

Alina Reyes's *Entre-deux* writing of the erotic female body

A charismatic and colourful character, writing about sexual bodies without prudery or inhibitions, the French author Alina Reyes has habitually been categorised as a sort of 'prêtresse de la littérature érotique' (1), and her books are often classed in the 'littérature érotique' section of many bookshops. But, in order to situate Reyes's *œuvre* clear of this potentially reductive classification, and to offset possible feminist criticism of her explicit representation of sexual female bodies, I shall argue that Reyes's 'fantastical' inscription of the sexual female body goes beyond stereotypical sexual fantasy and counters an objectifying, pornographic portrait of women's bodies. I shall discuss how Reyes's writing surpasses a solidifying discourse of the female body that is perpetuated within the Symbolic order (2) ultimately to promote a fluid re-presentation of female bodies as neither wholly desired objects, nor wholly libidinal, desiring agentive bodies, but as a fluctuating and fundamentally liberating *entre-deux* negotiation between the two.

In my analysis of Reyes's 'fantastical' writing, I regard the fantastic as a kinetic mode combining the marvellous and the mimetic, rather than as a static, demarcated literary category or *genre* (3); I have chosen to focus on the continuous negotiation of two deliberately broad narrative elements in Reyes's writing — reality and fantasy — in a resultant *entre-deux*, fantastical textual mode. And, in this analysis of *entre-deux* female corporeality, while genre criteria and divisions *per se* are not a primary concern, it is nonetheless pertinent to this study briefly to draw attention to how Reyes's generic *mélange* may be situated within a postmodern (4), feminist endeavour highly conducive to the sort of narrative fluidity and boundlessness which I believe enhances a corresponding re-presentation of women's experience of their bodies as *entre-deux* (5).

The term 'fantastical' is noticeably absent from much media comment on Alina Reyes's work. Since the first reviews, in the late 1980s, journalists have certainly appreciated a narrative blend of real and imaginary, the effusion of (sexual) fantasy into the text, and the *dérangeant* nature of Reyes's books. But no explicit connection is made between such textual elements and what Héléne Cixous has termed the literary fantastic 'invitation to transgression' (6). One possible explanation for this could be the 'erotic' label which, as mentioned above, often overshadows other elements in Reyes's work. Reyes herself senses a general deprecation of her 'erotic' writing, and makes this clear in two of her essays published in *Corps de femme* (7):

Le sexe et la bouffe ne deviennent nobles que lorsqu'ils sont traités par les hommes — philosophes ou intellectuels libertins et grands chefs. Au féminin, ils restent des corvées domestiques, transformées de bonne grâce en plaisirs simples par celles qui les ont en charge. Qu'elles en demandent un peu plus, et elles sont aussitôt suspectées de vouloir trahir leur office, déstabiliser l'ordre social, intellectuel et moral établi. (8)

Souvent les gens me regardent de travers à cause de certains de mes livres. Comme me disent les journalistes, d'un air finaud: érotiques ou pornographiques? En général pour me faire comprendre que mes romans selon eux sont de la cochonnerie, à tous les sens du terme. (9)

Manifest in Reyes's attitude, here, is the predominantly gendered approach she adopts throughout her work. Her narratives, almost all written in the first-person and from the point of view of a female narrator, tend to subvert the rigidity of subject positions and gender roles; her enunciation is frequently rooted in her female body and in a woman's embodied experience. Reyes clearly senses that those (men) who occupy arbitrary positions of moral power/authority dislike her tendency to re-present people — and most particularly *women* — as actually being and enjoying a body which is 'à la fois sujet et objet de désir' (10), when their passive body-objects ought to obey unquestioningly, to fit established rules, and to embody and perpetuate the established order.

Interweaved with the 'erotic', I see the fantastic as an equally significant and important aspect in almost

all of the many books Reyes has published over the last twelve years (11) — not because I wish to find an alternative label for Reyes’s writing, but rather because I feel that to recognize this unfixed fantastical quality in her diverse stories allows a corresponding reading of her optimistic inscriptions (or *not*) (12) of unfixed and fluid female corporeality, and that this works to expose arbitrary, inhibitive, and ultimately pernicious ‘realities’ of the female body.

