any good; you're working within their systems" (Baetz 261). I would argue that such a totalizing world-view obscures the realities of individual lesbian lives because out of practical necessity we must work within the existing system. We must walk a fine line between the material realities of our individual

lives and the necessity for collective action and validation. As lesbian literary critic Bonnie Zimmerman tells us, "In real life, the delicate balance between self and community is often a source of conflict for a woman who is forming a lesbian identity" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 157). Differences of race, class, physical ability, and any infinite number of individual identities are constantly threatened with erasure by the demands of a monolithic community. Certainly, in the 1970s, when community was paramount, complex individual identities, as well as diversity, suffered.

Once again, in our own words:

*"I freaked out that I would lose my individualism because of group identity."
-- Canyon Sam (256)*

"I'm probably more mellow about being gay and more flexible and tolerant. I feel like anybody who wants to be a dyke can be a dyke. They don't have to cut their hair or even necessarily be feminists." -- Chrystos (250)

*"What I've had hard in this community is being the only Black gay female. I can't get in with the gay women here. I just feel like I'm the only one on the earth, because they can't deal with me and they can't understand me."
-- Laverne Jefferson (246-47)*

All quotes from Lesbian Crossroads.

Jane Rule's novels, *Against the Season* (1971), and *The Young In One Another's Arm's* (1977), appeared in this era of community emphasis. Literary critic Constance Rooke tells us: "*Against the Season* marks a turning point in Rule's career. She abandons here the focus upon a single character or a single relationship; point of view becomes more flexible and the canvas grows" (*Dictionary of Literary Biography* 317). Although these novels do focus on the creation and preservation of community, they readily stress and encourage individual expression within that group focus. Rule resists the trap of binaries that unproblematically places individuals into an 'us' or 'them' category. Instead, she employs a wide range of characters who move in and out of interconnected subjectivities. Rule uses the relative construction of margin and centre to demonstrate that each character fluctuates between positions of power and powerlessness. A necessary movement between binary poles is constantly foregrounded, rather than a static placement outside, othered, and oppositional. The mandate of lesbian literary critic Reina Lewis, which I quoted in my introduction, once again succinctly expresses Rule's textual tactics: "[w]e deserve a complex and nuanced critical framework, and to see ourselves as part of a diverse group -- not just as the unified 'other' of heterosexuality locked into heroic combat with patriarchal straightdom" ("The Death of the Author and the Resurrection of the Dyke" 19). An insistence on the complexity of *all* human beings is Rule's goal in these two novels of connections. Freed from the restraints of a heteropatriarchal construction of difference as always other, Rule takes on the project of creating textual communities that value the importance of individual experience while simultaneously maintaining bonds across diversity. Zimmerman comments that Rule "Although a committed lesbian,

... is also a universalist in her views" (161). This paradoxical combination encourages a (re)course that does not replicate an early lesbian-feminist insistence on homogeneity, but instead, effectively combats homophobia and heterosexism with the inclusion of lesbian and gay characters *within* a powerfully varied community. Rule comments on the effectiveness of this tactic when she pinpoints the heteropatriarchal ideology at work in the reception of *Against the Season*: "I think the hostility to the book was that those people [misfits, homosexuals, etc.] were included in an ordinary world. There is a moral offense that some people feel and want to respond to" (Hancock 108). Challenging from within, then, raises the ire of many heterosexual reviewers--what better way to shock them into awareness?

I can't help it. I'm bored with these male intrusions into the text. I've thought this a thousand times, "Why can't she write only about lesbian characters?" My dyke friends all have the same complaint. We want to throw her away as just another humanist who doesn't take lesbian existence seriously. I mean, if she really wanted to help us create community why couldn't she write about one we'd all like to see, or at least lust after? A utopia. A political fantasy.

(In) sight. Why do I encourage dissension only within these asides? Are these my (in)sides? (Out)side solidarity.

Rule tempers dogma of any kind with an awareness of individual differences as she strives to find ways in which humans may live together productively.

In her own words, hopping on any type of bandwagon is a "frivolous activity" (Hancock 86). However, her statement does not result in an inactive, apolitical or unconcerned text. On the contrary, Rule's resistance of patriarchal paradigms offers a concrete alternative for individuals interested in recognizing the complexities of their/our interactions. Joanie, a woman too willing to accept the dictates of patriarchal society, eventually sees, in *The Young In One Another's Arms*, that no situation can be broken down into black and white categories. She comments, "Lots of people I know think they [draft-dodgers] shouldn't be allowed into Canada. I guess I thought that, too, but then, when you think about Arthur or Tom . . ." (42). Joanie develops a critical, rather than standard, analysis of the situation as we see "her unexamined categories of judgement breaking down before the simple experience of eating breakfast and dinner with particular people day after day" (42). Rule's complex portrayal of her characters lives enables a far-reaching critique of limiting categories and classifications of existence. As Biddy Martin tells us in her piece, "Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]," "Rendering lesbianism [and, indeed, any outsider category] natural, self-evident, original, can have the effect of emptying traditional representations of their content, of contesting the only apparent self-evidence of 'normal' (read heterosexual) life course"(279). With her strong communities, her refusal of alienation based on sexual orientation, and her inclusion of male and female characters, Rule confuses and angers those individuals who insist on lesbian's and women's powerless and marginalized positions. I find the words of contemporary feminist ficto-critic Aritha van Herk particularly instructive when she tells us that her intention is to "trouble the reader -- to upset, annoy, confuse; to make the reader react to the unexpected, the

unpredictable, the amoral, the political. [van Herk] want[s] to explode writing as prescription, as a code for the proper behaviour of good little girls" (*In Visible Ink* 131). I would argue that van Herk's feminist (re)course aptly describes Rule's process of upsetting and annoying the patriarchal reader.¹ Some reviewers of her work, such as John Glassco, express this anger and annoyance as they lash out at her portrayal of male characters: "The men of the house are the usual weaklings and misfits who make such an appeal to many women writers" (*Books in Canada* 3). Glassco's misreading does not describe the text so much as it reveals his construction of male characteristics; he is threatened by male characters who can sympathize with, as well as intimately understand, the dilemmas facing *all* of Rule's characters. With her usual wit and clarity, Rule speaks to this kind of criticism by revealing the constructions that underlie it:

our culture says that if you admit a male misses his wife,
you admit that a male or boy is a bit frightened of sex
and isn't quite sure how you deal with people and even
wonders whether you shake hands or stand with your
hands to your sides, you've got a Caspar Milquetoast
because boys are born confident. (Hancock 93)

Rule's male and female characters are anything but weak, and use their 'misfit' status as an empowering tool. As Helen Sonthoff explains in her critique of Rule's fiction, "The blessings of the place are its unlikenesses, its unlikely couplings. The place has room for shifting attitudes and

¹ I am not suggesting, however, that the textual processes of van Herk and Rule are equivalent. Van Herk explodes prescriptive writing by, among other things, blurring genre boundaries and expanding the signifying power of language. Although these writers employ different methods to upset or confuse their readers, I maintain that both van Herk and Rule search for alternative ways to express their feminism in language, and that both writers challenge their readers to re-evaluate traditional ways of viewing or understanding a text.

relationships" ("Celebration: Jane Rule's Fiction" 126). In both *Against the Season* and *The Young In One Another's Arms*, Rule employs 'misfits' to critique patriarchal paradigms; she traverses the boundaries of individual separation and classification through her creation of interactive, interconnected communities; and she perpetuates the concept of communal relationships by allowing the reader entrance into the texts, and by encouraging our participation in the continuity of the community. As I stated in my first chapter, my writing will also challenge a conventional reading. My intention is to annoy or upset or confuse or even engage a resistant reader. Just as Rule opens her communities to a wide-range of individuals, I want to open new spaces for critical writing from within the academy.

"My look is a feminist act of political resistance," proclaims my brash dyke friend. She regularly escapes her 9-5 feminine look with forays into the underground (they're always underground!) bar scene. A carefully tailored suit, complete with matching socks and tie, is her admittance. She tells me, "I'd never give up being a woman. That's just not the point of my butch look. Anyone with even the smallest amount of perception can see the outline of my breasts under my starched shirt, or the curve of my hips beneath my linen trousers. I already exist in this male-constructed world of the power-suit and all I want to do is intervene. Make a statement that tells them I'm tired of being silenced. I want a share of the power without having to become a man. I want to manipulate their expectations of women. When I wear my suit I imagine I'm talking back to those power-brokers. I'm saying, 'Fuck your dress code 'cause I won't buy into it!' I guess it shocks them out of assumptions, if

nothing else." --BJ Wray, *"Just Whose Dress-Code Is This? Body/Text Dressing, Cross-Dressing, Re-Dressing,"* 1993.

Individuals on the fringe of what is traditionally accepted as normal or respectable or moral, are in a unique position to critique the models of community and interaction that are placed before them. As members both of marginalized groups and of a larger society, we learn much about the dynamic paradox of living both inside and outside the dominant culture. As the title *Against the Season* suggests, there is both a resistance of the inevitable progression of an outside force that is combined with the knowledge one must live within the constructed reality of seasonal change. Take for instance, Dina, a Greek immigrant in the novel. She is both outsider and insider as she longs for and rejects a non-existent past in Greece, while simultaneously struggling to survive in the immediate present. She has no first language, only a second, that she has learned for practical reasons. Pulled between the fact of her present and the myth of her past, Dina learns compromise as she "stands up against and draws from" (Hancock 102-3) both worlds. As an immigrant outsider, Dina readily experiences the necessity of making connections with the larger realm while at the same time feeling the need to remain separate. So too, Dina's process may be read as emblematic of outcast positions. Diana Fuss accurately sums up this complex relationship in her analysis of the coming out:

To be out, in common gay parlance, is precisely to be no longer out; to be out is finally to be outside of exteriority and all the exclusions and deprivations such outsiderhood imposes. Or, put another way, to be out is really to be in -- inside the realm of the visible, the speakable, the culturally intelligible. (*inside/out* 4)

Rather than set 'misfits' or 'deviants' apart, or leave them stranded in isolation from the power structures, Rule demonstrates that vital and creative communities may be formed among these disparate characters. Indeed, it is their very quality of outsiderhood, as bo(a)rders, that brings them together as part of an 'in' community. This ability to reverse paradigms is the motto of Ruth Wheeler, the one-armed owner of the boardinghouse in *The Young In One Another's Arms*. She believes that, "What you lose is what you survive with . . . for her mother-in-law two rooms in the basement from the insurance paid for a dead child" (3). Using the material before her, Ruth gains the insight of adversity, and creates an alternative form of community. Marilyn Schuster explains the usefulness of these 'outcasts' and their ideology in Rule's fiction: "The outcasts who form these communities evolve an unwritten social contract that protects their outcast status, rejecting blind, brutal conformity to a dominant norm" ("Jane Rule's Subtle Subversion" 443). Schuster's explanation of the outcast's role is also Boy's ideology in *The Young In One Another's Arms*. A college educated, young Black man on the run from the authorities, he turns up on Ruth's doorstep and turns inside out the assumptions of the bo(a)rders. Aware of white patriarchal constructions of his identity, he appropriates their naming as his own; thereby disarming its negative force. Boy's awareness of his name's signifying power is made clear through his explanation:

'She named me Boyd, which is either a feathered creature who can fly--and I don't fly--or the past tense of Boy--and I, thanks be to sweet Jesus, ain't past tense yet. This way, everybody knows my name. I don't even usually have to tell them, lady.' (86)

This apparently self-deprecating statement is actually a radical act of subversion. As he tells Gladys, "if you don't give me no shit about my consciousness, I won't give you no shit about yours" (88). Boy demonstrates an outsider's ability to use the prevailing ideology for his or her own ends. He forces the rhetoric-espousing Gladys into a reexamination of her slogans: "She was comfortable enough gagging Boy or calling him names, but she had lost the ground under her feet too many times in the last couple of days to try arguing seriously with him" (92). Gladys' only alternative is to silence or taunt Boy because he so thoroughly exposes her simplistic and universalizing rhetoric. He makes sense of being both inside and outside by combining an already existing structure with his own notion of consciousness.

