

THE 'FEMININE PREDICAMENT IN THE 'UNABASHED CANADIAN POET' DOROTHY LIVESAY

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the involvement of the work of Dorothy Livesay to Canadian modernist poetry during the 1940s and to creatively connect female subjectivity to a belated Canadian modernism which included female poets writing about themselves, their own gender and their belonging to Canada. Livesay's early work is motivated on the subjectivity of an emerging female-centred poetics inspired by feminist readings of Modernism. The feminist's perspective on literature, creative or critical, whether in a third world country or elsewhere, has had to confront issues of similar persuasion: male-chauvinism, sexist bias, psychological and even physical exploitation, hegemonistic inclinations, and an utter disregard for the female's psychological, cultural, familial and spiritual quests.

KEYWORDS: *Female Subjectivity, Male-Chauvinism, Sexist Bias, Psychological, Physical Exploitation, Hegemonistic Inclinations, Cultural, Familial and Spiritual Quests*

INTRODUCTION

Canadian Feminist Literature is "a coat of many cultures"¹ (Thompson, Lee Briscoe, (1981) -soft, prominent and strident. The voices emanating from Canada vary from the traditional but conscious of their selves to exclusively self-seeking feminists with a vengeance. The feminist's perspective on literature, creative or critical, whether in a third world country or elsewhere, has had to confront issues of similar persuasion: male-chauvinism, sexist bias, psychological and even physical exploitation, hegemonistic inclinations, and utter disregard for the female's psychological, cultural, familial and spiritual quests.

- Feminist criticism in its broadest implication has three distinct divisions. The first two are well defined and frequently practiced without raising any ideological outrage. These are: -
- The examination and analysis of the woman characters by themselves or in relation with their male counterparts.
- The appreciation of female authors. But what is noteworthy is the fact that in the last few years, these commonly accepted practices have been overhauled to accommodate the possibility of exclusively feminist perceptions of human relations.
- The third direction is that of the so-called 'prescriptive criticism'. This attempts to set standards for literature that is 'good' from the feminist perspective.

Feminism' in the Canadian context is a by-product of the Western Liberalism in general and feminist thought in particular. The indigenous contributing factors have been

- The legacy of equality of sexes inherited from the freedom struggle.
- The constitutional rights of women
- The spread of education
- The consequent new awareness among women

Hypothesis

The paper deliberates on Dorothy Livesay, caught in the flux of tradition and modernity and saddled with the burden of the past, which ‘invades them.’ It boils down to scrutinizing empathetically the plight of Canadian women at the receiving end OF human interaction.

Objectives

This paper attempts

- To bring into prominence the feminist poet-critic Dorothy Livesay and have a glimpse into the various facets of the feminine principle and the progression of the inner journey of the poet.
- to explore junctures of ethnicity with insights of women’s bodies and minds in the poetry of Dorothy Livesay.
- to analyze this aspect of the poet’s journey, poems from ‘The Self –Completing Tree’, ‘The Unquiet Bed’, ‘Sorcery’, ‘Aubade’, and ‘Let Your Hand Play First’ are referred to in the paper.

Dorothy Live say was perhaps English-speaking Canada’s most accomplished modern poet. Livesay not only fostered her literary interests, but is also one of the most prominent and leading Canadian poets of the twentieth century, who addresses the plight of Canadian women and the issues that tend to suppress their distinctiveness. She was an unpredictable protestor for social change and women's rights. A child poet, her first slender volume of poems, ‘*Green Pitcher*’ was published by Macmillan in 1928 when she was just 19. A liberal in politics, she gave much of her writing and other activities to any number of liberation movements. Her erotic verse continued all her life, as did her interest in the writing of younger poets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dorothy Live say is presently the author of 22 Books on Poetry; 83 Books on Criticism; 25 Selected Works; 65 Articles; 3 Dissertations; 6 Awards and Honours; 10 Adaptations; 9 Interviews; 7 Archives; 1 Documentary and 1 Discography. Her free verse poetry probes the mysteries of existence- life and death, waking and dreaming, love and hate, male and female, being and doing. “Dorothy Livesay has remained at the leading edge of intellectual discovery and literary innovation in Canada”. Frank Davey observes that her works are the most sensitive and powerful poems of feminine sexuality in our literature.”¹²

The critical literature available on Dorothy Livesay poetry radiates that there exists profuse literature on her works, but only some of them directly champion the cause of women’ s issues, themes and concerns, and endeavours to emphasize their independence and recognize their sovereignty. But of all the Literature available, I have chosen to mention only those articles and books that deal directly with Dorothy Livesay feminist poems alone.