In an article on women’s contemporary re-writing of the erotic, Lucienne Frappier-Mazur more or less pre-empts my own schema of the fantastic — that of the ‘un-real’ saturating and unsettling an essentially realistic narrative backdrop — while placing it in the more specific context of erotic fantasy, within which Reyes’s corpus has been placed:

These new erotic stories [by women], even when they emphasize the onereic and fantasy aspects, they do so against the personal, social, and even professional background of women’s everyday life [...]. (13)

In Reyes’s texts, the ‘un-real’ that is constantly dis-covered *inside* the recognisable, realistic life of the *narratrice*, the repressed that relentlessly re-surges from within the narrative and from within the female protagonists’ bodies, are portrayed primarily by means of overtly sexual, erotic fantasy.

In choosing to describe Alina Reyes’s writing, throughout this paper, as (predominantly) erotic, as opposed to pornographic, I am aware of the polemic surrounding such terms and of their shifting definitions — an aspect somewhat fitting to the present study, with its emphasis on *entre-deux* non-fixity, fluid corporeality and multiplicity of meaning. A brief survey of this wide debate — beyond the confines of this paper — suggests that pornography ‘tends to be narrowly functional’ (14), that it is formulaic, and that it consists of the explicit representation of human sexuality ‘aimed at producing a particular effect of sexual arousal.’ (15) In Frappier-Mazur’s words, ‘The sole goal of pornography is to be sexually stimulating.’ (16) According to these criteria Reyes’s explicitly sexual writing, far from merely formulaic, obscene or titillating, is much more than mere ‘pornography’.

The signifier ‘erotic’, from Eros, Greek god of love, appears generally to be regarded as denoting a sexual, sensual textual quality or mood rather than function or aim, ultimately describing (sexual) thematic content of the text ‘within some fuller human and imaginative context’ (17), and the reader’s (sexual) response to it. This makes ‘erotic’ the more apposite manner in which to describe most of Reyes’s writing. Much of her work has an evidently erotic quality and content, since she frequently describes scenes of masturbation, intercourse and sexual phantasms sensually, and in terms of the *active* participation of the (female) characters. Reyes herself maintains that her writing project, while provocative, goes beyond a ‘pornographic’ goal of sexual titillation, beyond a wish to shock, and beyond the representation of sex for its own sake, towards a writing of her characters’ and her own desire:

[...] on est persuadé que je suis animée uniquement par la volonté de choquer. Ce n’est pas du tout ça ! Juste une envie de dire ce que je ressens. [...]

J’adore la littérature érotique parce que c’est agréable à écrire et à faire partager [...] je travaille beaucoup avec les sens. Tout chez moi est basé sur l’émotion, sur le sensuel. (18)

Autant que je m’en souviene, j’ai toujours écrit pour dire que j’aimais. Dans mes cahiers [...] dans mes lettres, tous mes petits textes, mes romans... Au point de ne plus très bien savoir si j’écris pour mieux aimer, ou si j’aime pour mieux écrire. (19)

[...] écrire c’est aimer. (20)

Both erotic and pornographic writing have been the focus of much second-wave feminist criticism, accused of endorsing and ^{encouraging} the combination of sex with degradation and/or abuse of a

fragmented and objectified female body (21). However, Frappier-Mazur asserts that increasingly daring first-person erotic narratives by women, rather than merely reproducing male/female power relations where the man is dominant *être*, and the woman is passive, abused *autre*, are now exploring and re-presenting sexual rapports and introducing a specifically female agentive subjectivity. Frappier-Mazur comments upon what she considers to be, in recent women's erotic writing in French, a contemporary 'return of the woman to her traditional role as *erotic object* and masochistic victim, *but with the status of a subject.*' (22) This notion, of a *narratrice* simultaneously occupying object and subject positions, transgressing purely objectified corporeal status to explore the pleasures of her simultaneously object and subject sexual body, succinctly echoes that of the fantastical, *entre-deux* inscriptions of female corporeality that I perceive in the work of Alina Reyes. As I asserted above, in Reyes's 'fantastical' writing it is sexual fantasy that often suffuses a mimetic background, going beyond vicarious titillation to subvert and destabilize sexual stereotypes of a passive female body-as-object. For Reyes inscribes, to borrow Rosemary Jackson's term, a 'dis-discovery' of women's sexuality, of women's desires — for so long repressed and rendered absent — in fantastical re-presentations of a society that has long vilified an ostensibly insatiable and boundless sexual female body.

