

poem

The Joke is Over

by Wanda Baxter

I heard a person too scared to speak (barely heard her)

one:

Sackville, the groan of the marsh is a million thoughts dead behind where I left it. With the pair of seventeen, and being afraid, and being afraid of never being loved, never valid.

A Thursday morning, though it could have been any day not going to classes, and my friend with the semitic nose, his pull-me-in eyes

telling me of the girls shot down in Montréal, and he hasn't heard from the girl he loves, who is there

and suddenly it's not about self-degradation

...Suddenly it's about the asshole with the locker next, in grade ten, coming too close... making me too aware of the curve of my hip, as too curvy (fuck you!), of my self-conscious breasts, too-girly, in white mohair

and it's taking a class with the strident makeup-less Harvard gal

with the awkward clothes and the awkward way

and reading women's words and the shift in my head

and they're talking about traps and talking about traps, and me, knowing a trap in my head.

and he is the gay man (so what) enraged by my ease, the first time I am accosted, just because of my sex.

and I won't let it go, and I won't be quiet when he says it isn't personal — that he hates all women (oh, ok, then)...

that if I had a mother like his, I'd hate women too.

and it is the taste of vomit in my mouth as I watch The Accused

and it is remembering the breath of my friend walking me home and me being too drunk, and me being too drunk (why so drunk?)

and it's the smell of his breath, and the weight of him

There was a massacre last night in Montréal, and the joke is over. And the joke is over.

There was a massacre last night in Montréal.

two:

The tavern, where I am free. Where the walls break down. And the girls break down walls, drink with the boys.

and Justine sleeps face-down in a puddle -

(playing pool with the boys — play the boy's games —)

and he is a real friend to walk me home because my girlfriends've disappeared, and he is a real friend to walk me home.

and being thrown into the ditch, the muck.

the hard ground

and people are passing, over there, and I'm screeching and people are passing

(they keep passing)

and suddenly remember a story from an ex-girlfriend of his no one believed when she told bad things about such a great guy — and suddenly remember not believing her

A long time ago, it seems, I heard the word feminist and cringed. Scared I'd be lumped-in with that band of 'ugly dykes' destined to loneliness (bitter, and angry)

and then the sky fell down, and those girls shot down.

(being cursed to want, not being able to have).

we've had our mouths taped-shut our feet, bound, our spirits burned our spirit, quelled

our voices our hands our heads.

our voices our hands our heads turned againstus.

There was a massacre in Montréal a long time ago. And it's still easy not to stand up. And it's easy to play 'girlfriend,' to wish you were a princess. It's easy. It's easy to lie down and wait. Just make yourself pretty.

But —

a symptom walked into a classroom and shot girls.

And, even if I wanted to lie down: even if I'm scared, that standing

may

mean standing, alone —

I'm a girl, and I'm strong. And I'm here.

(je me souviens)

Remembering the Montréal Massacre

Every year on December 6, people gather to mourn the fourteen women who died at the École polytechnique in Montréal.

poem

The Beast Within

by L.A.S.

Would you murder a child kill her dreams kill her spirit

Would you laugh as she bleeds watch her dying alone

Would you scar her within call it love or indifference

Does her beauty remind you of waves crashing in?

opinions

It's not a surprise in a society like this

by Rachel Gray (then a History Grad Student at U of T), The Varsity reprinted from the January 11/1990 issue of the Gazette

We should not be having this discussion at all. There can be no doubt. It is time to make the connections about these things.

A man carrying a new semi-automatic rifle walks into a traditionally male-dominated institution, and kills 14 women in the hallways, he mainly ignores men and hunts women. In the classroom, he separates the women from the men before killing them. At some point during the carnage, he rails against feminists. He turns the gun on himself and dies with a suicide note in his pocket which

identifies women and feminists as the source of his unhappiness.

This all seems very clear. Is it not obvious who he intended to kill? Who is dead? What is up for debate?

Now, there are those who would have us believe that this is the work of a sick and demented mind, and that it is an isolated incident. There are those who would have us believe that this is a human tragedy with no more bearing on women's lives than on men's. There are those who agree we live in a sexist society, but who say that "this thing in Montréal" has no place in a discussion about violence against women because violence can't be qualified according to sex.

On the campus at Queen's University, a bunch of self-proclaimed "friendly guys" feel

misunderstood. They say, "No means kick her in the teeth." They say, "OK, so it may have been in bad taste but it was just a joke." My dad says that worse things happened in his days there. "It was a prank. Queen's is a great university. What are they complaining about?"

These friendly guys have a need to make jokes about women being raped. The language they use for joking about rape involves gang bangs, kicking her teeth in, and tying her down. How much time would you want to spend with these friendly guys? Have they ever considered the woman who is raped — a real person — being gang banged, tied down, and given a mouth full of broken teeth?

If rape jokes are acceptable material now, is it because

women are safe; safe from rape, sexual harassment and assault, exploitative images that use our bodies to sell cars and beer, safe from violence at home and on the street...safe from murder? Those who do joke, don't have to think about rape and therefore it's fine to joke about it.

What is not their consciousness, their experience, is not their concern. And if I don't take a joke about suffering and pain and violence and hatred then I'm the one with the problem — not them. When I walk home at night I am cautious and quite often afraid. When statistics tell me that one out of ten women will be violently attacked by the men who share their beds and their lives, this affects me differently than it does my brothers. When my friends talk about being raped,

I know those boys at Queen's have never thought about what it is like to be a woman in a woman-hating society. They haven't had to. Don't you think it's time they did?

As long as it's okay to make jokes about rape, the "thing in Montréal" should not shock us. It illustrates the hatred and violence that is accepted and justified and joked about. For women who have been raped, who are beaten in their kitchens, who walk home at night knowing the keys gripped tightly in hand are a poor defense, who feel hostility because of the way they dress, or the way they do, or the inpedance they seek, or the conventions they reject...for all of us women this is not a shock. It may be our worst nightmare come true, but it should not be a shock.

Women are people, not objects

I was sitting in the Grad House one evening, minding my own business, when a certain individual of the male persuasion started up a conversation with me.

As he uttered his first words, I realized that he was a little more than intoxicated. I was polite, nodded my head in response to his verbal spatterin' and sat

there rather impatiently looking for the perfect moment to leave.

Quickly, his rant of the general became specific. He commented how there was some pretty good "pieces" here for the taking. My contempt for him grew.

My body language said it all. I was completely uncomfortable with this individual's

objectification of women. My first instinct was to tell him off, but I thought to myself, "What's the point? He's drunk. He wouldn't remember what I said anyway." I got up and left.

This incident made me think that this objectification of women is the first step in what leads to violence against women. If men

see women as objects, then this justifies beating them — all forms of violence directed at women — because there's a return to the archaic belief that women are not persons. No more.

Something has got to change. Fourteen women died at the hands of one man on December 6, 1989, but as much as one may

see those deaths as senseless and unjustified, they did not die in vain. It is in their memory that so many Canadians continue to fight to end violence against women.

These women, martyrs in their own right, are the fallen soldiers in a war they did not wage.

Lest we forget.

MARCUS LOPES