Cindy Bisailon (2004) *Dorothy Livesay: The Woman I Am* is an autobiographical work, which clearly defines and establishes the kind of woman Dorothy Livesay is. Carol Ann Weaver and Rebecca Campbell's (2003) *Awakenings*, a text by Dorothy Livesay and Di Brandt, musically celebrates a woman's awakening of herself, her rights and her independence. Bruce, Meyer, and Brian O'Riordan (1984) *In Their Words: Interviews with Fourteen Canadian Writers* deliberates on Dorothy Livesay as 'an unabashed romantic.' (1984) Among Livesay writings not mentioned above are *Day And Night* (1944); *Poems for People* (1947); *Call My People Home* (1950) is about the mistreatment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War; *A Winnipeg Childhood* (1973); *Ice Age* (1975); *The Raw Edges: Voices from Our Time* (1981); *The Phases of Love* (1983); *Beginnings* (1988); and *Journey With My Selves: A Memoir, 1909-1963* (1991). *The Self-Completing Tree: Selected Poems* (1986) is her own self-selected anthology, the selection of poems that she would like to be remembered by. Dean J. Levine (1998) edited *Archive for Our Times: Previously Uncollected and Unpublished Poems of Dorothy Livesay* (1998). There are several biographies of Livesay: Alan Stuart Ricketts, (1983) *Dorothy Livesay*; Lee Briscoe Thompson, (1987); *Dorothy Livesay and Peter Stevens*, (1992) *Dorothy Livesay: Patterns in a Poetic Life*. Much useful information is in the *Dorothy Livesay* (1979) issue of *Room of One's Own*, where she claims a spacious temporal dimension for women.

Critical Studies of Live say's work include Paul Denham, (1987) *Dorothy Livesay and Her Works* ; Nadine McInnis, (1994) *Dorothy Livesay's Poetics of Desire* claiming positive semantic space for Women; Rauwerda, Antje M.(1998) *Upsetting an Already Unquiet Bed: Contextualizing Dorothy Livesay's 'Zambia;' Benita*. Sharma, (1989) *Why We Are Here: Changing Perspectives in the Poetry of Dorothy Livesay*; Prem Varma, (1980) *The Love Poetry of Dorothy Livesay*; and Lorraine York, M. (1980) *A Thankful Music Dorothy Livesay's Experiments with Feeling and Poetic Form*.

This research paper titled *The 'Feminine Predicament in the 'Unabashed Canadian Poet' Dorothy Livesay* discusses those poems of Dorothy Livesay that has had to confront issues of male-chauvinism, sexist bias, psychological and even physical exploitation, hegemonistic dispositions, and utter disregard for the female's psychological, cultural, familial and spiritual quests.

DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS

Dorothy Live say was influenced by early exposure to Canada's multilingual and multi-ethnic culture, institutions and social stratifications. To use the language as a means of including as well as of excluding people from community, was her special charisma. In her poems and other writings Livesay explores the interplay of the constructions of language, gender, sexuality, politics and culture. She works with feminists on social themes, often with wit and humour.

The poet aims to eradicate attitudes to, and images of her experience, which men have imposed on her, and to replace them with her own feelings and experiences. In this process, she is inventing, giving birth to herself and ultimately to a new human order. Predictably enough, the ways out suggested subtly or propagated more avowedly, have ranged from mild protest, seeking accommodation through moderation, love and persuasion, to carving out of a self-sufficient exclusivist self.

