

order to self-destruct – on the contrary – nor to discover something about myself. I do it just for myself, to glorify my senses and because I

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elf” [“Je ne fais pas cela découvrir quelque chose pour glorifier mes sens et it! C'est un cadeau que je creative subject at home, “I"s, and transgress into

the realm of the senses. Still in love with her fiancé, Dylan, Soana believes profoundly in the Sanskrit meaning of love – “to give freedom” (226). Arcan has given her readers the representation of a woman who appears to be self-confident, reflective, empowered, creative, and openly enjoying sex – thereby, in effect, reclaiming her own sexuality.

The same cannot be said about Véga, the female protagonist of Pauline Gélinas's 2001 novel *Le Sexe sale*. Like the narrator of *Putain*, who is a university student with a strong penchant for sex, and like Soana in *Passions tropicales*, who relishes her vacation affairs, Véga is a self-made sexual woman on summer break from her days as Sabrina, a student of philosophy. Unlike Soana, who searches for and enjoys sex seemingly without guilt, but more similar to Arcan's prostitute who performs sex without mixed feelings, Véga is also a woman of the North American popular culture, like Rioux's Éléonore, who dances in a bar to Jim Morrison's “L.A. Woman” and “becomes the music” just before her first sexual encounter with her summer lover (Gélinas 31).

The title of this novel clearly reveals Véga's attitude toward sex. Right from the first pages, she describes how she loved and feared sex from a very early age: “And never enough will power to resist this diabolical attraction. Sin. Evil. Filth. Shame. Shame. Shame ... I finally admitted to myself that I was perverted. Deranged. Crazy. Impure” [“Et jamais assez de volonté pour résister à cette diabolique attraction. Péché. Mal. Saleté. Honte. Honte. Honte ... je me suis finalement avouée perverse. Dérangée. Détraquée. Impure”] (13–14). She even has an orgasm in class: “I had come. And hard. In front of the class. In front of my executioner. In front of the nun. In front of this professor. My persecutor ... The shame of being perverted. I had only one way out: to leave my sexuality ... to take sexuality out of my body” [“J'avais joui. Et fort. Devant la classe. Devant mon bourreau. Devant la religieuse. Devant cette professeuse. Ma persécutrice ... Honte d'être perverse. Il ne me restait plus qu'une seule issue: sortir de ma sexualité ... sortir la sexualité de mon corps”] (37). But she doesn't; on the contrary,

she increasingly sees herself as a prostitute, goaded by her own mother's attitude: "My mother takes me for a whore. You can sense it in her voice. In her eyes, too. There's shame in her voice. I feel that I am dirtying her house. I am dirtying her name. Her image. Her conscience" ["Ma mère me prend pour une putain. Ça se sent dans sa voix. Dans ses yeux aussi. Il y a de la honte dans sa voix. Je sens que je salis sa maison. Je salis son nom. Son image. Sa conscience"] (112). And Sabrina is still an adolescent.

The refrain of being a "putain" echoes throughout the novel. At thirteen and fourteen she denies being one, since whores like sex, and she does not. She becomes increasingly obsessed with not being seen as a whore: "It's so disgusting, this word, "whore." So dirty. Whore even almost rhymes with scorn. I am not a whore" ["C'est tellement répugnant, ce mot: putain. Tellement sale. Ça rime avec dédain. Je ne suis pas une putain"] (129). When she fashions herself as Véga, the purely sexual being who takes up with a mysterious stranger in the summer, he reminds her again and again that he likes whores, that he needs to treat her like one, that she loves being treated like a one, that she going to come like one, and ultimately that since he loves the whore in her, she should learn to accept it (51, 52, 55, 56, 154).

This "innate" role of prostitute that Véga constructs for herself and that is constructed for her by her lover is one of the most relevant components of the sexual fantasy world that the two of them build together. With mysterious, theatrical, and ritualistic planning and eventual action, Véga narrates for her readers some of the most graphically sexual scenes in "mainstream" literature. Their sexual escapades are also, from the beginning, fraught with violence and sado-masochistic actions, exhibiting what Kristeva has called our fascination with the derangement of identity and our interest in the abject (Kristeva 208). Vega's lover (Philippe) believes that all women desire to be raped. She agrees, but adds that this desire refers only to someone the woman knows (50). She tells him her violent sexual fantasies. He scarily tells her that he is going to make her fantasies real – and he does (50). They use leather, rope, and handcuffs; he brutally rapes her in his car. She knows that what she is doing is dangerous and that she should be afraid, but she deeply feels the need to explore even further. She feels that by doing so, she will somehow be able to rid herself of her past obsessions with filth and guilt: "To touch what goes beyond the forbidden. Beyond the censored. Beyond Evil ... To break taboos. To break guilt. To break shame. To break the anger of taboo. To break violence. To break my past. To break the violence of my past. The violence of shame. The violence of

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guilt. The violence of taboos” [“Toucher ce qu’il y a au-delà de l’interdit. Au-delà du censuré. Au-delà du Mal ... Casser les tabous. Casser la culpabilité. Casser la honte. Casser la colère du tabou. Casser la violence. Casser mon passé. Casser la violence de mon passé. La violence de la honte. La violence de la culpabilité. La violence des tabous”] (75). Such a “clipped” series of “neutral” infinitives mirrors Vega’s mind and her desperate need to rid herself of socially and religiously learned notions, on a journey toward purity, absolution, and freedom.

But love (and a bit of silliness) conquers all. At the close of the novel, Véga has become Sabrina again, the philosophy student back in the university classroom. Her visiting professor of Nietzsche walks in, and (surprise!) he is none other than Philippe, her violent summer lover, who ultimately convinces her that he loves both Véga and Sabrina. Can he really love her other than as a “putain,” she wonders? Ah yes, love has won out, and she can finally rid herself of her demons. She can walk, timidly, into “a world finally clean!” [“un monde enfin propre!”] (155). It is almost as if Gélinas originally intended to create a violently sexual woman – part object for the unknown male, part subject of the sex and violence – but at the last moment could not perpetuate the representation of such a “dirty” female in a Quebec society still divided into binary oppositions. Other female writers, however, will push the boundaries further.

SEXUALITY AND CRUELTY/VIOLENCE  
GO HAND IN HAND

La cruauté est un bonbon délicieux à sucer longtemps.

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nd, *La Salle d’attente* 15.

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aphic Imagination” 222.

*Female Literary Sexual Violence in the United States, France,  
and Great Britain*

I have already mentioned the U.S. phenomenon of female “fringe-fandoms” and speculative fiction (SF), begun in the late 1960s by women who created erotic zines about men for other women. Edi