

The Politics of Water

ROSE CULLIS

Rose Cullis is a playwright living and working in Toronto. Her playwriting credits include Baal (Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Toronto), Pure Motives (The Theatre Centre, Toronto), and That Camille Claudel Feeling (a dance/text performance piece presented as part of the Toronto Fringe Festival). She has collaborated with visual artists, dancers, and musicians in creating an installation piece for Shared Habitat — A Festival of Art and the Environment. Most recently she won an award from the Harold Greenberg Fund (script development program) to develop a screenplay of her play Baal. Her writing has appeared in UnderCurrents and The Church-Wellesley Review. She is a member of the Stern Writing Mistresses.

The house is leaking
A burst pipe here
and then another
Soon the wood floors are thick as blotting paper
I jam my finger into a hole in the pipe
but it's not enough

water slips across boundaries, defies the rules
of geography runs hidden and determined through
deep veins — drops through the porous surface of the earth
and creates underground rivers that swell into being
over hundreds and hundreds of years

Look down:
Two women are in a boat headed for the shore
Their paddles dip and rise and dip

Did you know our bodies are seventy percent water?
she asks me her mouth soft and sweet and wet
Her tongue it's her tongue I love, her tongue I sin with
Wishing I could possess it, wishing I could make it all mine

We wanted to live as birds construct a tender
house of straw accept the seasons of love
the inevitable ebb and tide
of our passion for one another
make a sweet and temporary home
rise together and fall apart
willingly
to love in awareness
to drink deep and let go without a trace

We had a dream of free water

And this is the story:
that I feared thirst, I wanted power,
I built dams, I held back floods,
Grasped at what we had
and turned it into a commodity —
I took our free gift our love and I made it
A token for exchange to have and to hold

But love won't yield to that kind of tyranny

We can create a loss
by accounting for what we have
in a particular way It's all too easy
to take generations of rainwater
and squander it
to direct water into tubes that drip
through a wash of poisons
till the sea feels the gap in the earth
demand a new weight, and presses in

as salty as a lover's tear

And they say that someday
wars will be fought over water

See how water can be made to yield
to a kind of measure, it can be valued
at so many dollars a litre, and sold
and suddenly there isn't enough

How come some of us have it and some of us don't?

There are shells with pointed tips as delicate as nipples
with bruised blue spirals as casual and precise
as her fingers trailing a flesh-toned interior
in my ear the pounding sea my crashing blood

Maybe if I had *had* love, I wouldn't have wanted it so badly

Coiled accounts of love lost who did what
why make a labyrinthine vortex always
partially filtered polluted by encounters
water spinning down the drain into pipes
spiked with poisons into combined sewers
seasoned with waste
till the whole frothing soup
is either hurled into the closest body of water
or filtered, treated, bleached and released

On the beaches in Toronto a sign reads "No Swimming"
I stand on a rough shore wailing into the implacable waves
A roar of sea rushes at me and stops
then tries again

The water gleams like hammered metal

