
‘When they are French’: *Dérangement* in Carole Maso’s *Aureole*: An Erotic Sequence

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Abstract

“The way in which the story is told is the story,” American hybrid fiction writer Carole Maso states. Given the SSAWW conference topic, Maso’s work, and especially *Aureole*, crosses borders, seeking to subvert and disrupt the concept of what constitutes a novel. As a short story composite that operates as a unified novel, *Aureole* disrupts established fiction form through repetition across the stories and through fragmentation on the page, so as to create “different fields of narrative” wherein she can work “multi-voiced, polyphonic sheets of sound.” In addition to dismantling and reconfiguring the traditional structure of the novel through a choreography of flash fictions and short stories, scenes and episodes, Maso crafts fiction that shows the influence of Anaïs Nin and Marguerite Duras. On the page she seeks to write “fugitive states” of desire through “the sexual energy of the sentence, the erotic surge of the phrase,” wherein the influence of Gertrude Stein is evident in the way Maso uses phrases, clauses, and sentences separated by line breaks, white space, mid-line caesura, dashes, and ellipses to disrupt her text. The repetition of the clause “When they are French” in the opening piece, “The Women Wash Lentils,” operates metonymically to represent both travel, relocation, and redefinition as well as representing untethered freedom, fluidity, possibility, and ecstasy. The disruption, the boundary-crossing Maso seeks, is an interstitial space in which to write a prose that emulates the erotic moment, offering a liminal stage “In the place where one thing is about to change into another. In the hovering. [...] between poetry and prose. [...] Between imagining and seeing you.” Maso’s prose in her experimental novel *Aureole* disrupts the boundaries of standard prose, offering readers entry into a place beyond “the outermost boundaries of speech” where intimacy offers “the joyful, mysterious passage to metaphor.”

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