Live say is the real element; she can convince you that poetry is not dead and that it is still a dominant voice in culture and social change. Her poems come to grips with cultural conditioning and its effect on gender roles. There seems no theme that she cannot address and in poem after poem she rights the wrongs of a disheveled world. Dorothy Livesay develops a rich, untrammled language capable of exemplifying her search for poetics rooted in physical experience.

Irrespective of subject Livesay's voice, interchangeably amiable and acidic, remains engaging and instructive. More importantly her poems go straight to the heart and are complex, multi-layered and explore the landscape of love and romance, feeling and form.

Tom Way man (2001) in his Introduction to *'The Dominion of Love :An Anthology of Canadian Love Poems'* hopes that Livesay's poetry will help make anyone's journey across love's backwaters and terrains more confident, cheerful, exciting, and successful. "Strikingly perceptive, literary and passionate, these poems explore the landscape of love and romance. They map the complexities of first love, eroticism and marriage all while avoiding the effusive sentimentality that often accompanies this genre. *"The Dominion of Love* is divided into four sections:

- You Have The Lovers," which explores the breathlessness we experience when we fall in love;
- In Darkness We Find Each Other," which celebrates the curious fact that love often does best at night
- Running to Surrender," which praises long term relationships; and
- Away with Words," two poems that explore the tangled links between love and the language we use to express it.

The theme of much of Livesay's work, which forms a central metaphor for the most definite collection of her poetry, is seen in the poet's use of the metaphor of *The Self -Completing Tree*. Livesay uses the metaphor of the 'Tree' ("half verdant, half in flames") - to symbolize the androgynous self. Implications of theological, liturgical, and literary works and their clarifications of nature, aging, family, adolescence, passion, muse, social, political, and sexual relations have been some of the most popular themes explored in her poetic literature for ages. This sonorous, rebellious, proto-feminist was met with a resounding silence. The result is a spiritual autobiography charting the fascinating domains of her own life and of the struggles all women share. Her poems about the small details of marriage and motherhood carry much more emotional weight. The old feminist adage of "the personal is political" is often evident in Livesay writing.

Although feminist literary criticism is almost thirty years old, critics are still struggling to understand the extent to which the conventions of western literature render female subjectivity unrepresentable. This is where the work of feminist poet critics have been crucial, for women poets have unique insights into the strategies that women have developed for subverting hostile conventions. It is therefore gratifying to examine Dorothy Livesay's poetic works as representations of female sexual desire as central to her quest for poetic identity.

Dorothy Live say's *'Poetics of Desire'* examines themes and images from a feminist perspective. It is also a corrective to long-standing interpretations that have never entirely captured the complexity of the erotic in Livesay's (1994) "The strength of Livesay works lies in its decentering of the male subject as the measure of all things –a concept of poetic identity seldom questioned by thematic critics."(Ibid) In the poem: *'On Reading Some Writings by Women'* Livesay speaks for all women when she says:

- The woman inside that box
- Called "home"
- Cannot wrench off
- The roof'

- Such women are “swallows beating its wings against a wire mesh” and she wonders
- “If she pulls her wings tight tight, will she get through?”

Love poems are a part of her poetic scholarship but Livesay “re-visions” them by stating that they are not just ‘personal and confessional’ as some critics tend to think but that they do “extend beyond the private relationship between man and woman to reveal the forces that determine the relationship between the individual woman artist and her male dominated culture. (p.2) Some of her favourite love poems are ‘*The Unquiet Bed*’, ‘*Sorcery*’, ‘*Aubade*’, and ‘*Let Your Hand Play First*’. Livesay believes that true love is found in the intimacy where “one laughs at my absurd/long second toe.” This kind of intimacy is also intertwined into the sexual intimacy of that last line:

- “You are the one.
- who when I leap to leave you,
- for the sun
- can pull me back to bed
- Woman, Woman, come”

There is an intersection of sexual and textual politics in Livesay’s work. Her best poems are seductive without being pornographic as in “Let Your Hand Play First”:-

- “Let your hand play first
- fanning small fires
- over the arms, the breasts
- catches responses all along the spine
- until the whole body flowering
- enveloped in one flame
- that shudders wildly out
- to meet your thrust-”

Mc Innes equates live say’s poetic maturity with her sexual maturity, neatly dividing her depictions of sexual experience into three historical periods.