The location of Rule's textual communities also expresses the dynamic of living both inside and outside the dominant culture. The town in *Against the Season* balances precariously between city and town status. It is on the edges of both as Harriet tells us, "what turns a town into a city is greed and vanity," and Peter counters with "what keeps a town a town is also greed and vanity" (15). Rule's characters must survive with these ambiguous and confusing definitions as they are often placed on the edges of a larger society. In *The Young In One Another's Arms*, Ruth Wheeler's boarding/border-house, the initial site of action in the novel, is located on the periphery of the city's centre: "From wilderness to this edge where she was, Ruth had been moving closer and closer to that [city] center" (18). Similarly, the next site of communal activity, in the novel, is Galiano Island, both linked and separated by water from the British Columbia mainland. Although, as Bonnie Zimmerman tells us, the island in lesbian fiction, often signifies community--

"The community to which the lesbian hero journeys . . . is repeatedly imagined as existing on an island" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 124) --I would argue that Rule's use of an island challenges a monolithic vision of lesbian community because she populates her fictional territory with characters ranging from a raunchy embezzling accountant, Boy, to a conservative PhD. graduate, Mavis. These characters unite because of their need for protection and shelter from the divisiveness that often invades their tentative communities. In *The Young In One Another's Arms*, for instance, the appearance of Ruth's husband, Hal, illustrates the communal bonds that are in place against outside forces. Hal is an arrogant and domineering man whose misogynist attitudes receive no sympathy in this bo(a)rder-space. The community refuses to entertain his ideology: "There was no point in arguing with him before an audience, particularly one where he had no allies, which had always been the circumstance in this house" (48). Through their union, the inhabitants of this house, and of the communities in Rule's novels, manage to maintain their separate visions in the face of such strong opposition.

We are each creating our own Contract With The World; en-action-ing relationships with ourselves, and each other, in order to survive. Survival depends on our bodies in motion because bodies at rest are dead bodies; inert, immobile. So some of us are walking, hanging, writing, recording, mourning, or painting our way into, through, and out of the insanity of extraordinary lives. The ordinary becomes a sacred space: "The ordinary for the reconciled is holy" (178). The ordinary is alternately a risk and a far away place that we

transform with our separate visions. One of us says, "the source of terror is the source of comfort. Running from one means being deprived of the other" (326). Visions of how the world should be propell us towards connections with one another. Each of us making portraits of our realities to engage this terror for the sake of comfort. Words, sounds, sculptures, photos, and paintings are the media we employ to make sense of our individual contracts with the world. Each of us is alone, and each of us flows into and out of and back into the lives of the others.

For Rule, diversity does not mean fragmentation. Instead, unlikely couplings provide the basis for community. Dina's antique shop, run under the name "George's," in *Against the Season*, is a gathering space for complex associations of the acceptable and the unacceptable. Contradictions abound as fine antiques and refinished furniture sit alongside empty beer bottles and well-worn paperbacks. Similarly, her shop embraces all types of individuals, from the dope smoking teenagers to Ida Setworth, "one of the town's finest antiques herself" (19), to the wealthy Grace Hill. Each element of this eclectic environment assumes significance because, "For Dina herself, the people around the stove were as important as the old pieces of furniture" (20). The resulting atmosphere of George's is "at the same time drowsy and alive" (20), combining diverse elements into a unique and contradictory space. Through the creation of this diverse shop-community, Rule exemplifies Aritha van Herk's insistence that "We cannot permit ourselves to scuttle back to ghettos and divisions, to the perverted sanctity of family, heterosexual orthodoxy, race, class, colour, where we are separated by walls of words, their different

meanings differentiating us in too many directions" (*In Visible Ink* 133). The key in van Herk's statement is that no one dogma, slogan, or way of being should dictate divisiveness. Rule's families, in *Against the Season* and *The Young In One Another's Arms*, are anything but orthodox or homogeneous. Rule explains, "[n]one of these people are carrying out a silverware as notion of what it is for one person to relate to another" (Hancock 107). What is important is that they are still families. Rule questions and restructures the heteropatriarchal family model but never does away with it entirely. As Marlene Van Luven tell us in her thesis on Rule, these fictional communities of outcasts are places "wherein people relate to each other in the way in which family members traditionally rallied together for a common cause" (55). When Arthur is dragged away by the police and deported as an army deserter in *The Young In One Another's Arms*, the boarding house community rallies to his defense with meetings and demonstrations. Similarly, when Boy is tracked by the authorities, the island community bands together, refusing to give the police the information they require. In both situations, they unite as families protecting one of their own. Again, it is Diana Fuss who makes clear the usefulness of such restructuring of traditional models: "The figure inside/outside cannot be easily or ever finally dispensed with; it can only be worked on and worked over -- itself turned inside out to expose its critical operations and interior machinery" (1). This analysis eagerly invites a subversion of existing structures that questions the very root of what is inside and what is outside; what is family, what is not.

*I am in the world
to change the world
my lifetime
is to love to endure to suffer the music
to set its portrait
up as a sheet of the world
the most moving the most alive
--Excerpt from Muriel Rukeyser's, "Kathe Kollwitz"*

Rule's novels break open values of family and community to show us alternatives. In a critical examination of Rule's work, Helen Sonthoff recognizes the delicate balance between insider and outsider status that Rule's character's must achieve: "The people in Jane Rule's fiction move between convention and invention, between attitudes they have assumed or absorbed or been given somehow, and attitudes they come upon, discover in themselves" (121). Sonthoff accurately points out that it is the movement between poles of "convention and invention" that challenge Rule's characters. They must resist forces outside of themselves that would script an absolute text of identity onto them. The enforced text of convention delays or inhibits an actualization of individual identities. Amelia, in *Against the Season*, becomes bed-ridden and despondent upon reading her dead sister's diaries. These texts construct Amelia solely as a figure of her lameness, rather than as a whole being. Agate, Amelia's latest charge, points out the constricting nature of these texts when she reveals to us that "'Beatrice says things like, 'Sister is simply grotesque,' and 'Some of us have to be grateful there are cripples who need us'" (125). It is only with the burning of the diaries that Amelia regains her strength and removes the hold of another's text on her life so that she may continue to invent her own way of being.

Rule's characters must never be content to rest under the inscribed text of another. Like the streets in *Against the Season*, they must insist on room for their individual expression. Signified only by letters of the alphabet--A Street, B Street--the town's geography lends itself to renaming and rewriting. These streets allow for (re)courses and individual intervention into the community text. Rule creates a climate of movement with her dialectic of community and individual. Priority cannot be given to an essentialist reading of the self that ignores societal influence, and similarly, a social constructionist view cannot be privileged over the requirements of the Self. Both are necessary to reverse frozen categories of identity and community. Rule does not see the pull between convention and invention as a debilitating or paralyzing process, but instead, sees these movements as the base of her writing: "I don't think of myself as a dramatic writer. I think of myself as far more interested in rhythms in a book that are closer to music--not Beethoven--closer to chamber music which has moments of intensity" (Hancock 83). Shunning stasis, Rule's musical analogy stresses that a continual flow between the moments and characters of her novels is more important than a dramatic climax. Movement is embraced in a resistance of polarized 'us' vs. 'them' battles. As Sonthoff explains, "the vision of the novel is that categories break down"(126). Through their interconnectedness of experience, the characters of Rule's communities enable each other to adapt. The awkward, shy, and self-conscious Cole in *Against the Season*, finds a soulmate in the bank manager, Peter: "Peter, for Cole's sake, wanted to teach him just such simple protections so that the boy wouldn't suffer the ordinary as much as he did now"(12). Cole must be adaptable if he is to survive, as a 'misfit,' in the realm

of the "ordinary." The recurring image of the lungfish, in *The Young In One Another's Arms*, also represents the adaptable figure who is equipped to survive both inside and outside its original habitat. Tom, an American who can't return to his family, tells us the story of this unique creature: "the lungfish, the clumsy misfit who finally climbed out onto the shore. . . probably didn't have much of a life, just learning how to breath the air, but it did learn"(20). Metaphor for the outcasts of Rule's communities, the lungfish eventually forges a new way of living as it re-learns the conventions of its past. Adaptable to its surroundings, the lungfish bridges the distance between worlds with its very existence.

Divinely-shaved feminist theory
And a touch of the domestic
Silver-tipped boots, a black mini-skirt
That's where the disjunction takes place.
She had a hard time dealing with me,
She thought I was a scholar
But I looked like shit--
Dress for success, I can't do it.
Dress to excess, I can do it.
Dress to undress,
Dress to express,
INCONGRUITY!
--Girls In The Nose, "Incongruity," Origin of the World.