It is interesting to recall that the etymology of fantastic or (*le*) *fantastique*, of fantasy or *la fantaisie*, and of phantasm or *le phantasme*, brings us back to the same root: the Greek word *phantazein*, signifying vision and to render visible, reiterating the strong link, in this fantastical mode, between desire and discovering. Reyes's inscription of explicitly erotic fantasies — and more precisely of female protagonists as active subjects in their own sexual fantasies — goes far beyond an authorial 'volonté de choquer' (23), beyond empty erotica, beyond sheer *chosification* of the female body, to breach and portray breaching of restrictive boundaries that Western society, in discourse, creates around the female body.

Reyes's 'time-bomb', always already planted at the very heart of this normalising discursive order, constantly blowing apart sexual norms and fixed identities from within, is transgressive, liberating (erotic) fantasy — consequently a fundamental feature in her *entre-deux* writing of female corporeality as 'à la fois sujet et objet de désir.' In another essay from *Corps de femme* entitled, 'Vous n'avez pas le monopole du corps' (24), Reyes condemns the normalising bent perpetuated by those she calls 'les encadreurs' meaning the censorious and the judgmental among us all (in this Reyes's view coincides with the Foucauldian assertion that 'le pouvoir vient d'en bas') (25). The *encadreurs*, she argues, deny the individual 'le libre usage de son corps' (26), because they recognise that 'avoir conscience de son corps et de ses désirs, c'est la porte ouverte à toutes les désobéissances.' (27) Herein lies the transgressive force of Reyes's erotico-fantastical writing: once we are aware of the unencumbered pleasure of our bodies, experienced as *à la fois sujet et objet*, arbitrary 'normalising' forms of power cannot curb the subversive vigour originating in such an unregimented, desiring, agentive body. Reyes's sensual, explicit writing of *jouissant* female bodies and of female corporeal desires renders the female reader conscious of 'son corps et [...] ses désirs', constituting that 'subtle invitation to transgression' fundamental to the fantastic mode. In the present analysis of Reyes's 'fantastical' texts, then, I am espousing Frappier-Mazur's germane definition of the erotic, which is particularly so fitting to Reyes's writing:

I call erotic those stories which represent a succession of sexual acts connected by a narrative thread, and which are perceived [...] as transgressive because they violate both the norms of discourse and of sexual behaviour. (28)

Throughout her corpus, Reyes passionately articulates her hostility towards such 'norms of discourse and of sexual behaviour', towards corporeal taboos and the pigeonholing and normalisation of sexuality — and most particularly of *women's* sexuality — with their pernicious, 'solidifying' consequences. She does so especially forthrightly throughout *Corps de femme*, where she shares personal experience of her own female body — of an operation to remove a lump from her breast, for example, or as an adolescent, anticipating the arrival of her first period — and condemns restrictive attitudes towards corporeality and sexuality, in a series of short, non-fictional essays and articles. These essays are in turn interspersed with ludic fictional 'fantasies' recounted by various desirous body parts — 'Le rêve des pieds', 'Le rêve des

os', 'Le rêve des fesses', etc — giving the desiring body a subject voice, literally oscillating between object and agent, speaking and spoken body. The resulting (fantastical) alternation, the *corps de femme* (29) of the title being inscribed as simultaneously *sujet et objet de désir*, the (female) body in turn factually talked and fictively talking — eroding boundaries between 'fact' and 'fiction' — is illustrative of potentially liberating, unfixed, and unsettling oscillation in an *entre-deux* experience of corporeality promoted throughout Reyes's writing of the erotic female body.

