

human tongue

he said, "Why not?" And I said because I realized when I did start writing, that I would write outside of that patriarchal structure. I would *displace* that kind of language, and all the creative writing courses that I ever looked at were given by men. So I could not take a creative writing course, and have as judge — again as an authority figure — a man, because I want to write outside of that structure. So I feel that the way I use language is a feminine economy even though not all women use it.

Lisa: Yes. Which leads into—I was thinking poetry is perhaps more suitable toward this re-creation, this re-definition of language because it's so free. Creative writing—fiction—is very formalized, conventionalized. Do you ever consider yourself writing fiction—would that ever be possible?

Tostevin: Well, the reason I started *Double Standards*—for a long time I didn't know if I wanted a story or a poem—was because I thought this was going to be my novel. And I would start writing in a very linear, narrative way... and things would just start breaking down and I wanted to write a poem. So I thought, well, why can't I do both? Eventually the manuscript goes into totally language-oriented poems, or play on words or—but it starts in a linear narrative, with a childhood, and eventually through time, and space of the page, it starts breaking down and it ends up being poetry. That's one of the double standards. I think we have a need to express ourselves at both levels, and to say that you are only going to write a story to me *closes* me immediately—and there's no freedom.

Lisa: Which is almost paradoxical when you think that women traditionally have been envisioned as *enclosing* themselves—or simply because of their sexuality... and yet there's so much in all women's poetry that I see—wanting to break out—you know—we've been defined, we've been enclosed by other definitions which we in turn have to break out of.

Tostevin: And it's so exciting for women writing now because we can break out of these things and find out—break new ground—and it's open-ended all the time. That's why I don't give my poems titles, because it's an on-going process, and it's always a questioning, and the minute you get an answer it's behind you, and you forge ahead all the time. It's wonderful.

Lisa: Yeah. There seems to be a real *movement*, as opposed to women like Emily Dickinson who would sit there and ponder—very much an enclosed sort of thinking, and enclosed

"we've been enclosed by other definitions which we in turn have to break out of"

sort of space. Whereas now we seem to be pushing forward which is, I suppose, like the notorious penile pen of male poets, writers. There seems to be some sort of connection between sexuality and creativity—you've still got a pushing forward through the birth of a creation. Throughout the centuries we have males comparing a work of art to a gestation, to labour.

Tostevin: That's right. And I notice with the French feminists right now, writing has been described as a phallic act. And one woman said, "I don't want—I want to write always *outside*, because we don't—our kind of writing is not phallic because it's not an insertion." Right. And I thought, OK, that's fine. But I want to do *both*. I want to write on the borderline, I want to do the "insertion" too. I don't care who says it's phallic—I can do both. I want to appropriate what's been taken away from me, and I want—all the possibilities are there for me to take over if I want them.

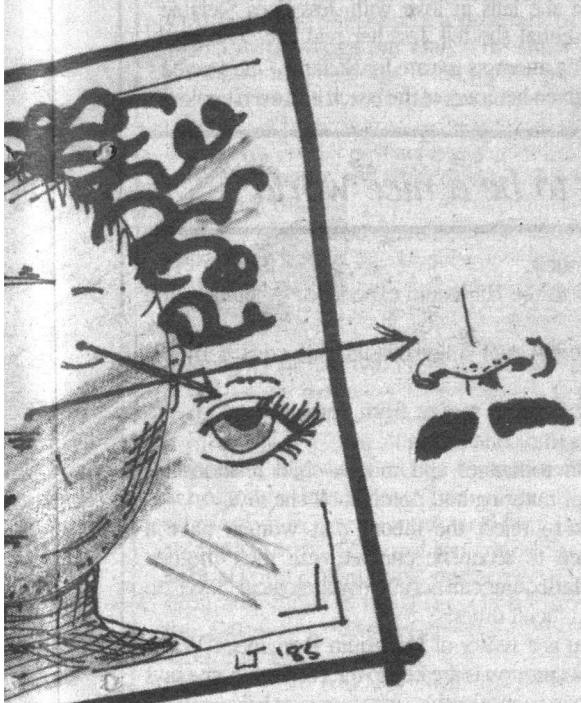
Lisa: It's like that one line in your poem about "I am a poem, feminized by its parts" "I am a human, feminized by its parts"—there's no reason why masculine, feminine must be masculine—male, feminine—female. Once you re-define them—it becomes a type of personality, rather than a cause of gender or birth. And interesting too is—sure, you can push forward too—it's—that other line about the tongue, and penetrating with the tongue—in the same sort of way—and of course all humans not deaf or dumb have that ability.

Tostevin: Yes. And to use it, yes. And we have that need to express ourselves on all these different levels. And that's why I want to do all this, what I call 'intertextuality'. In another series of poems—which I didn't read here—I borrow from women that I've read through the years, and I thought, OK, I'm going to write a series of poems of women who have influenced me. I'm not going back to the text. I'm going to try to remember—what is it about [a female writer]? That's totally misquoted, but it became my poem, right?

Lisa: Kind of like developing a matriarchal line.

Tostevin: Yes, going back. And now it's become mine, and it's all re-defined. It's all different. But now it's mine. So you appropriate that for yourself.

Here the conversation ended when a bearded 'being' entered to warn Ms. Tostevin that if she continued speaking with me, she would most certainly go without food. So we parted. Besides, I was a bit hungry too. But you think I could find decent franks and beans anywhere on campus?



silenced. And—even French, all the people making comparisons of our articles, our

(French articles) a definition, like everything retying of gender, even within the *la, le...*

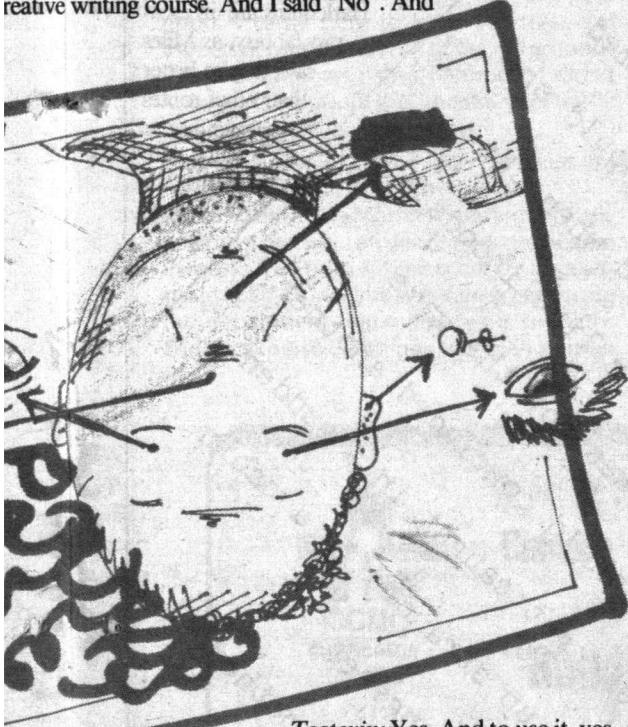
To me, even French is patriarchal because been a tool which was not a true image of to their (men's) own end.

Is would have definite masculine connotations

the way that language was used was to their and women—very few women writers isn't our tool. And so that's why *Gyno Text* is y little lines - uh, poems—one word per line. language, for women to have to start almost

again, from scratch.

meone asked me last night after the reading, if creative writing course. And I said "No". And



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