As they connect worlds, Rule's characters slip in and out of expected roles, and, as a result, expand the perceptions and conventional views of those around them. Ruth, in *The Young In One Another's Arms*, reveals the inadequacy of conventional sight through her ambiguous-looking body: "In the darkened street, Ruth Wheeler might have been mistaken for a boy of middle growth, spare-bodied, light on her feet"(1). Ruth's fluid identity may be misread by the outside observer, leading to a confusion of expectations and assumptions. Similarly, Amelia, the aging survivor of one of the town's oldest and most respected families in *Against the Season*, also refuses to play a stereotypical role. She rejects the title of morality regulator or aging spinster and, instead, graciously welcomes and accepts unwed pregnant women into her stately home. Amelia must bear the brunt of the dominant morality as friends urge her to take on a more conventional approach:

Friends were beginning to be critical, under the guise of concern: . . . 'Don't you think by now other people could take on this sort of thing?' They implied, of course, that Amelia was too old, too much out of touch, and perhaps had always been too much of an amateur to deal with these girls. The morality of it had, for thirty years or more, threatened propriety. (3)

Though the town erects barriers between themselves and the unwanted, immoral others, Amelia forces the population into a new awareness of the artificiality of these barriers. She is, "the lame, old spinster who knew more about motherhood than anyone else in town" (60). Rule subverts expectations and insists on "moral confusion" (42) as the two worlds coalesce and connect in Amelia's house. Similarly, Dina must learn the value of connections with others, and the artificiality of imposed morality if she is to free herself from

the constructions of her Greek background. Initially sheltered "inside the layers of clothes she seemed to wear in all seasons" (25), Dina rethinks her stance of separation because of Rosemary's "assault on her mythology" (79). Rosemary Hopwood, the prodigal daughter who comes home as social worker, confronts Dina's ill-fitting ideology that "A Greek, to marry well, must be a virgin" (31), or that "A woman should marry" (57). Once again, Rule links her characters in a communal world of knowledge as the widower minister, Carl Hollinger, points out the crux of Dina's dilemma: "Knowing what should be isn't hard,' Carl said with some dryness. 'Accepting what can be seems to me the problem'" (91). Dina must refuse stasis and stop waiting "for a mythical Greek to come and claim her and her dowry"(56). Rosemary enables this movement as she makes herself vulnerable, and disallows the presence of conventional attitudes in the love she feels for Dina: "I'll put you to bed. And don't tell me you don't sleep in front of people. *There'll be no more slogans tonight* " (177 emphasis mine). Wise Ida Setworth uses the analogy of re-reading poetry to expose this continual process of re-learning our own mythologies: "The remarkable thing about poetry is that you always think you understand it until you understand it differently and realize you didn't" (49). Like Adrienne Rich's fictional woman reader, Dina, Rosemary, Ida, and indeed all the characters in *Against the Season*, participate in "Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" ("When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Re-Vision" 35). Together they re-write constricting heteropatriarchal texts, and create new paradigms out of their communal existence.

Rule bridges binaries and connects worlds with the accessibility of her fiction. Accessibility itself is redefined as Rule resists the conventions of the traditionally accessible novel that presents clear-cut, simplistic conclusions, and fails to challenge the intelligence of its readers. Rule's portrayal of a material, everyday world, includes the realm of ideas and philosophies. The political awareness of Gladys, the ideological underminings of Boy, and the moral questions of Amelia are but a few examples of Rule's attempts to connect the worlds of ideas and experience. In her own words:

One of the things that troubles me about a lot of accessible fiction is that it is important not to use your head, as if ideas were not part and parcel of real experience. . . . It's very important to incorporate intelligence, abstract intelligence. . . . It's a part of real living. I don't think ideas govern life. I don't think that morality governs life, but it's part of the fabric of living." (Hancock 88)

Rule weaves an intricate fabric of living in her combination of the abstract and the practical. This non-hierarchical form encourages the reader to access a multiplicity of individuals within these novels. Her narrative structure refuses the isolation of outcasts by placing each character in a position integral to the whole. As outcast readers we, too, may permeate this model. In writing her community texts, Rule decided "to develop the way to write about community that interests me and it will start with this very conventional exercise in shifting point of view to a statement about the way I think people live in the world" (Hancock 108). As reader, I experience the reading of these texts in the same way her characters experience living in a community. That is, through each character I see the connections they have with the group as a whole, rather than experiencing the group through the eyes of a single narrator. My own point of view must be multiple, and open to the various

interpretations of incidents each character relates. Rule provides me with an opportunity to locate a model for my community. She provides a space for the woman/lesbian/outcast reader to enter into. I am situated in her extraordinary cluster of seemingly ordinary, everyday lives, that I may embrace in a celebration of diversity, or as so many reviewers have done, recoil from in fear: "There's this terrible fear that if you allow this kind of relationship in the ordinary world, it's like pesticide. It's going to kill all fertility, wreck our world, threaten patriarchal structure. The gentler it is, apparently the more threatening it is"(Hancock 108). Just as another stranger is welcomed into the community at the end of *The Young In One Another's Arms*, we too are invited by this textual realm of the everyday to read conventional signs in a new way, and expand our own communities of people and ideas.

*I ask him : How can we go on reading
and make sense out of what we read? --
How can they write and believe what they're writing,
the young ones across the street,
while you go on pouring grape into ORANGE
and orange into the one marked GRAPE --?
(How are we going to believe what we read and we write and
we hear and we say and we do?)*

*He looks at the two machines and he smiles
and he shrugs and smiles and pours again.
It could be violence and nonviolence
it could be white and black women and men
it could be war and peace or any
binary system, love and hate, enemy, friend.
Yes and no, be and not-be, what we do and what we don't do.*

*On a corner in East Harlem . . .
a man keeps pouring grape into ORANGE
and orange into the one marked GRAPE,
pouring orange into GRAPE and grape into ORANGE forever.
--Excerpt from Muriel Rukeyser's "Ballad of Orange and Grape"*

CHAPTER THREE

Critical Bridges: Double Movement in Rule's Essays

*"Whereas an 'old book' offers no challenge to, derives no energy from its formal design, the new art is all about shuttling back and forth between text and book," writes Ashok Mathur in the introduction to his installation piece, Book Ends and Odd Books. I wander through this exhibit of innovative books, amused by the bindings of some, stimulated by the construction of others, all the while experiencing Mathur's words. "Experiencing" because I'm caught in this double movement of reading the book and reading the text it contains. Tired from all this double-sight, I sprawl on the usefully situated futon in the center of the gallery. Here, in the 'bedroom books,' I finally understand the necessity of double movement. The pages of *Parallax* turn in a regular forward to backward fashion, until you reach the end and realize you can flip the book over to read a parallel story on the inside of the original pages. On one side, a heterosexual man rants about the evils of 'them,' those horrible homosexuals. On the other side, a gay man also rants against 'them,' those overbearing heterosexuals. But the story doesn't end in hopeless monologues; the two men meet at the close of the text and at the close of the book. Double movement, I realize, creates places of intersection. Locations, where 'them' and 'us' are not so clearly delineated.*

Traversing the categories of author, critic, and lesbian requires boundless stamina and infinite flexibility, especially for Jane Rule, who insists on resisting the static containment of a singular subject position. Rule's critical essays in *Lesbian Images* (1975), *Outlander* (1981), and *A Hot-Eyed Moderate* (1986) reveal to us the often dangerous and inhospitable terrain of politics, morality, and literature that she must cross and double-cross in her attempt to write from a location of wholeness. Wholeness signifies a refusal of the narrow and limiting definitions of what a lesbian author/critic should write, act like, represent, or include in her fiction or criticism. In her struggle to acknowledge the contradictory and complex associations of her subject positions, Rule employs what I call "double movement." By this, I mean that she must initiate a dialogue with multiple identities that, paradoxically, overlap, collide, or fuse. Rule's conversation with the many categories of her existence is not an endless tug-of-war between opposing identities but is, instead, an ongoing double movement of lesbian **and** author, private **and** public, myth **and** reality. Her positions are linked and separate; similar and different. Like the vital inside/outside dialectic discussed in chapter two, Rule's critical essays emphasize a paradigm of contradictions. She both embraces and rejects the label of *lesbian* author; the influence of an audience on her work; and the verisimilitude of a realistic text. This is not to say Rule adopts a neutral stance. On the contrary, her double movement allows readers a valuable glimpse into lesbian everyday lives. In our struggle to exist both inside and outside given structures, we develop strong and flexible ways to reconcile the duality of living as lesbians in a culture of enforced heterosexuality. Rule demonstrates that double movement need not be reduced to a debilitating schizophrenia, but may be used as a means of

expanding knowledge and increasing power. In fact, double movement reveals the constructed nature of **all** categories, and enables us to see that their borders are shared and interdependent. Rule employs contradictions to create a fluid paradigm of lesbian writing that avoids the deathly grip of dogma.

The invitation baffles me. It reads, "Come as you aren't." For days, I ponder the possibilities of this inverted construction. To come as I am not means I must contradict what I am. Ok, so I need to know what I am. No problem, I'll just run through the labels: lesbian, white, student, twentysomething, lower-middle class, blond, overweight, intelligent, interesting, witty, average shoe size. My list takes up hours of my time. To go as I am not, I decide, is to go as I am. For at any given moment I reveal only selected parts, or others see me with their selective eyes. In the end I choose to go as I am because that isn't what I am and it isn't really the end.

Rule's traversing double movement is readily apparent in her numerous discussions of lesbian authorship. Her critical works touch on several crucial questions for lesbian criticism: Who is the lesbian author? What qualifies as lesbian fiction? Is the category even valid? How do the positions of lesbian and author intersect? These questions, for many lesbian literary critics, come out of our struggle to recognize a cohesive body of literature. For instance, Bonnie Zimmerman presents us with a common, but highly limited, definition of the lesbian novel: "A lesbian novel has a central, not marginal, lesbian character, one who understands herself to be a lesbian. A lesbian

novel also places love between women, including sexual passion, at the center of its story" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 15). Based on this description, Jane Rule has written only one, perhaps two, lesbian novels. Zimmerman's categorization leaves little room for authors, like Rule, who are interested in portraying a variety of human interactions. In Zimmerman's sense, Rule does not write lesbian novels; she writes novels with lesbian characters. Rule comments, "sexuality itself is only one of dozens of tags by which we identify ourselves" (*Outlander* 203). Striving to portray a variety of human characteristics, Rule disdains prescriptive structures. As Reina Lewis comments, "[Rule] insists on her right to present a realistic range of human experience" ("The Death of the Author and the Resurrection of the Dyke" 28). For when Rule writes a novel with lesbian characters, she expands the definition of a novel; if limited to writing a *lesbian* novel, Rule finds herself shelved at the back of the room along with the other 'special interest' texts.

If she is to go on writing Rule must, therefore, achieve a balance between her own desire to include a lesbian community in her work and her insistence on telling the stories of a larger human community. That is, paralysis comes easily if she cannot create bridges between the categories of her existence. Rule acknowledges that it is impossible to separate her lesbian self from her authorial self. Ultimately, as in her fiction, she provides a forum for dismantling rigid notions of a unified, monolithic lesbian position. Just as Rule demands that "A character should, like a real human being, resist categorizing, resist simple-minded solutions," (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 6) so too, she believes her position as a lesbian/author/critic cannot be reduced to static understanding. The process of movement and the dialectic created in

Rule's essays may be likened to Elizabeth Meese's insistence on the fluidity of lesbian and feminist criticism. Meese explains in her text, *Crossing the Double-Cross*, that in order to undermine static patriarchal criticism we must constantly cross and re-cross the terrain of our own texts, not afraid to present contradictions and paradoxes. Meese writes, "Feminist criticism does not need ideology as dogma in the guise of theory, and deconstruction equips us to detect and unravel our own and others' masquerades with a certain skill" (1986 xi). Process, then, is essential as we create, and re-create, in a continual cycle of growth.