In the first-person, non-fictional essays, Reyes systematically ironizes and counters the same manner of normalising, confessional discourse of sex that Foucault condemns in *Histoire de la sexualité* (30), where he regards sex and the sexual body (object) as being increasingly laid bare and managed, or disciplined, by the very discourse that professes to 'liberate' it. For Reyes, this intrusive tendency is encapsulated by 'la société médiatique', or 'notre monde de reality show':

Le secret, c'est ce que la société médiatique n'aime pas. On veut tout savoir, tout montrer, tout contrôler. Alors, pour s'assurer que vous ne sortez pas de la norme, ou le cas échéant pour vous faire admettre que vous en sortez, on vous interroge, on publie vos aveux dans la presse, ou mieux encore on vous invite à venir vous confesser à la télé [...]. (31)

Contrairement à ce qu'on veut croire dans notre monde de reality show, la parole peut se transformer facilement en voleuse de vie, d'identité et de liberté. (32)

The more our sexuality/ies and sexual bodies constitute objects of scrutiny, brought out in the open and talked about, the more they become 'things' to be defined, prescribed, limited and controlled according to absolute and valued sexual norms, *constructed* against de-valued 'abnormal' and arbitrarily peripheral sexualities. In her essay 'Corps sondés' (33), as elsewhere in her *œuvre*, Reyes counters such disciplining discursive practice by exploiting the multiplicity of language, focusing here on the verb *sonder*, meaning to probe, drill, or bore, and to poll, sound out, or survey — in either case, one is 'probed' or 'penetrated'. According to a recent survey (*sondage*) of sexual fantasies, the most common among French women is apparently to make love in a closed four-poster bed, a desire at variance with an era where sex has been rendered omnipresent, and where 'l'ordre du jour, de tous les jours, c'est jouir' (34), with sex being carefully described (prescribed) in ubiquitous media images. In ironic tone Reyes first points out, with a "voice of reason", that these so-called romantic women are not playing by the rules — in momentarily eluding the (internalised) reproving gaze of the 'penetrating' public eye, they are going against all the sexual regulations. Subsequently, Reyes openly applauds these ardent 'feminists' in their desire to repudiate sex such as it is constructed for us, escaping into a *temporary* retreat from 'reality':

Le fantasme du baldaquin finalement, n'est-ce pas la revendication du droit de chacun à son corps, du droit au corps privé, secret, différent, contre l'inquisition du corps social qui exige transparence et conformité aux modèles? (35)

Reyes celebrates this opportunity, for women in particular, to spurn — in erotic fantasy — a normalising, objectifying order, and momentarily to allow our bodies to 'speak'; she extols this occasion for female corporeality fleetingly to be wholly agentive, and to be wholly desiring:

[...] domaine privé de tant de femmes avant vous, à l'abri de toutes les espèces de sondeurs qui aimeraient bien vous épier, pour enfin Vous retrouver, *laisser parler Votre corps, avec ses goûts, ses faiblesses, ses rages, ses fantaisies* [...]. (36)

For Reyes's female characters as for her readers, sexual fantasy is much more than mere 'pornographic' titillation, vicarious fulfilment, or escapism. In *Corps de femme* Reyes elucidates the way in which sexual fantasy unsettles — from within — the Symbolic order/discourse that perpetuates a phallogocentric 'reality' which persistently ratifies women's feared 'swampy' corporeality and a 'natural' feminine identity. In these essays, as in her fictions, Reyes inscribes such *fantasmes* as dis-covered expression of latent desire originating in the undisciplined, agentive body:

Même le plus apparemment anodin [des fantasmes] peut se révéler une véritable bombe à retardement, nichée sournoisement au cœur de l'ordre établi. (37)

[...] fantasmons gaiement! Nos fantasmes, même les plus simples, les plus idiots, les plus méchants, les plus tordus, n'importe, c'est notre imagination au pouvoir, plutôt que l'imaginaire préfabriqué que nous balance continuellement la société normalisatrice du spectacle! (38)