In her early work, Livesay’s personae exhibit a youthful ambivalence about sexuality: charmingly timid and romantically impulsive by turns, these personae vacillate between autonomy, represented by solitude in nature, and connection, represented by the longing for heterosexual experience.

As Live say matures into middle age her poetry grapples with the problems and possibilities of heterosexuality - specifically, the construction of heterosexual union in terms of male privilege and power versus female invisibility and silence: the extent to which her personae resist silencing and erasure correlates positively with the emergence of an

authentic voice.

Finally in old age Livesay comes to redefine desire in broader terms: it now includes such seemingly disparate experiences as love for her grandchildren and sexual intimacy with women. These mature love experiences signify Livesay's poetic maturity and place her in a position to comment authoritatively on the grim consequences of patriarchal sexual politics.

In Live say's earlier works there is a remarkable textual sophistication but in her later works there is definitely a relaxing of this textual precision. Her themes and images do tell us much about the sociology of love affairs. Her personae are seen struggling with husbands and lovers. She uses language as a metaphor to express sexual desire. (50 and 64)

Live say' poems of middle age are significant not merely because she has come to an understanding of heterosexual politics but, more important, because she now has a handle on the subject positions from which she can speak. For example, when she writes: "This woman I am /is not what you see,;" this is a very threatening kind of simplicity. The line calls upon us to acknowledge the dislocation between the "I" on the page and the poet who puts it there, and not to confuse the two.

In Di Brandt's (2000) a study of Livesay's perspective to motherhood and childbirth is depicted in her "*Wild Mother Dancing*" which searches for the maternal subjectivity absent from Western Literature and finds it in Canadian female literary multicultural. "Reproductive consciousness" – the labour of childbearing and childrearing can be recognized as central to human life on this planet, along with the caring uses of natural resources. Susan Bordo (1990) addresses the insistence among many feminists "that race and class each have a maternal base; that gender lacks and points to the work of influential various social constructions of reproduction, the vast disparities in women's experiences of childbirth, and so forth preclude the practices of reproduction can meaningfully be interrogated as a source of insight into the difference gender makes" In other words since difference is all there is among mothers, studies of mothering can shed no useful light on the difference between the gender that gives birth and the one that does not. Brandt (1994) argues that "the mother has been so largely absent in Western narrative, not because she is unnarratable, but because her subjectivity has been violently, and repeatedly suppressed." Most useful is her adoption and enlargement of Mary O'Brien's ()concept "reproductive consciousness", defined as "an intentional, politicized awareness of our gender differences in relation to child birth, an act of recognition and acceptance by each gender of its respective role in the reproductive process..." Male tradition trivializes birth perceiving it merely as a metaphor for literary composition.

This is an implicit reminder of where feminism began, namely, in a vision of a better world for men and women across the cultural and social spectrum .We need poet-critics like Nadine McInnis and Di Brandt (1994) to remind us that together women's literature and feminist criticism can keep us focused on that vision.

"*The Taming*" involves a woman passionately in love with a man who wants her to "be women" and she is able to explore the conflict between being a woman in search of independence and yet at the same time bound by physical desire. Livesay searches for a language adequate to articulating the discourse of passion, desire and longing in her love poetry; but there are rhetoric tropes such as speechlessness, fragmentation, and deflection which testify to the writer's difficulty in broaching the subject of love. Similarly Livesay shows that love poetry proceeds out of a profound failure of language resulting from the denseness of discourse, its lack of neutrality, or the fugitive transparency of reference.

Live say also represents the challenges of being both a woman and an artist; and explores the untold connections between the woman author and her subject, between woman writers, and among women artists, teasing out a convincing assertion of sisterhoods for a diverse range of authors and works despite the differences of the cultures and eras they represent. Building on scholarship, such as feminist criticism that has contributed to an awareness of the distinctive perspectives on female experience revealed in women's writing, Livesay reveals how women authors construct their protagonist's quest for creative self-expression. By situating these narrative journeys in their own times and cultures, *Literary sisterhoods* shows how they contribute to a common tradition that speaks to readers today

"Ms Livesay is preoccupied with the problems of expressing and perhaps reconciling, the many-sided feminine self. This self continually appears in all its varied guises of child, wife, mother and finally as a concerned human being."