For Rule, this process of growth is only possible when propaganda, but not politics, is resisted. She comments, "I write a fiction of reversed or at least reserved judgement" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 7). Paradoxically, Rule realizes that when the confines of propaganda are resisted, in her own work as well as in fiction generally, the most meaningful and long-lasting political comments are made:

For our women writers, not early curbed into narrow didacticism or personal confession, have developed voices which do accurately describe for us the climate in which we live. They are being our historians, sociologists, psychologists. With their testimony we have an opportunity to make more informed political judgements because we have an understanding of our complex and particular culture only a real literature can give. (23)

Rule's critical analysis of women's fiction highlights the need for flexibility in critiquing and understanding our work. An expansive and generous critical approach allows us to read a multitude of texts, rather than a select number of

ideologically similar works, as valuable political commentaries. Again, I find Elizabeth Meese particularly useful because she insists that feminist criticism must be construed as "ideas that assist us and then disappear, as opposed to a codification that restricts or determines what can be said, by whom, and about what" (*Crossing the Double-Cross* xi). Rule, too, rejects ideological censorship on the grounds that "To test, to contest, is the only way to reach forward into understanding areas of human experience vulgarized by either taboo or glorification" (*Outlander* 157). Critical dialogue is imperative because Rule knows only too well the damage wrought by the taboos against lesbians. These taboos begin to break down when we treat "knowledge [as] a collective enterprise" (151) which creates bridges of understanding between individuals. Rule's strategy for coping with the ever-changing and often mystifying aspects of her life, as well as the lives of others, is to promote this concept of understanding. To understand effectively, we must, Rule asserts, communicate with honesty all parts of our lives: "As long as who and what we desire are treated as broken-off secrets of our lives, trivial for men, all-consuming for women, we will go on understanding very little about what it is to be human, in public or private" (171). Rule's desire for honesty comes out of a growing personal awareness of the lies and silences surrounding her. Early in her career, she embraced critical examinations of literature which contended that, "To be concerned about content was a grave error in critical judgement revealing a subjective and uncultured mind" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 16). Rule comments that this critical approach was often a safe-haven for her lesbian identity: "Since I also already knew I was a lesbian, I certainly didn't want future critics of my work prying into what was then my private life" (17). After publicly acknowledging her own sexuality, Rule found

she was able to "come out of the critical closet" (18) and confront the institutionalized silence surrounding lesbian writers.

In confronting critical homophobia, Rule promotes the concept of understanding as a means of deconstructing the patriarchal tendency to situate individuals as those either opposed to, or for, the dominant ideology. 'Understanding' insists on a much more complex evaluation of human interactions. As Rule asserts, "I had never been as resigned to ready-made ideas as I was to ready-made clothes, perhaps because, although I couldn't sew, I could think" (*Lesbian Images* 4). Thinking enables Rule to resist easy descriptions of individuals in her fiction and criticism. Lesbian theorist Judith Butler explains this necessity for intersecting and overlapping identities, in her essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," as she argues that, "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (13-14). Rule re-situates power inside the individual rather than in an outside label, such as lesbian, to undermine the patriarchal tactics of classification Butler identifies. Rule blends tags of identification in a traversing movement as she writes, "I am a politically involved lesbian, and I am a writer. I do not see the two as mutually exclusive; neither do I see them as inextricably bound together" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 42). Through the linking power of the semi-colon, Rule discards absolutes and bridges us into a new awareness of her work. The power in naming a diverse self is re-placed in the hands of the affected individual. In other words, Rule reclaims her right to exert power over **all** the labels in her life. The danger of emphasizing individual power is, of course,

that Rule risks ignoring the need for a strong community of lesbians. However, as her dialectic demonstrates, Rule recognizes and dialogues with these dual demands as she moves through the public and private aspects of her lesbian existence. She instructs us that, "Whether we like it or not, our sexuality isn't a private matter, and the altruism of some good citizens hasn't changed the government's mind" (65). Ultimately, Rule unifies public and private identities into a workable paradigm where inside and outside define and reinforce one another.

This is Not For You

If you were hoping to hear from me, you'll be disappointed. Yes, I'm writing but this is not for you: "I don't intend to call you." Why? Because I want to remember the parts I sever when I'm with you. Sew myself up with the thread of my story. That is why this is not a letter. A letter signifies the desire to communicate, and that is not what I desire; I want liberation from your presence. I cannot be like you who had, "one source of identity, the measure of commitment one had to people and ideas, out of which should come the work one did." I don't deal in 'shoulds,' prefer to stay in the realm of what is. That is why this is not for you. I cannot say what this is, but know clearly what it isn't. For so long I have concealed what I am. I hid the bruises on my face and arms, fearing you'd find out about my underground existence. Now, I am coming out and that is why this is not for you. I wrote you for months

without answers and am accustomed to the futility of my task. "What I never supposed you really read I don't quite believe you won't read now. It comes to the same thing." Perhaps I'm re-versing my tactics, taking another course to reach you because this is not for you.

Coming out of the 1970s and early 1980s, Rule's three critical texts are situated in an era where, according to Bonnie Zimmerman, "the meaning of the word 'lesbian' was profoundly influenced by feminist politics and ideology" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 12). 'Lesbian' came to represent more than the private choice of a sexual partner; it took on the political message of feminism. Zimmerman explains this phenomenon: "Lesbian feminists proposed . . . that the word 'lesbian' *stood for* a specific relationship to the dominant society rather than simply being a name for women who 'happen' to make love to other women" (11). Rule describes the debilitating atmosphere created by the heavy-handed enforcement of lesbian feminist ideology in a "Lesbian Lifestyles" course she facilitated at the University of British Columbia: "diversity doesn't need to get in the way of sharing experiences, but in this circumstance it did. One by one every woman who was willing to speak was disqualified by others in the room as inauthentic, not a 'real' lesbian" (*Outlander* 174). Unfortunately, as Rule realizes, the situation in her classroom is "played out in the larger public world" (174) where lesbians compete to be ideologically correct:

There is not, apparently, an authentic lesbian in the land, except perhaps those who have yet to admit it. To discover this at a time when thousands of women are choosing to

take the risk of being public lesbians is at first disconcerting and then for many really terrifying. It ought, I think sadly, to be funny. (175)

The reduction of lesbianism to a category of authenticity clearly disempowers individual actions and inhibits the growth of a lesbian community.

Public Revelations:

"Being a lesbian is not an accomplishment," said Martina Navratilova in forearm-revealing T-shirt chic, addressing the masses at the march on Washington this spring. 'It is not something I had to study for or learn or graduate in. It is what I am--nothing more, nothing less.'" -- The Advocate, October 5, 1993.

"And there I was at the Triangle Inaugural Ball, and k.d. [lang] said something and she introduced me, and I just said, 'Well, you know, I'm really proud to have been a lesbian all my life,' not realizing what I was doing,' she says chuckling, ' was coming out. I was just stating the fact.'" --Melissa Etheridge in Deneuve, December 1993.

At first, I was dismayed by Rule's refusal to be a figurehead for any organization or movement. I wondered how she expected lesbians to gain acceptance as an integral part of society if she was unwilling to promote our interests? But then I realized that a figurehead often constructs and determines the authenticity of a movement's members. Rule's anti-

leadership stance does not erase her input or importance as a lesbian figure, but it does resist creating standards of community. Like all public figures, the common knowledge of her lesbianism makes it impossible for Rule to be invisible. Indeed, visibility, rather than leadership, is Rule's strategy of defiance; it allows her to resist dogma while simultaneously promoting the recognition of lesbian existence. Rule writes, "Only visibility is instruction" (*Outlander* 189). In her critical essays, as in her fiction, Rule strives to expand, through visibility, who and what a lesbian can be. Mistrusting solidarity, Rule primarily values an individual's power of determination. However, double movement creeps into her valuation, because it is, paradoxically, the individual stance which forges a path towards community:

The paradox is that, when I really stand alone, I realize what remarkably good and large company I am in. There are authentic lesbians everywhere: yes, asleep in their husbands' arms; yes, nursing their children; yes, three to a bed; yes, faithful into old age; yes, alone. (*Outlander* 178)

Rule embraces these diverse notions of lesbianism, and refuses to tailor her writing according to a specific lesbian feminist pattern. This, of course, raises the ire of some gay critics who insist on positive images of homosexuals. Rule tells us, "For critics who are themselves gay, I am held politically accountable for every less than perfect gay character and am warned that I will lose part of my audience if I insist on including heterosexual characters in my work" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 42). This rigid censor of political correctness often binds lesbian writers. Again, it is Bonnie Zimmerman who recognizes "[w]e (for i fight this censor in myself) still write with fetters on, fearing to alienate any segment of the community" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 19). Rule refuses this censor as she insists it is not her place to write *for* everyone: "My job is not to

speak for other people but to listen to them speaking for themselves to expand my understanding of what it is to be human and female at the end of the 20th century" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 56). Her refusal of dogma does not mean that Rule desires to be disconnected from a lesbian identity but, rather, that she does wish to be highly connected to numerous aspects of her being. Judith Butler expresses a similar desire when she makes it clear that although she resists identity categories, this need not mean she refuses to publicly acknowledge her lesbianism: "This is not to say that I will not appear at political occasions under the sign of lesbian, but that I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies" ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination" 14). Rule, too, does not wish to construct lesbian as a privileged or magical sign but, instead, calls for a moving, unfixed identity that signifies differently, not only to diverse individuals, but also to the same individual at different periods in her life. For, according to Rule, "Sexual appetite, like all appetites, is not fixed. As our bodies, our needs, and our knowledge grow and change, so do our choices, if not of partners, certainly of practices" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 72). So, to construct a writer solely on the basis of sexuality is a futile action in the face of shifting appetites.

A traversing quote that crosses and re-crosses the borders of my chapter:

"Invert, To turn, bend. *Shape-changers. The turn of a phrase, the page, the mind.* Inside-out and upside-down. *Coming out turning us inside-out revealing the world upside-down: things aren't what they seem.*" --Betsy Warland, preface to InVersions: Writings by Dykes, Queers, and Lesbians.