In Alina Reyes's writing, erotic phantasms abound — from the ludic to the sober — in 'un-real', marvellous, and magical elements, offering the *narratrice* a fleeting and elating escape from 'real' life. When the *narratrice* of *Derrière la porte* (39), for example, visits a small travelling circus, each numbered *porte d'Eros* she enters opens onto a scenario where she (potentially) plays another role in another incredible sexual exploit — from dressing up in sexy underwear and having sex with a whole troop of *pompiers*, to being 'abused' by a crowd of hooded men with Dobermans, to having upside-down sex with Batman, and so on. In *Le Boucher* (40) the young, introverted *narratrice*, working in a butcher's shop during the holidays, frustrated by an ungratifying summer romance with a selfish, inattentive boyfriend, is both aroused and unsettled by a heady build-up of desire and exhilarating, excruciating sexual release in the always potentially brutal hands of *le boucher*. In *Au Corset qui tue* (41) the reserved Lucile, ignoring her flight home to her respectable job and decent fiancé, stays on in her deceased uncle's flat, in a strange *immeuble* pulsating with Spanish music and African tam-tams, to become obsessed with a dark, handsome painter who paints her nude and watches porn movies at night. In *Lucie au long cours* (42) the protagonist escapes civilisation to a mountain haven, living naked, carefree and at one with nature, where she makes love with a strong, handsome and protective *bear*. The *narratrice* of *La Nuit* (43), drawn, impromptu, from her ordinary, empty existence to a shadowy castle on a stormy night, makes passionate love with two striking, distinguished, silver-haired brothers (one of whom, as it turns out, is her father); the eponymous *Lilith* (44), roaming the increasingly degenerate back streets of *Lone*, has lesbian sex, group sex, sex in doorways, sex with an angel ...; and *L'exclue* (45), gradually abandoning society, has sex with herself whenever and wherever she wants.

This, I would argue, is what renders Reyes's *œuvre* transgressive: the very factor that, citing Frappier-Mazur once more, permits her fantastical narratives to be perceived as subversive because they 'violate the norms of discourse and of sexual behaviour'. In each of these texts Reyes tenders erotic fantasy/ies — going beyond stereotypical 'Rue St. Denis' sexual fantasy and the objectifying tendencies of 'hard' or 'soft' pornography — saturate the text from within, as a means to transgress and to challenge normative and commonsense (46) discourses of tradition, propriety, gender (-roles), and the 'ordre établi'. For Reyes, sexual fantasy is temporary (self-) exclusion from the 'norm', during which one may experience fleetingly the invigorating pleasure of one's fully agentive corporeality:

Dans ces moments-là, libérer son désir, dans sa toute puissance, le laisser s'exprimer à travers les gestes *d'un corps qui n'est plus piloté que par lui-même (et non par une quelconque recette)* – cela seulement vaut le coup, et cela n'est plus hard ni soft mais simplement vertigineux, et délicieux. (47)

In her essays, as in her fictions, Reyes believes in endless exploration and perpetual exchange – an *entre-deux* of negotiation, rather than fixity – as that which makes love, sex, and indeed all human rapports exciting, positive, and valuable:

[...] cette façon de se sentir à la fois complètement dans sa peau et un peu dans la peau de l'autre [...]. L'amour, ce n'est pas seulement pénétrer ou être pénétré physiquement. C'est surtout pénétrer et être pénétré mentalement, jusqu'à en être changé. (48)

The fluidity created by this slippage between mimetic 'reality' and erotic, 'un-real' phantasms allows characters to escape the normalizing rules and regulations (discourse) of Symbolic society, to 'escape' gender roles and gender expectations and provisionally to explore diverse, alternating, unfixed identities or subject positions. *Lilith*, for example, 'escapes' the fate of passive, frigid femininity modelled on Eve,

