...ving finally moved through another construction, another constraint, as if through water and on to the other side.

Blue and green and sparkling. This miraculous life.

It was the reach in that room that was so beautiful.

by Carole Maso

from Break Every

Rule: Essays

on Language,

Longing & Moments

of Desire

Break Every Rule

REMARKS MADE AT BROWN UNIVERSITY'S
GAY AND LESBIAN CONFERENCE 1994 AND AT
OUTWRITE, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 1998.

*I*F WRITING IS LANGUAGE and language is desire and longing and suffering, and it is capable of great passion and also great nuances of passion—the passion of the mind, the passion of the body—and if syntax reflects states of desire, is hope, is love, is sadness, is fury, and if the motions of sentences and paragraphs and chapters are this as well, if the motion of line is about desire and longing and want; then why when we write, when we make shapes on paper, why then does it so often look like the traditional, straight models, why does our longing look for example like John Updike's longing? Oh not in the specifics—but in the formal assumptions: what a story is, a paragraph, a character, etc. Does form imply a value system? Is it a statement about perception?

If the creation of literary texts affords a kind of license, is a kind of freedom, dizzying, giddy—then why do we more often than not fall back on the old orthodoxy, the old ways of seeing and perceiving and recording that perception?

Why do we adopt the conventions of, for lack of a better word, the oppressor?

Is it because we've lost faith in our belief that language is capable of a kind of utopia, speaking to myriad versions of inner and outer reality?

Or is it that we on the margins long secretly for nothing more than to be embraced by the mainstream? To *become* the center?

Is it that we want the security, the emotional, the financial security that comes with those who tailor their visions or in some way comply with the *Agreement*.

If language is desire, if syntax and rhythm and tone and color create worlds of desire, if we see, if we live out on the margin, then how come we so often write between the lines? We who are ostracized, estranged, despised, denied rights of every kind? Why do we write as if we were inside?

I do not feel in the position to judge or understand the motives of my fellow gay and lesbian writers. I am only here to pose some questions.

Why does realism equal verity? And whose verity is this? Why does realism equal accessibility? Might there be ways outside the standard models that could afford both reader and writer a few more options? Accessible in whole new ways.

Would disrupting or upsetting the lexical surfaces, and the deeper structures disrupt other contracts (social, political) we have entered with those who have continually tried to dismiss us?

If we joyfully violate the language contract, might that not make us braver, stronger, more capable of breaking other oppressive contracts?

Might our pleasure, our delight, our audacity become irresistible finally?

Would celebrating through the invention of new kinds of texts—ones that insisted on our own takes of the world, our own visions, our own realities—would this finally convince both us and others that we are autonomous, we are not them, not exactly, but we are nonetheless joyful and free? In short we too are complex human beings and cannot be so simply reduced or read.

And what if that were reflected in our prose? All the things that matter most.

If through language, through literature, through what we make we refuse to accept our limitations, if we are wild and unruly and unswerving in our conviction and irreverence, will those who try to contain us get it finally?

Might the old novel, one day, like the old ways of thinking about gender and race and sexuality, simply appear silly, outdated, quaint?

Might writing by women, by people of color, by gay men and lesbians be an active refusal of the dominant code, a subversion

of r ...ing as it has been traditionally constructed, for something perhaps more strange, elusive, other?

Carla Lonzi and *Rivolta Femminile* from "I Say I":

You would like to keep me under your guardianship.
I distance myself and you do not forgive me.
You do not know who I am and you make yourself my mediator.
What I have to say I will say on my own.

Rupture, Verge, and Precipice
Precipice, Verge, and Hurt Not

Be not afraid. The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

You ARE AFRAID. You are afraid, as usual, that the novel is dying. You think you know what a novel is: it's the kind you write. You fear you are dying.

You wonder where the hero went.

You wonder how things could have gotten so out of hand.

You ask where is one sympathetic, believable character?

You ask where is the plot?

You wonder where on earth is the conflict? The resolution? The *dénouement*?

art of dakar (or, tourist trap)

> "*a senegalese activist reported that trees, some more than a century old,*
> *had been cut down everywhere the [u.s.] president was scheduled to pass.*"
> —*jonah engle*, the nation, *7/23/2003*

poems are bullshit unless they are trees a century old, sentries lining the streets of senegal. in dakar, the darker brother keeps his peace, while a bush burns in effigy. a poem should show, not tell, so hold up your arms as if they were trees: if you have enough digits to make a fist, you are now a double amputee. terror perches in branches with its sights set on power ties, so no trees on these roots. a poem in jeopardy appeals perversely to the senses. the space where what you haven't seen used to be *(what did these trees look like?)*. less traffic on the main thoroughfares *(what did these trees smell like?)*. using *like* or *as*, describe the impact of the visit on the city: dakar, comatose quadriplegic, stunned by the thundering walk and big stick of a blowhard. and where are the residents of gorée island, while the resident of a white house tours a red one? come on, concentrate. clean shot photo ops, souvenirs at low low prices. all sales final: no return.

by Evie Schockley
from a. half-red sea