"Dorothy Livesay has remained at the leading edge of intellectual discovery and literary innovation in Canada." In *'The Unquiet Bed'*, she writes:

- the real poems are being written in out ports,
- on backwoods farms
- in passage ways whose pantries still exist
- or where geraniums
- Nail the light to the window.

Dorothy Live say intended this to be a manifesto to Canadian Poetry. She was trying to establish a Canada's female space. In an interview with Paul Stevens (1993) she observes: "Locus, there must be locus we must take the place, the Locus and dig down into our own place where we're born."¹⁰ Dorothy Livesay seems to be calling for a sense of place in Canadian poetry in contrast to the American rootlessness. Her poem *'Climax'* and *'One Word from You and I Snap'* which depicts her longings for the British Empire which she longs for- the archetypal colonial mentality that renders "her exile in her own country." Canadians have never been fully rid of the colonial mentality through out their postcolonial identity. Earlier it was the British colonial experience that engendered the colonial outlook, now it is the psychosocial and economic colonization of Canada by USA that accounts for its existence.

In this autobiographical yet straightforward poem *"Ballad of Me"* Livesay explores the theme of abortion to express her views of "being upside down" which is the overall metaphor in the poem. It is quite a mysterious and confusing poem because it ends on a very personal note "No one ever remembers Dorothy was ever here".

"Winnipeg Childhood" displays Dorothy Livesay's fascination with "flying" and "movement". There are several images that recurred extensively and one of them was the fantasy of flying; it seemed to the reader that movement somehow worked as a special metaphor for the poet. In another lovely poem titled *"Where I Usually Sit."* Dorothy Livesay refers to how she is "in love with movement" and how she views this as a compensation for aging. This concept continues post the years of *"The Unquiet Bed"*. There exists a deepening sensuality in the poems that followed. The poet seems to be evolving into what Yeats called "the celebration of the bodily imperative" as a stay against aging One notices that in the earlier Livesay poems there is almost a complete absence of emotional feeling in words but in her later poems Livesay tells us that Africa liberated her from the chains of the inability and she was able to speak in a very colorful and rejuvenating

manner of her close relationship with a man much younger to her. These poems were in all honesty real love letters to the man.

Dorothy Livesay as a poet colonizes and problematizes women's issues that have principally retarded or foiled the evolution of a distinctive Canadian identity. Livesay lives life backwards. She is trying to come to terms with their past and reconciling it with their present. Their quest for individuation and self-actualization provides, in poetic terms, metaphoric analogues to reckon with this sense of discontinuity and dislocation, caused by the colonial experience in Canada, which is engendering a sense of inadequacy and insufficiency has severely affected the acquisition of an adequate whole identity.

Dorothy Live say explores and explodes structures of power and dominion in inter-personal male –female relationships and typifies the emergence of the strong feminist politics in the past 1960's. She, like Margaret Atwood, equates Canada's subjugation by the USA with that of the female by the male, so her voice of the woman becomes the voice of the nation and metaphorically problematizes the question of the American presence that has subverted the efforts to assert a distinctive Canadian identity.

Social history all over the world, the Gandhian strategy in India, Feminism in the west, being a witness to the indignity and exploitation of women, legitimized through glorification of the strange myth of 'feminine mystique'-exuding capability of coping under the worst conditions, the capability, then, labeled as liberation. The parallel instances of embellishing individuation of women are also available in History, though it is essential to bear in mind, that such women outshine the rest as 'exceptions' in contradictions to the general ethos of oppression and injustice of the social universe, where emancipation appears to be a mere utopia. Dorothy Livesay portrays women as role performers, aspiring, suffering, protesting and reconciling as mothers, wives, sisters and mistresses. When role expectation and role-performances came to be at cross purposes, emotional isolation and crisis of values and clash of tradition with modernity threatens to ruin the family world of order, discipline and harmony

Though defying and criticizing its modis operandi, the Canadian poets accept the sanctity of marriage as a social institution. Dorothy Livesay is vociferous in her condemnation of gender injustice. Gender discrimination is part of the larger issue of social justice, for women's cause is a legitimate independent issue in itself for qualitative social transformation. Livesay is an illustration of energizing innovative feminine consciousness personifying individuation in postcolonial Canada. Canadian women by and large are involved in a fundamental quest for ideality notwithstanding the myth of emancipation- they portray perpetuation of feminine repression through the ages.