and common to so many women, by (transitorily) becoming Lilith, the voracious first woman before Eve, desired and desiring equal of Adam cast into Hell. More mundanely, Cerise, the poor, provincial adolescent of divorced parents in *Il n'y a plus que la Patagonie* (49), with her supernatural gift for guessing lottery numbers and her mysterious bag full of bank notes, dresses up in designer gear and lives one night of the heady and brutal Parisian high-life arm in arm with her girlfriend. And nowhere is this phantas(ma)tical escape from 'reality' more blatant than in *Derrière la porte*, where the *narratrice* abandons little by little her leather biking gear to become, among other things, an unsophisticated and devoted medieval maiden, the masochistic lover of a modern day 'Barbe-bleu', or Mary Poppins making love to a sooty chimney sweep. In this book – which, notably, presents both the woman's and the man's subjective points of view of the same episodes – not only does the *narratrice* explore myriad identities, she also experiences the multiple subject positions involved in being alternately voyeur, victim, exhibitionist, dominatrix, behind, below, on top, in front... Of four possible endings to this erotic 'adventure' story, the most positive leaves her 'juggling' with her partner, the elusive *homme*, literally, as a circus act, and figuratively, having learned to espouse an unfixed sense of being. The *narratrice* of *Derrière la porte* thus erodes rigid binary opposites and boundaries; tending – like most of Reyes's characters – constantly to 'move on', she is never fixed definitively in any exclusive place or role.

Reyes, I would argue, clearly does not suggest that a feasible response to 'l'inquisition du corps social qui exige transparence et conformité aux modèles' (50) lies in permanent, irrevocable abandonment of this normalising, Symbolic social realm in order to live in a purely Imaginary, pre-Symbolic, pre-linguistic state. For not all of Reyes's female protagonists present positive models of *entre-deux* female corporeality, and several 'anti-heroines' actually regress or lapse into an a-social and *wholly* agentive state of corporeality, ultimately to experience a more or less distressing form of 'Symbolic' death. In *L'exclue*, *Au Corset qui tue*, and *Poupée*, for example, female protagonists variously abandon themselves entirely to corporeal desire – their bodies becoming wholly agentive – only to 'die', symbolically and/or literally.

The eponymous *narratrice* of *Poupée, anale nationale* (51), a satirical critique of rigidity in all its forms, is foulmouthed, ludicrously paranoid, pathologically obsessive about cleanliness, and fixated with *merde*. In turn abandoned and abused throughout her childhood, she has turned increasingly against her own vilified female body, and ultimately remains mentally, physically and corporeally static and isolated, entrenched forever in an unfulfilling a-social state of introversion. At the end of her *récit*, after being escorted, dirty and defiant, from the forest where she had intended to bury her aborted foetus in secret, Poupée is locked in her room, completely isolated, becoming ever more confused, insomniac, and feverish. She finally reverts to wholly infantile state: her lexis becomes increasingly incoherent, scatological and babyish; she wails and cries out; she urinates and defecates on the floor; and she rolls up in foetal position. Ultimately, unable to espouse and to enjoy any fluid sense of corporeality, Poupée lapses instead into a non-linguistic, 'sémiotique' realm (52) into a 'Symbolic' death.

In *Au Corset qui tue*, Alice and Lucile, so close in childhood that they professed to forming 'deux esprits dans un seul corps' (53), were split apart as adolescents by their contrasting reactions to the trauma of rape. While Lucile rejected her memories of Alice, and locked her own objectified body up in a figurative *corset* to live a pragmatic and literally single-minded existence, Alice lapsed into 'le désordre mentale' (54), living wholly in an imaginary realm, guided only by her agentive body, where she ignores the normalising rules and laws of society. Lucile represses all her corporeal desires, while Alice lives solely according to hers.

The return of the estranged Alice coincides with the return of Lucile's alienated desires – Alice *embodies* Lucile's repressed/returning desire. And as Alice gradually becomes more present in Lucile's narrative, so Lucile's desire becomes increasingly apparent. For Lucile, whose desire remained repressed and locked away for so long in her objectified body, the overwhelming return of/into absolute desire (the wholly agentive body) personified by the 'psychotic' Alice, is tantamount to 'Symbolic' death (55). After a heady episode in which Lucile grows unbearably jealous of the flirtatious Alice, the intricate tale culminates in Alice coldly killing Lucile, as she lies making love with the artist at last. Alice

— embodying Lucile's dis-covered desire — finally dominates; Lucile's dis-covered, unrestrained desire ultimately 'kills' her.