Paradoxically, her heterosexual critics, too, judge Rule on the basis of her sexuality, and leave little room for her to write. Rule explains, "in the academy, I am dismissed as a marginal writer not because some of my characters share my sexuality but because I am a lesbian, therefore somehow mysteriously disqualified from presenting a vision of central value" (43). The academy's dismissal of her work, illustrates the dilemma Rule faces in being named a lesbian writer. Her texts will be labeled with inferior status stickers, warning all who read them that they are not acceptable literature. Writer and artist Mary Meigs describes the situation Rule often faces in academic settings:

I have heard, after the publication of *Memory Board* in 1987, the question to her by a man in her audience at McGill University, 'Do you call yourself a lesbian writer?' This question, which is legitimate when posed by a lesbian, was in this case intended to be a trap similar to, 'Do you still beat your wife?' ("*Falling Between the Cracks*" 111)

Yet, even with these critical traps in her path, Rule insists on her right to name herself and makes no attempt to hide her sexuality. In her critical texts, on dust jackets, and in interviews she publicly acknowledges the fact of her lesbianism. What she refuses are the restrictive connotations associated with labels, such as lesbian, not the need for some form of identification. Refusing to write for a heterosexual or a gay audience, Rule provides all of her readers with a broader picture of human experiences. Limiting her writing to the needs or wishes of a particular audience is debilitating for all concerned because "No book really worth reading tells you only what you want to know about yourself as well as the world you live in" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 52-53). Rule widens the construction of lesbian through the double movement initiated by traversing the requirements of her various audiences. She writes,

as we shall see, not to satisfy narrow demands of her readers, but to "speak the truth" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 43) in all its forms.

This is Not For You

I am greedy with my text. You will not control the words on my page or the way in which I say them. Now I am writing for me and this is not a letter for you. It isn't one of your cryptic postcards which always left me staring at the picture; the picture, my only clue to your feelings. No, this is not a note of explanation or apology: "Nowhere are there directions for the proper form to thank someone for an inheritance." But forms are irrelevant because this is not for you. This is not a public document, but you see the contradictions in that. I write because I will not take your vow of silence. I will write you out of my body, my mind, and I will write me into the spaces I have hidden from myself for so long. Now that I am here, in this foreign land, I see with new clarity the reality I left behind. I am writing the beginning from the ending. Or, perhaps, rewriting. This is my truth. But its telling will alter your vision of me, will alter my perception of you. I'm fashioning truth from my myth of you and myths from your truths about me. I can no longer answer your letters. You could not hear what I have to say; silence invades your senses. For my sake, I must speak to you. This is not a reprimand; this is not for you.

The desire to create realistic fiction is a recurring theme in Rule's critical works. She writes, "[m]y responsibility, as I see it, is not to present the world as it ought to be but as it is" (*Outlander* 153). Rule shuns fiction as morality and insists on writing reality. Her insistence on portraying the real is problematic, however, in this era of deconstructing the notion of a true and authentic experience. Theory and practical experience, as Bonnie Zimmerman points out, are often in direct conflict:

Most theorists today are anti-essentialist, suspicious of 'experience' and 'truth' as categories, and enamoured of disruption and fragmentation; most lesbians in everyday life believe they always have been lesbians, rely on their experience and sense of what's real to make literary judgements, and seek the condition of wholeness and normality. The discourses of 'common sense' and contemporary theory seem to be moving further and further apart. (*The Safe Sea of Women* 13)

I would argue that Rule brings into dialogue these disparate discourses. She engages in the double movement of writing reality (a commonsensical approach) in order to disrupt, and rewrite reality (a theoretical stance). That is, she constructs a realistic text in order to counter traditional representations of human interactions and, in the process, creates stories that build lesbian mythologies. She acknowledges, then, the duality recognized by Zimmerman: "interwoven into the fabric of even the most transparently realistic texts are the myths, fantasies, political visions, and cultural ideals--in short, the ideology--cherished by the lesbian feminist community" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 26-27). Because Rule's fictional reality bears little resemblance to heteropatriarchal visions of the world, and because her action of speaking

truth leads the reader to question what is taken for granted as reality, her realist tactics, then, are initial steps towards fragmenting the heterosexual norm. Judith Butler succinctly observes that "Compulsory heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that 'being' lesbian is always a kind of miming" ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination" 20-21). Rule situates lesbianism in the realm of the real in order to reevaluate its construction as a bad imitation of original heterosexuality. Lesbianism will not be an other category idly waiting its turn to become authentic. Butler argues that because heterosexuality imagines homosexuality as the copy in order to maintain its own position as the original, heterosexuality "'knows' its own possibility of becoming undone" ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination" 23). Double movement occurs because heterosexuality requires, and is dependent on, homosexuality for its definition. This movement places lesbians in powerful rather than marginal positions.

When the words open into a not yet open space writing becomes:

*A shout to someone to do something; a reminder to
myself of what I needed to remember; words to
center me in a hostile and chaotic universe; a prayer;
a justification of need; a repetition to keep my sanity;
a stubborn clinging to what I needed in order to
go on with my life on the edge, on the margin of power.*

--Minnie Bruce Pratt, "When The Words Open Into Some
Not Yet Open Space."

Rule insists on "speaking truth" precisely because lesbian 'truths' in literature are so difficult to locate. Bonnie Zimmerman explains the enormous importance of telling reality for lesbian writers: "Lesbians often write not because they felt compelled to create art or because they love language, but because lesbians need a literature that is honest and true (or at least true to the image we are creating about ourselves)" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 18).

Rule's desire for truth, however, focuses not on a narrow, factual account of reality, but on the *action* of speaking and telling what is known. Exposing previous portrayals of lesbians is a process that grows and grows as Rule re-tells not only the patriarchal myths concerning lesbians, but our own constructions of lesbian images as well. Bonnie Zimmerman explains that, "[i]n a sense, then, lesbian myths and stories are no more 'true' than the old patriarchal literature. But--and this is a crucial point--they do serve lesbians better" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 25-26). Indeed, it is again double movement that provides an opportunity for realizing the valuable intersections between myth and reality in lesbian existence. Their interdependency creates space for a plurality of lesbian images because the continual speaking of truth develops a plethora of lesbian myths, that in turn, enables the reader to recognize her own truths and speak new myths. As performance artist Shawna Dempsey proudly proclaims, "From now on I declare myself a mythological terrorist for truth" (*Femfest Cabaret* 1993). In circular fashion, Rule, like Dempsey, rips apart myth to insert truth, thereby, creating a new myth, and a space for

enriched truth-speak. Rule leaves us with a secure place from which to invent our own lesbian mythical truths: "I want to be sure from the faint tracings I inherited, I leave at least a hard bed, a comfortable rocking chair, a warm hearth, and a few of the survival skills I've learned" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 60). Rule builds on the faint history of lesbian experience, and on her desire to portray reality, in order to create a space where theory and lesbian existence may coincide.

Traversing her positions as author **and** lesbian, in a private **and** public arena, **and** on the theoretical **and** practical level, Rule replicates the double movement of lesbian everyday existence. As Adrienne Rich explains, "Lesbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life" ("Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence 52). That is, we take apart the restrictive realities surrounding us and build up a new mythology of human experience. We learn the rules of compulsory heterosexuality in order to placate parents, siblings, friends, and colleagues, but also continually break those rules when we carry out our everyday lives as lesbians in the environments we find safe and nurturing. We must continually resist becoming stuck in a counter-discursive position where opposition governs our decisions. Rule writes of the dangers involved in constructing an oppositional paradigm: "I try not to make a principle of being politically incorrect, for rebelling against a code can be as limiting as serving it. I depart, valuing the journey" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 96). Traversing the terrain of a variety of political impulses allows Rule to form a tentative and fluid notion of lesbian reality. In her analysis of lesbian

literature, Bonnie Zimmerman elaborates on the dangers of simply substituting one static paradigm of reality for another:

Contemporary lesbians expose that [patriarchal] reading by showing how it turns the lesbian into a fantasy or traps her in a fiction. In its place, however, we are easily tempted to enshrine another reading, equally static and potentially entrapping. In attempting to say *this* is a lesbian identity, *this* is what it means to be a lesbian, we simply call fire yellow instead of red. Rather than reveal the truth about lesbians, we fabricate new myths for old without acknowledging that our stories are exactly that--stories. (*The Safe Sea of Women* 25)

As Zimmerman shows, it is imperative that we acknowledge the fiery blend of colors in our lives, rather than reduce reality to a single factor. We need not dispense with all paradigms, but the models we develop must be fluid, shifting, and necessarily contradictory. Elizabeth Meese instructs us that, "feminist criticism does need theory as a strategic process of conceptualization that relates various instances of practical criticism and enables us to explain ourselves to each other and to a larger critical audience" (xi). Rule's criticism attempts to explain her position as a lesbian to herself, to other lesbians, as well as to a heterosexual audience. She never claims to speak for all lesbians or to ever provide a quintessential picture of lesbian reality. Rule acknowledges that her work is a multi-faceted process of telling, speaking, and storying, and recognizes "the need to be *practicing* artists" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 5). In double movement, Rule employs realism to write against what is already there, as well as to fashion a truthful, mythical text because, as Shawna Dempsey says, "It's a myth eat myth world" (*FemFest Cabaret* 1993).

Traversing the many aspects of her life; portraying a realistic/mythical text; and fashioning a fluid/contradictory critical analysis, requires that Rule achieve a sense of balance. The title of her third collection of critical essays embodies the paradoxical and contradictory balance Rule commands. *A Hot-Eyed Moderate* signifies both a firey, compassionate, angry, political visionary, and a middle-of-the-road, calm, average, compromiser. Balance, for Rule, is not an end but a perpetuation of movement. She instructs us, in *A Hot-Eyed Moderate*, that, "Balance is probably more a matter of keeping one's own to help insure the balance of the other in the sometimes rocking boat" ("Rule Making" 149). As textual, moral, and political waves crash against our rocking boat of theory, fiction, and everyday experience, we must shift to the right, then to the left, and back again as we traverse, with Rule, a potentially upsetting situation. Balance is not a matter of standing still in the middle of the boat where you are unprepared for sudden movement. It is instead, a vital crossing back and forth between aspects of our lives. Balanced in an understanding of double movement, Rule guides her readers into a recognition of individual importance and community solidarity. Her work "is not a clever puzzle to be solved by clever readers; it is a passionately articulated vision to be intensely shared" (*A Hot-Eyed Moderate* 20).

Pink Guitar

*A pink guitar
She played a pink guitar
A pink guitar upsets a lot of balances . . .
A rosy writing space, a rose colored
instrument, a new kind of pinko,
Which I hold and, by my play, try:
Into this scene gallumphs the female artist,
Hauling a different colored lyre, guitar,
or mandolin
"You want difference!" she says,
heehawing . . .
"I'll give you difference!"
A pink guitar
I'll play a pink guitar:
Not mastery but plurality
Not a form but a method--
My pink guitar has gender in its
very grain.
I can feel its strings vibrating . . .
And that means unpick EVERYTHING.*

*A Girls in the Nose song. Words arranged by Kay Turner from Rachel Blau
DuPlessis' essay "The Pink Guitar."*

CHAPTER FOUR

Performing Ambivalence in *Memory Board* and *After the Fire*

Opposition is not enough:

But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed.

--Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

Assimilation is not enough:

The 1993 Gay and Lesbian March on Washington:

Besides the cocktail parties, the biggest attraction seemed to be the three competing stores pushing merchandise. . . Had the March become a sort of queer Yosemite? Watching activists stand on line for hours to buy souvenirs, I wondered how our movement had become so tame and without content. The politics had seeped out of the event, leaving only a bland urge to be part of America. The new agenda was to get lesbians and gay men as large a piece of the pie as possible, not to criticize the pie's ingredients, bake a new one, or discuss who wasn't getting any pie at all and dying of starvation.

--Donna Minkowitz, *Out Magazine*, Dec/Jan 1994.

Throughout the latter half of the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, lesbian literary, political, and social commentary has turned its focus away from the narrowly constructed feminist ideologies of the 1970s and perceives, instead, a diverse lesbian community in need of pluralistic theories which reflect and accommodate the rich mosaic of lesbian lives.² This intensified discussion of lesbian identities and subjectivities comes as a result of the perseverance of lesbians of color who demanded and created criticism and theory which accurately discusses the reality of difference among lesbians. Finally theorizing by and about lesbians began to catch up to the material conditions of many dykes. Instead of the monolithic, forboding, and inaccurate representation of the lesbian feminist, theories of diversity enabled lesbians to recognize, as Bonnie Zimmerman explains, "that the safe sea of women is divided into eddies of different races, classes, ethnicities, ages, physical abilities, and even sexual tastes" (*The Safe Sea of Women* 173). A recognition of difference manifests itself in the collections of lesbian writings which appeared in this period. *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures*, *InVersions: Writings By Dykes, Queers & Lesbians*, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, and *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: beyond the lesbian nation*, to list a few, all grapple with the desire to name ourselves both within and outside of existing identity structures/strictures. In doing so, they traverse the territory between essentialist and social constructionist notions of identity, tentatively mapping the multiple ways in which we name ourselves.

² I am thinking here of works by writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Teresa de Lauretis, Daphne Marlatt, Diana Fuss, Biddy Martin, and Makeda Silvera. These are but a few of the lesbians whose recent texts on a wide range of subjects--from lesbian autobiographies to queer theory--have contributed to the recognition of diversity within lesbian communities.

In her most recent novels, Jane Rule traverses notions of the subject; she deliberately employs ambivalence and so initiates ambiguity to both resist dominant structures *and* create alternatives. This traversal is similar to the inside/outside structure described in chapter one and resonates with the double movement of chapter three; ambivalence and ambiguity allow for a vital blending and blurring of both essentialist and social constructionist paradigms of identity. Ambivalence opens a space where plurality mingles with singularity; difference reveals commonality; and community embraces individuality. Contradictions stimulate and promote flexible ways of being which do not advocate any **one** form of identity. Because ambivalence is a continual fluctuation it is often perceived negatively, by a patriarchal vision, as indecision or uncertainty. Dichotomized thinking insists on the clear edges of identity categories and scornfully rejects the blurring potential of ambivalence. I would argue that Rule's use of ambivalence suggests a positive irresolution which allows her characters to express all of their conflicting attitudes and emotions. Lesbian theorist Judith Butler describes ambivalence as the opening of a dialogue between seemingly disparate concepts. She describes this dialectic of subject-construction in her 1993 text, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex:"*

There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the 'we' cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience. It is in the space of this ambivalence which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by which subjectivation proceeds--and fails to proceed. (124)

Rule, too, reworks the terms of subjectivation as her texts perform ambivalence and generate ambiguity. Ambiguity occurs when an individual is read or understood by an outside viewer in multiple ways. That is, the individual recognition of internal and external contradictions manifests itself outwardly as ambiguity. Ambiguity functions to establish an uncertain reading that, in Rule's work, ultimately does not act as a barrier to communication but, instead, broadens the possible points of connection between her characters through their resistance to simplistic categorizations. Robin Van Heck argues that Rule "writes against attitudes which categorize and isolate people according to gender and sexual orientation. Rule is changing the world we live in by changing the ways we look at it" ("The People-Centred Vision of Jane Rule" 302-3). In Rule's final novels, *Memory Board* and *After The Fire*, connection between and among the characters occurs when the roles of gender, sexuality, and race are presented as ambivalent performances. This is not to say that performance is only a playing of something the characters are not, rather, the performance itself is part of what the characters are or are becoming. Identity is then an intricate network of innate and conditioned perspectives which Judith Butler describes as "*a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" (9). Rule traverses ideologies, labels, and categorizations to demonstrate the possibility of a subject that is neither solely the product of essentialism, nor the result of a social constructionist stance, but is, instead, an ambiguous mixture of these dualities. As fixed identities are resisted, Rule reveals the ambivalence her characters experience in daily life and shows their subsequent flexibility in performing multiple roles. These performances open spaces of connection

with other characters and, ultimately, the reader of her texts because we are given a place to acknowledge and validate the contradictions of our own existence. The texts themselves perform interconnected narratives that not only link Rule's fictional characters, but resonate as well with the multiple and layered nature of lesbian realities. As we shall come to see, ambiguity is not a neutral state of indecision or endless pull, for Rule, but is a vital source of forward movement that expands, rather than reduces, the ways in which a subject can be.

This is what I'd like to find on the ceiling over my bed--"Focusing on a label renders static the vital movement of our existence." Not nearly as lyrical as Brossard, yet its academic eagerness might still bring the house down on top of me. I suppose it is ironic; this longing for a slogan to remind me that slogans are inadequate. I'd rather think of it as humorous: the lesbian who somehow missed her label immunization shot. Instead, I swallow textual pills with a calculated dose of generalizing material to ward off the larger attack. I can't stop this longing for easy understanding. Over and done with. THE END. How unacademic of me, I can hear you say. But I've never been taught how to translate theory into reality. All I can do is read the writing on the ceiling.

Gloria Anzaldúa's text, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), arguably the most influential work on plurality to emerge in the 1980s, focuses on the expansion of identity constructions. I use this piece as a means of

understanding the positive connotations of ambivalence and ambiguity. In her text, Anzaldúa insists upon a fluid subject who is free to acknowledge and express her diversity outside of restrictive labels. Labels are not rejected absolutely because they do promote the possibility of collective identification; however, their usefulness depends on an explicit naming of their limitations, or on an inherent plurality. For this reason, Anzaldúa suggests we search for a term such as "mestiza queer" to express lesbian collective **and** individual realities. Mestiza queers "have the ability, the flexibility, the malleability, the amorphous quality of being able to stretch this way and that way. We can add new labels, names and identities as we mix with others" ("To(o) Queer the Writer--Loca, escritora y chicana" 249). Through this statement, Anzaldúa exposes the ambivalent nature of a categorization whose primary function is to resist categorization. This ambivalence makes possible a unique blending of individual choice and community influence which does not exist in a white woman's invocation of "lesbian." Anzaldúa is clear on her reasons for resisting this generic label:

For me the term lesbian *es un problemon*. As a working-class Chicana, mestiza - a composite being, *amalgama de culturas y de lenguas* - a woman who loves women, 'lesbian' is a cerebral word, white and middle class, representing an English-only dominant culture, derived from the Greek word *lesbos*. (249)

As I argued in chapter three, Rule, too, is uncomfortable with the term "lesbian" because of all that it does not signify; it excludes our varied cultural, economic, and political circumstances and sets in motion a homophobic homogenization of women-loving-women. Through the character of Diana Crown in *Memory Board*, Rule portrays labels as crumbling containers of

meaning. Diana, a retired doctor and lifetime lover of her partner, Constance Crowley, insists on her right to be seen as an individual and not as a ghettoized minority. After decades of separation, Diana's twin brother, David, reappears in her life to initiate a reconciliation. Eager to understand his sister's sexuality, David reads *The Body Politic* for information. But as Diana points out, the diversity of homosexuals cannot possibly be contained under a single blanket of classification. She believes that "the nature of sexuality. . . couldn't be isolated, labeled, and then judged by any system of real values" (203). David generalizes about gays and lesbians because, from his heterosexual position, homosexuals are easily slotted into an 'other' status. Lesbian writer Lisa Kahaleole Chang Hall explains the presuppositions that are possible from a dominant perspective: "There is a power move that requires the security of being the 'normal' center, whether racial/white or sexual/heterosexual. It doesn't work both ways; no one assumes that analyses by or about marginalized women cover the experiences of all 'women'" ("Bitches in Solitude: Identity politics and lesbian community" 221). Diana understands that generalizations are one way power moves and, for this reason, she denies affiliation with a minority status. Rule writes, "It was the label Diana objected to, as if by it he [David] could dismiss her views as a lesbian plot against men's privilege and pleasure" (195). Diana makes it clear that the insertion of a monolithic homosexual community into the existing system of categorization will only subsume, rather than acknowledge, the diverse aspects of her identity. Again Rule writes, "it horrified her [Diana] now to hear of young women who called themselves not only lesbians but dykes, as if they took on the world's judgement of them and flaunted it" (203). We cannot ignore, however, the internalized homophobia Diana expresses in

these assertions. Not wanting to be like 'them' replicates a typical knee-jerk reaction to homosexuality. Yet, Diana's ambivalence sets the stage for a vital blending of individual and community concerns. Through the novel, Diana comes to recognize that absolute individualism and complete denial of minority status is an equally debilitating stance, which serves to minimize the importance of community and to underscore the power of assimilation. Like many lesbians, she has created a mask of commonality to use as a protective device, rather than as a bridge into new territories of human interaction. Diana realizes that in her eagerness to be accepted as a doctor, she denied herself intimate connections with the gay community's efforts to care for AIDS patients: "These were the people whose existence she had always denied, who believed, as she never had, that they were members of a real minority and responsible to it. Dealing with them behind her professional mask, she was aware of it now for the first time as a mask" (271). With the mask stripped away Diana is capable of the understanding that comes with complexity. Acknowledging her community status, in this instance, is part of her own growth. She must, at some level, take responsibility for the minority she belongs to while simultaneously retaining an existence outside of a marginalized condition. Diana's unmasking exposes the ambivalence inherent in any labelling process; a label both enhances community solidarity and perpetuates an alienating otherness that reduces our identities to a single descriptive element. Like the bomb shelter and the locked houses of *Memory Board*, categories of sexuality act to both protect and confine their inhabitants. Somewhere in the ambivalent space between David's insistence on Diana's difference and Diana's insistence on her commonality they find points of connection that neither eradicate diversity nor undermine similarities.

Being women together was not enough. We were different.

Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different.

Being Black together was not enough. We were different.

Being Black women together was not enough. We were different.

Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different.

--Audre Lorde, Zami: A New Spelling of My Name.