How the myth of emancipation has been operating culturally to anesthetize political consciousness of women, hampering the evolution of an egalitarian socio-political psyche. Legally it is true that the only thing you could get without a hitch was a divorce, yet in society, old age perceptions and attitudes, regarding women's independence identity had not changed. Legal provisions were no solace, nor compensations, for social frigidity. Irene Gilbert comments, perhaps it is only a difference of degree, but many independent women in the west would insist their situations were similar.

To a reasonable extent, the women portrayed expose aspects of ambivalence regarding mute suffering and rebellion, resignation and hope, compliance and visionary emancipation. They also visualize prospects of social change in India through an emancipation of change –oriented consciousness, both of individual and social levels. Such consciousness could well be the beginning of a questioning the questionable in both traditions and change and of a meaningful quest for identity beyond the axis.

The Taming involves a woman passionately in love with a man who wants her to “be women” and she is able to explore the conflict between being a woman in search of independence and yet at the same time bound by physical desire. *Climax* deals with women’s sensitivity to body – mind pleasures and to betrayals; and in *Every Woman You Loved*, Canada is represented as ‘Female’ and USA as ‘Male’. The poem also views ‘marriage is just a working contract’ where ‘Man’s begging her to stay’ because ‘she is useful when he’s helpless’: at other times ‘*Woman as Wife*’ is seen as ‘Vacuum Cleaner’. The theme of marriage repeats itself in ‘*Women Alone Women Ageing*’ where Livesay depicts the woman’s mundane role of the woman as wife and mother in phrases like ‘cooks food and eats’, ‘consumed and consumer.’ Livesay’s fear of the ageing process is seen in words and phrases such as ‘but no flesh there’ ‘Nothing but its end’, ‘endlessly beating its way home’, ‘collapsing bare disappearing flesh.’ ‘bare bone’, ‘earth’s sufferance’. *Woman in Search of a Destiny* and *What is the Validity of Your life?* throws light on Livesay’s concept of ‘love and loss, death and dying,’ ‘caught and netted,’ (animal imagery) tempestuous cloudbursts. In *Collared* Livesay uses animal imagery to express her shock of the death of her ‘grandmothers’, ‘grandaunts’, ‘grand cousins’ all who die exactly at the age of 60. Livesay describes the white dress with collars and frills at the neck of the corpse her loved ones “to hide the finger marks clutching at my throat”, “noticed by these young eagle eyes.” “Groan,” “finger marks of death” “boned,” “clutching my throat.”

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusive part of the paper deals with the technique Dorothy Livesay explored in her poetic outbursts. In “*Making the Poem*” Livesay’s speaker reflects with characteristically wry humour that:

- “Dreams are just furniture
- Jack said
- Like words you keep pushing around
- Till they fit the room somehow”

Dorothy Livesay’s poetry even at its most self - consciously ‘technical’ is much more than mere verbal machinery. In fact Livesay’s poems are “not what you see...not just bones and crockery” (*The Unquiet Bed*, p.39) for Livesay poetic technique fuses feeling and form. One of the most gifted critics of Livesay, Peter Stevens’s (1993) comments that “some poems fall short of their aims because the poet seems more concerned with poetic theories about form and lining.” Livesay’s technique of breaking the lines into choppy, breathless fragments may not be entirely inappropriate in depicting the breathlessness and emotional intensity of certain human experiences.