The marginalized *narratrice* of *L'exclue* gradually excludes herself completely from society, from the realistic backdrop of the narrative. Progressively she lapses into a purely *sémiotique* realm of sheer libidinal plenitude and pleasure. As a result, rather than an open-ended sense of multiple self, the *narratrice* turns in on her self, until she is no more than her wholly agentive body, which becomes no more than her insatiable *sexe*. Ultimately desire and the wholly un-real, marvellous, or imaginary, fully saturates *L'exclue*: the sole endeavours of the *narratrice* become perpetual *jouissance* and a wish to turn to stone, which come to pass, quite literally (bearing in mind that the literary fantastic commonly actuates the metaphorical). Her body transforms into a marble statue, one hand frozen onto her breast, the other over her pubis ? the fantas(ma)tical reification of her Symbolic death.

Akin to Kristevan theory, therefore, Reyes does not portray such 'psychosis' as an enduring alternative to the Symbolic — those characters who, suffused by unrepressed desire, ultimately lapse wholly into the non-Symbolic are 'dead', pushed too far in their reactions to a repressive diegetic social order that mirrors our extradiegetic world. Ultimately unable to communicate, no longer part of society, they are therefore unable to change it for others who remain repressed within it. However, corresponding to Kristeva's 'revolutionary', poetic, *sémiotique* force *within* language, Reyes's 'lapsed' characters represent an ever-present disruptive and subversive *opportunity* to traverse and erode the normalising boundaries that society always attempts to establish.

By confounding the categories of an absolute Symbolic social system, with its fixed sense of body, identity, and gender roles, and by constantly traversing the boundaries into and from the realm of (sexual) phantasm, Reyes's erotic texts work to weaken restrictive boundaries around identity, sexuality and corporeality. Her writing exposes the idea of a rigid, unitary sexual identity as in fact *constructed*, non-absolute, always questionable and always disruptable. Embracing this oscillation and learning to live in and according to this *entre-deux* state is almost always, implicitly or explicitly, the positive alternative to the realistic narrative backdrop for Reyes's characters.

Reyes's fantastical writing of the *entre-deux* erotic female body disrupts normalising Symbolic discourse — from *within* — in order to re-present the female body not as purely sex-object, nor as a purely libidinal, agentive body, but ultimately as a fluctuating, *entre-deux*, and fundamentally liberating negotiation of the two.

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NOTES

1. Jean-Claude Lamy, 'Alina Reyes: Entrez sans frapper', *Le Figaro*, 12 August 1994, p. 14.
2. See Elizabeth Grosz for discussion of this 'solidifying' discourse: 'The fluidity and indeterminacy of female body parts [...] are confined, constrained, solidified [...]. This indeterminacy is [...] not a fact of nature but a function of the modes of representation that privilege the solid and the determinate over the fluid'. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 205.
3. For more detailed discussion of such a definition of the fantastic see Ch. 2, 'The Fantastic as a Mode', in Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London & New York: Routledge, 1981), pp. 14-60.
4. Briefly, my own understanding of 'postmodern' is encapsulated in Susan Bordo's definition, as 'the contemporary inclination towards the unstable, fluid, fragmented, indeterminate, ironic and