As I argued in chapter one, lesbian existence, both inside and outside of heteropatriarchal labels, enables a recognition of both the usefulness, and the frequent inadequacy, of naming individuals according to pre-existing classifications. I turn again to Gloria Anzaldúa who writes that, "When a lesbian names me the same as her she subsumes me under her category. I am of her group but not as an equal, not as a whole person--my color erased, my class ignored" (250). Anzaldúa's articulation of the power of labels to obscure individual realities is demonstrated in *Memory Board* through David's initial reaction to his wife's classification of Diana and Constance as lesbians: "He had also known, without articulating it to himself, that his sister was in love with Constance. When Patricia put an ugly name to it, he was stunned at first and then a little in awe of them" (226). The connotations of the word, rather than the assumed reality, is what bothers David. Understandably, he is uncomfortable with thinking of his sister in "ugly" terms and would prefer to see her as a composite being who simply loves another woman. This insight is precisely what David gains when he resumes communication with Diana.

He is able to understand sexuality as an ambivalent performance instead of a determining and limiting orientation. As his son-in-law, Jack, says, "anyone who caught and kept Constance Crowley's fancy for forty years is someone I want to meet because I very much doubt it's what they do or don't do in bed" (64). Jack's expansion of lesbian identity into a wider realm outside of the bedroom reflects Rule's position when she comments in her interview with Geoff Hancock that, "The sense. . . in society, is that special sexuality is totally defining and limiting. I'm not writing to try and prove that isn't so. I'm simply writing out of my sense of the world as I live in it" (90). Rule's refusal of oppositional status suggests a desire for a far more complex reading of sexuality.

Through the character of Karen Tasuki, in *After The Fire*, Rule reinforces the power of complex identity readings. A woman of both English and Japanese heritage, Karen embodies an ambivalent subject position. Her ambiguous appearance upsets and confuses the traditionalist of the island, Milly Forbes, who is known for her rigidly held notions of race. Milly classifies Karen as "'That Jap girl with the blue eyes'" (12). In her blatant racism, Milly focuses on Karen's 'white' eyes as an obviously disturbing characteristic. Unable to relegate Karen to a singular category of existence, Milly criticizes Karen's ambivalence:

Milly didn't *dislike* Karen. It was just that she didn't seem clearly enough one thing or another. If she was a Jap and wanted to be one despite blue eyes, she shouldn't mix with white people, even trying to foist off that disgusting seaweed [sushi] as a *contribution*. (95)

Milly insists that Karen must decide on her 'real' culture and abide by that decision. Milly's reasoning for this insistence becomes clear when we consider her reaction to living on the island. She sees herself as the only 'civilized' presence Galiano Island has: "All her life she had hated to go to bed and hated to get up in the morning. Here on the island, people with not a thing to do behaved as if they had a herd of cows waiting for them" (13). Milly dichotomizes all that is around her because it enables her to keep in place a separate identity. She defines herself against the differences of others: "[Milly] might be abandoned by her husband, neglected by her children, but at least she was white, at least she wasn't a pervert" (69). In light of this statement, we see that Karen, therefore, undermines Milly's tenuous subjectivity. In fact, anyone she can't accept as either the same as herself, or as utterly different, threatens to disrupt the subject position she inhabits. Milly comments, "I learned I had to shoot 'em the minute I saw the whites of their moral eyes. You take that Karen. She doesn't know her place; she should be put in it" (96). Everyone in Milly's world has an assigned location in relation to her own morality. As the novel progresses, Milly unlearns her neatly constructed categories and comes to accept ambivalence as a valid option. When she understands her own identity in related, rather than oppositional, terms, Milly embarks on a new relationship with the world: "Milly had a peculiar feeling that she and her daughter together would be leaving the hospital with a new life on their hands--her own" (130). Milly's new life initiates connections with the diverse characters of *After The Fire*, and allows her to see the island as a place of refuge rather than isolation.

There are rows of neatly stacked, newly washed dishes between these paragraphs. Meters of sparkling chrome and dust-free surfaces connect these sentences. I mean this literally. In my tentative resistance and creation I long for something solid, something finished. Once, I labelled my chores distractions, now I call them substitutes. They are the other text, the one that is simple, and known, and tangible. The clear edges of their completion tempt me to ignore how they contribute to my ambivalent sense of writing.

Rule shows her readers that we must move beyond the ideological constrictions of a lesbian nation and, in the words of lesbian writer Arlene Stein, "build new forms of community, forms which acknowledge our differences as well as our communalities, and which provide openings to the world beyond" (*Sisters, Sexperts, and Queers* 207). These openings are possible when communities embrace their own ambiguities instead of dictating, by exclusion, their membership criteria. In her critique of lesbian community in the 1980s, lesbian historian Lillian Faderman clarifies this ambiguous expansion: "Paradoxically, the community's shift toward moderation actually encouraged that diversity. It muted the passion for conformity that had characterized lesbian communities" (*Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* 285). Faderman's recognition of paradox succinctly describes Rule's use of ambivalence to create radical reconceptualizations of human

community. Take, for instance, the character of Red Smith in *After The Fire*. She insists on leaving the truthfulness of her name open for speculation because she refuses to be situated in a place of static origins, preferring instead, the ambiguity of anonymity; she will not be Re(a)d. Intending to leave Red her possessions, Miss James questions Red on the 'realness' of her name. As Miss James tells us, Red can only speculate on the validity of her name: "She said as far as she knew it was, except that Red was a nickname for Scarlet" (71). Red is known to the island community, not by her name, but by the person she is. Miss James comments that, "Anybody could say Red's the one I meant, whatever her real name is" (71). Red's desire for an unencumbered reading of her identity forces the community to perceive her according to their interactions with her, rather than according to what they assume about her identity from her name.

Once diversity within a group is established, the possibility of abundant connections with other individuals and communities is vastly increased. Lesbian theorist Biddy Martin explains the importance of overlapping identity boundaries in order to establish bonds with a plethora of communities. She writes that, "the forms of solidarity forged here are based on shared but not identical histories, shared but not identical structural positions, shared but not identical interests" ("Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]" 282-83). Solidarity, then, is not an exclusion of outside forces, but an expansion of similarities. The concept of sharing prevents isolation and insists on an ambivalent mixture of individual and community concerns. Ambivalence, in the form of multiple interests or experiences, does not result in a muddled or convoluted subjectivity, but one

in which wholeness and common goals are more easily achieved. In other words, ambivalence as a clearly defined term--"contradicting emotions, a continual oscillation: fluctuation" (Websters)--allows for expansion and redefinition from *within* the confines of its dictionary construction. For this reason it is a useful paradigm of lesbian existence because, although we need the generalizations about 'our' community for legal and political motivation, we are not limited to homogeneity.

This chapter isn't like the others. There is a hesitancy here. A barrier to thought that makes me uneasy, uncomfortable. It's in the text. I'm performing ambiguity and ambivalence in a theatre of linear argument. This contra diction is often paralyzing. You tell me, how can I write movement and fluidity without sounding categorical and dogmatic? I gesture to you with the text inside the text inside the text . . . Hook into an uncomfortable word, phrase, idea and move this text into your own. I want to make you unreach a non-logical conclusion. I know this doesn't make sense but this is what I struggle to be comfortable with. And it is an enormous struggle. Until writing this chapter I did not know the value I gave to structure and proper order. Ambivalence doesn't just make me fidget, it makes me cringe in terror and repulsion. It undoes the ways in which I see the world, and it's as painful as walking on broken glass. The therapist within keeps asking me why I chose Jane Rule, this queen of ambivalence, to guide me through a year's worth of work.

In *Memory Board*, Rule uses the ambiguous figure of twins as a paradigm of shared experience that simultaneously incorporates difference. Rule shows neither sisterhood nor brotherhood as the preferred paradigm, but develops instead a primary relationship around the blending of the two categories. As children, David and Diana express their commonality by adopting, for each other, the generic name of "D." Rule writes, "They had the same name for each other, which even their mother couldn't use since it didn't distinguish them from each other. For themselves they didn't need to distinguish. Differences didn't matter" (4). The name is relevant only to David and Diana because they have the sole power to interpret its meaning. Differences do begin to matter, however, as school and other friendships intervene to foster very distinct world-views and to enforce separation. Diana refuses to read aloud any story that she doesn't like because "most stories reflected David's view of the world rather than her own" (6). The twins grow into separation and lose sight of their common name, and common bond, until they set aside their respective conditioned roles and create a new voluntary relationship. By the end of the novel, David and Diana once again unite as the two "D's," only this time their individuality finds a space for expression within this bond of similarity.

Re-making or initiating connections occupies primary space in all of Rule's texts. Rather than leaving individuals stranded in isolation, or in equally isolating ghettos of classification, she is concerned with moving across constructions of subjects to create vital bonds of community. Yet, paradoxically, in Rule's texts it is the ability of characters to exist alone or on their own terms that connects them with a larger world. In *Memory Board*,

Diana finds love with Constance because she is unrestrained by strategies of conformity and chooses to confront conventionality even if it means marginalization: "That self knowledge which had made her left-handed had also freed her to love Constance" (226). As a young girl, Diana risks the wrath of her teachers by refusing to alter her left-handed identity, just as she risks the rejection of family and friends in loving Constance. Her courage to be different provides Diana with a fulfilling relationship that is the envy of David. He realizes that, "What separated them was not the gulf between the sexes but sex itself. She had chosen her own. He had accepted what was expected of him" (231). Rather than refuse or at least question conventions, as Diana did, David accepts the role of heterosexuality that is foisted upon him: "Not even his body, never mind his life, had been in his own hands for years" (19). It is David's later assumption of control that allows him to reconnect with his sister. In an ambivalent fashion, separation from expected roles and relationships works throughout the novel to open spaces of more meaningful connection. David gradually awakens to this new sensibility when he understands that roles may be manipulated according to individual needs. On a stroll down Granville Street, David's ability to change his appearance and his subsequent role becomes apparent. With a few alterations of clothing and posture, David transforms himself into a beggar:

His tongue touched the roof of his mouth and nudged the upper plate out of place. With it in his pocket, he had a partially toothless grin, and consonants would only softly form and slur at their escape. He next removed his glasses, to which his hearing aid was attached. The sound of traffic disappeared. He heard no footfalls of approaching pedestrians, and the traffic lights blurred into their larger auras. Finally, he let his stance accommodate the pain in his shoulder, hunched up against his ear. (19)

David's newly acquired role nets him two dollars from an unsuspecting pedestrian and allows him to experience freedom from the enforced expectations of himself, his family, and the world around him. Once David relinquishes his conventional roles as old man, widower, father, and brother, he enters into productive relationships with his daughters and sister.