Livesay continuously experiments with feeling and form. She continuously couples observations on technique with considerations of theme and emotional reaction. For example, Livesay’s lively enumeration of the qualities which make a successful poem reveals the fusion: “music, dance, and rhythms...speech rhythms and in tone a sense of isolation leading to a game of wry wit, a play on words. Behind it all a belief in love, in communication on all levels; and a sense of grace, a call to praise”³ It is this “call to praise” which fuses the music of poetry with the music of feeling and gives rise to the major forces in Livesay’s poetry.

Robert Weaver (1948) described these poems as “nervous” and “taut”⁵ and the intensity of the lyrics such as “Fire and Reason” and the terse, brittle “Reality” bears striking witness to Weaver’s claims:

- “Encased in the hard, bright shell of my dream
- How sudden now to wake
- And find the night still passing overhead,
- The wind still crying in the naked tree,
- Myself alone, within a narrow bed.”⁶

The word “encased” is the most striking symbolic word in the entire poem. A deeper reading informs us there are two types of “encasements” - One, the traditional concept of being encased in a cocoon like an insect; and the second type is the more terrifying possibility of being encased in a womb- an unbearable awaking life. On awakening from the “hard, bright shell” of the dream, which oppresses the sleeper as her loneliness does the “within” explains that the poet is not on or in her lonely bed, but it possesses and ‘encases’ her. There is also a third kind of an enclosure operating in ‘Reality’ –our own as readers. Technically Livesay encases us in her poem, the leaden iambic beats leave us trapped and despairing as the sleeper: “I alone within a narrow bed.” This, then, is the way Livesay’s poetry must be read – with an eye and ear attuned to the special relationship between technique and subject which makes a poem vibrate, resonate in our minds. This tense energy is never lost in Livesay’s later work. “*I saw my Thought,*” from Livesay’s early collection, “*Sign Posts*” is much more than an artifact from a “phase”

- “I saw my Thought a Hawk
- Through heaven fly!
- On earth my words were shadow of
- His wings, his cry.
- How many clouded days
- Precede the fair-
- When thought must unrecorded pass
- Through sunless air.”(SP, P.6)

The visual scene in the first half serves as a prelude to the more troubling considerations of the second half: how many human thoughts or for that matter how many human lives die unrecorded? This two part construction will resurface in many of Livesay’s later poems -poems in which the principles of opposition and synthesis become the center of the poem and of human experience. In the Ballad “*Perversity*” there is a progression from ‘scarlet’ to ‘black’ to ‘white’ and this symbolizes the poet’s journey from the passion to the deathly stagnation of a love affair. It records the exciting advent of poetic liberation for the young Live say

- That day I wore a red gown
- Because I could not hide
- The warming flame in me- but you

- Thought Scarlet meant my pride.
- And so I wore a black gown,
- To prove my humbleness
- But you instead took black to be
- A sign of bitterness
- I dare not wear a white gown
- My honesty to show
- You'd take it for a shroud, no doubt
- Uncomforting as snow (SP, p.10)

These lines demonstrate a thematic continuity in Livesay's poetry. In the progression of this ballad, from 'scarlet' to 'black' to 'white' symbolizes the poet's journey from passion to the deathly stagnation of a love affair. There is also a certain care for the movement and construction of a poetic sequence. It records the exciting advent of poetic liberation for the young livesay.

- In "Ballad of Me," Livesay's autobiographical poem highlights Livesay artist as a lonely singer:
- "I go disarrayed
- My fantasies
- Twist in my arms
- Ruffle my hair (Unquiet Bed .p.7)

Livesay couples this musical awareness with her cute sense of poetic progression in "Flower Music" in which the three "movements" contributed by Cyclamen, Geranium, and Peony form a symphonic rise to a visual, sexual climax:

- "Suddenly out of gloom
- Underneath the hanging
- Scrotum cluster
- Red buds bursting
- To Blaze The Room (UB, P.35)
- What spite: the flowers
- I have grown tyrannically
- that never blossom
- he fathers forth

- so light
- so silken

Live say seems to be in the frontline of arguing for women's independence and freedom, both professionally and erotically - though not without a sense of accompanying social responsibility,

Caring for those one has committed to caring for, not taking advantage of the young, and so on.

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