By the end of the novel, Diana, David, and Constance choose to live together in a relationship where roles are constantly ambiguous. Constance's loss of short-term memory requires of David a flexibility of performances because she does not remember who he is from one moment to the next. Far from discouraging David, this situation allows him act out a previously denied plural identity: "When Constance mistook him for the plumber or the garbage man or the gardener, he quietly took on those roles, not with any archness or flamboyance but with an understated gentleness which was meant to be reassuring to her and was" (311). David's performance is not an act, but a performative ambiguity that stems from his desire to care for Constance. Constance, herself, has no concept of linear past, present, and future time. She constantly reinvents her daily world through the aid of Diana, who, each morning, writes Constance's activities and chores on an erasable memory board:

Diana took up a small state, lifted the cellophane to clear it of the crossed off items of yesterday, and began to write the list for today, the first item intended to amuse Constance:

Put on your clothes
Breakfast
The morning show

Lift bulbs in the bed by the garage
 Lunch
 Rest
 Errands on the avenue
 Walk on the beach
 Dinner with David (24).

Constance's loss of memory functions as a highly ambivalent act in Rule's text. Constance is both freed and and contained by the continual erasure of her identity. Her containment is literal one--the locked house doors and garden fence--and also metaphorical in the sense that she must rely on someone else's construction of the reality around her. Diana has the power to cross off yesterday's version of existence and create today's concept of truth. Constance tells David, "It's very peculiar having your memory located outside of your head. Diana is remarkably truthful, but it's still her version of the truth" (128). Constance must accept Diana's truth because she needs her aid to make sense of the world. Yet, this containment in someone else's reality is also an opportunity for Constance to appreciate each moment, and to enable other characters in the novel to see beyond their narrow scopes of linear time: "it was true for Constance . . . for them all, to live as long as they could in the moment. In the moment dread could fall away" (278). With her "opening lines," (160) Constance expands the possibilities of communication with other characters. Her memory loss does not force them into limited ways of being, but instead creates a multitude of possible reality paths. Paradoxically, as her name signifies, she is the ambivalence which is also always constancy. She is the site of steadfast fluctuation. As Henrietta in *After The Fire* tells us: "Once you stopped thinking of life as something requiring a destiny, you could accept it as the realer miracle it was, meaning inherent in every moment of it" (115). Resisting a fixed ending frees individuals to

connect with the world around them in an ambivalent performance of identity. As Rule's characters let go of imposed destiny's, each determines her/his contract with the world. And, when we, as readers, understand these novels as Rule's version of the truth, we must not be contained by it, but take up the power to intervene, displace, and open up the reality she creates.

Lesbian readers need potentially erasable texts if we are to create truth and simultaneously work at reinvention. Along with Constance, we may learn to understand and accept the potential of a fluctuating identity model.

In *After The Fire*, Karen, like David of *Memory Board*, also realizes the importance of existing on one's own terms. As the novel opens, she tells us that, "In the year she'd been on this little island, she had learned nothing about the one thing she had come to learn: how to live alone" (6). Learning to live alone means, for Karen, taking control of her own life, away from the influence and confinement of others. Aloneness does not mean isolation or desperation, only that Karen confronts "the fact that she had no view of her own" (80). Being alone heals Karen's wounds and crystallizes her desire for self-knowledge: "She needed only to understand herself, to know that she would never again, under any circumstances, be dependent either financially or emotionally on anyone. . . . For the first time the idea of being alone was a relief" (80). Again, ambivalence is at the forefront of Rule's text as we see that it is Karen's ability to embrace outsider status which gives her the internal security she longs for: "*I'll never belong here*, she thought, or *anywhere*. And bleak as the thought was, it had an odd comfort in it, perhaps because it was the truth" (44). The 'truth' reveals the necessarily paradoxical nature of Karen's existence. She finds comfort in her solitude because, like Milly, Karen

stops looking outside of herself for definitions of an inner existence: "She was learning that the mirror of her own value could not be the face of a father, lover, or child, nor could she find it in the old women among whom she'd been looking for role models" (124). The community around her, then, directs Karen on an inner search, and plays an ambivalent role as it nurtures her by promoting individual power. Karen "was coming to understand that if she was to have a life, it must be a deliberate one" (140). In this unlikely cluster of people, Karen explores the ambiguous relationship of individual and community life that Rule's texts so frequently encapsulate. Through her solitude she sees the "open, even inviting, horizon" (228) before her, and is "free to make her own terms with the world" (229).

On the subject of 'Lesbian Chic,' # 1:

All this attention is of course welcome. I'm a big believer in the power of popular culture to increase visibility. . . .Gone are the days when lesbians were described in the media as hairy-legged, man-hating Amazons. But today's lesbian is too good to be true. If the media reports are correct, we are highly educated, liberal minded and earn \$46,000 a year. --Rachel Giese, The Globe and Mail, July 2, 1993.

2:

The great feminist Mae West once snarled, "It is better to be looked over than overlooked." But all this lesbochic makes me nervous (color me ungrateful). It's too domesticating, too taming,

too nice, too white. We're no longer dangerous, we're merely naughty. . . . A lesbian is not a people pleaser. Chic is of the moment; radical is the momentum. When a woman chooses a woman, she may or may not be chic, but you can bet your ice pick she's radical. --Kate Clinton, Out Magazine, Dec/Jan 1994

In our desire to be mainstream, gays and lesbians often lose the critical edge of political analysis. The end to gay and lesbian oppression lies not in our assimilation into *or* separation from heteropatriarchal culture, but in our constant assertion of the power of ambivalence to expand human perception and accommodate difference. Biddy Martin explains this fluid model of lesbian identity:

[Lesbianism] remains a position from which to speak, to organize, to act politically, but it ceases to be the exclusive and continuous ground of identity or politics. Indeed, it works to unsettle rather than to consolidate the boundaries around identity, not to dissolve them altogether but to open them to the fluidities and heterogeneities that make their renegotiation possible. ("Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]" 289)

Advocating ambivalence and ambiguity does not mean that the lesbian community, or indeed any community, breaks down into relativism or unmanageable contradictions. Gloria Anzaldúa teaches us that, "The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. . . . nothing is thrust out, the good and the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain

contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 79). That "something else" in Rule's novels is an energy of creation. Rule formulates a unique blend of subjectivities through her use of a 'potluck' mentality. Lesbian theorist Joyce Trebilcot proposed the potluck concept in her 1990 essay, "Dyke Methods," as a philosophy opposing the marketplace of ideas: "The principle that in making a statement I do not try to get others to accept it suggests not an image of such a marketplace but one of a potluck: we each contribute something and thereby create a whole meal" (21). I offer the potluck metaphor as a contribution to the ongoing expansion of lesbian identity mapping and as a paradigm for Rule's creation of functioning voluntary communities. The potluck analogy bridges Rule's text into the realm of the everyday. Most of us have experienced this communal food event, whether in the gathering of neighbors, church members, friends, or families. The potluck is an ambivalent performance as it combines individual contributions in a community context. This ambivalence exposes the potluck as both a moment of celebration and of resistance. In resistance, patriarchy's tool of individual isolation is banished from this communal gathering place, and in celebration, people come together for laughter and conversation. Each person chooses which dish or dishes to share with the community as they decide what to make for the potluck. What is contributed determines the overall composition of the event. Likewise, each member of the community picks from a host of food which items she will put on her plate. I must stress that this community gathering is a momentary event that occurs when a need for collective is felt necessary by many individuals. The community is fluid and non-binding because at each meeting new dishes can be brought to, and chosen from, the

potluck. Yet, if an outsider asks us what we're doing we can answer with a shared response.

Potlucks are commonplace in *After The Fire* and provide the community with a useful gathering space for communal mourning and celebration.

Whether it is Dickie's death, Hart's funeral, or Miss James' memorial/ Red's housewarming, potlucks unite individuals who are in need of community.

These events insist on the creation of what feminist literary critic Donna Przybylowicz terms "alliance" politics:

Contemporary feminist political practice, therefore, must be based on alliances between diverse groups with diverse experiences and needs rather than on the notion of a homogeneous collective with similar desires, identities, and interests. ("Toward a Feminist Cultural Criticism: Hegemony and Modes of Social Division" 300)

Przybylowicz's theory is readily seen in the collective response to the fire's threat. This diverse grouping of individuals band together in order to preserve their tenuous community. It is through these momentary alliance politics, created for resistance and celebration, that we realize how community, no matter how diverse, exists out of necessity. In the words of Nancy Hartsock, "Those of us that Euro-American masculinist thought marked as Other cannot but experience the world collectively since our stigmatized identities are formed as members of groups" ("Postmodernism and Political Change: Issues for Feminist Theory" 29). A plurality of lesbian identity maps must exist in an ambiguous relationship to each other if we are to generate more complex performances and readings of our identities as human beings. Neither essentialism nor social constructionism nor any other

useful paradigm of subjectivity may be dismissed as irrelevant. It is unrealistic and unproductive to expect that all lesbians will want to locate within a singular mapping of identity. Models must necessarily come from dykes, lesbians, sexperts, and queers of all types.

Impossible Letters: The Catharsis Project

Artists Sylvia Ziemann and David Garneau write:

Our project will consist of a table with large envelopes containing individual impossible letters. Participants can come to the gallery, read the letters, write their own letters, and even write letters responding to those already existing. . . . Our desire is to allow you to communicate your inmost thoughts, feelings, desires and experiences with others, and, at the same time, read the letters of others to find a secret community of shared experience.

Gradually, through submersion in Rule's novels and recent lesbian texts, I am beginning to see that our diversity is not something to be negotiated, but is instead, a gift to the lesbian community that provides essential points of connection with the larger human community.³ The cathartic aspects of my

³ In her essay, "The Indiscreet/Indiscrete Lesbian Subject Refuses to Negotiate," Kathleen Martindale expands on the concept of diverse identity constructions as a gift to the lesbian community. Rather than negotiate our

text are intended to provide readers with a framework for their own textual creations. Just as Rule traverses the ambiguities of sexuality, gender, and race, in order to confront the pre-formed categorizations of her readers, I wish to fashion an ambivalent work that expands the textual realm into material reality. The action of 'traversing' demands not only a fluid definition of subjectivity, but also a non-static textual theorizing. That is, the text which contains a new mapping of the subject loses its argumentative force if it simply replicates existing theoretical constructions. Texts that resist easy labels and definitions, in favor of a complex interaction of subjectivities based on the positioning of each individual in her respective variety of communities, must struggle to create a work whose very form illustrates these complexities. By including such a wide range of material, one of the goals of my thesis has been to expand the possible number of connections the reader may make with the text. I hope that diversity becomes a textual reality through the multiplicity of access points in my thesis, and that this textual diversity enables complex, even contradictory, readings of Rule.

differences, Martindale looks at the writings of Joan Nestle to explain how lesbians may work the contradictions between and among our subject positions.

[T]he danger remains that our conventions and stereotypes will become so firmly entrenched that we stamp out version after version of the same lesbian tale. To avoid this, we need to keep in mind the words 'work,' 'struggle,' and 'interpretation'; we might further adopt the values of instability and change over those of fixedness and home. --Bonnie Zimmerman, The Safe Sea of Women 205.

For the sake of a promised sanity I write.

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