- heterogeneous, for that which resists definition, closure and fixity'. Susan Bordo, 'Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body', in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. by Janet Price and M. Schildrick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) pp. 255-6, note 3.
5. While Lidia Curti does not refer to Reyes in her study of contemporary women's writing in English, her analysis of her selected women writers' tendency to mix *genres* and to confound *genre* conventions is highly pertinent to the present study. See Lidia Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative Identity and Representation* (London: Macmillan, 1998).
6. Hélène Cixous, quoted in Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, p. 180.
7. Alina Reyes, *Corps de femme* (Paris: Zulma, 1999).
8. *Corps de femme*, p. 122.
9. *Corps de femme*, p. 46.
10. *Corps de femme*, p. 46.
11. The exception is *Moha m'aime* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), which will not be analysed in this study: the primarily realist mode in which it is written does not correspond to a 'fantastical' vacillation between realities, and the narrative focuses little on female corporeality.
12. Note that, as we shall see later in this paper, not all of Reyes's female protagonists present positive models of 'fluid' female corporeality. There are 'anti-heroines' who ultimately founder, lapse or regress in an a-social, pre-Symbolic and wholly agentive state of corporeality (e.g. *L'Exclue*, *Poupée*, Alice in *Au Corset qui tue*).
13. 'Marginal Canons: rewriting the Canon', in *Yale French Studies*, 75 (1988), pp. 112-128.
14. Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 174.
15. John Phillips, *Forbidden Fictions: Pornography and Censorship in Twentieth Century French Literature* (London & Virginia: Pluto Press, 1999).
16. 'Marginal Canons: rewriting the Canon', p. 113.
17. *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 174.
18. Fabrice Gagnault, 'Alina Reyes : Voyage au cœur du mal', *Elle*, 9 March 1998.
19. Alina Reyes, *Quand tu aimes il faut partir* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. 'folio', 1993), p. 63.
20. *Quand tu aimes il faut partir*, p. 47.
21. For discussion of feminist definitions/criticisms of pornography and erotica see, for example, Chapter 8 of Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Debates: Issues of Theory and Political Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 172-194, and *A Concise Glossary of Feminist Theory*, ed. by Sonya Andermehrer, T. Lovell and C. Wolkowitz, (London & New York: Arnold, 1997), pp. 165-6.
22. 'Marginal Canons: rewriting the Canon', p. 126 (my italics).
23. Reyes, cited in Gagnault, 'Alina Reyes : Voyage au cœur du mal'.
24. *Corps de femme*, pp. 46-49.

25. The notion of 'normalisation' is well expressed in Susan Bordo's concise definition: 'By social 'normalisation' I refer to all those modes of acculturation which work by setting up standards or 'norms' against which individuals continually measure, judge, 'discipline' and 'correct' their behaviour and presentation of self. By social 'resistance' I refer to all behaviours, events and social formations that challenge or disrupt prevailing power relations and the norms that sustain and reproduce them.' Bordo, in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, p. 255, note 2.
26. *Corps de femme*, p. 46.
27. *Corps de femme*, p. 47.
28. 'Marginal Canons: rewriting the Canon', p. 113.
29. Note that Reyes does refer to the male body also, for example, in 'Le rêve du pénis', and she does universalise her argument at times: but over-all her ideal reader, and the body in question, is *female*.
30. Paris: Gallimard, 1976.
31. *Corps de femme*, pp. 133-4.
32. *Quand tu aimes il faut partir*, p. 47.
33. *Corps de femme*, pp. 128-134.
34. *Corps de femme*, p. 129.
35. *Corps de femme*, pp. 129-30.
36. *Corps de femme*, p. 129 (my emphasis).
37. *Corps de femme*, p. 129.
38. *Corps de femme*, p. 131. I am grateful to Keith Reader for drawing my attention to the possible correspondence between Reyes's critique of 'la société normalisatrice du spectacle' in favour of 'notre imagination au pouvoir' and the endeavours of Guy Debord's revolutionary artistic and political movement, the *Situationnistes*, created in France in 1957, and influential during *les événements* of May '68. While I do not develop it here in this paper, I certainly agree that this connection merits reflection, bearing in mind my own argument for the subversive nature of Reyes's *entre-deux* writing, and Reyes's anti-establishment (*contestataire*) views, evident in many of her texts and in, for example, the articles she has written for *Libération* newspaper.
39. *Derrière la porte* (Paris: Laffont, 1994 [Pocket 1996]).
40. *Le boucher* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).
41. *Au Corset qui tue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).
42. *Lucie au long cours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).
43. *La Nuit* (Paris: Joël Losfeld, 1994, 2000).
44. *Lilith* (Paris : Laffont, 1999).
45. *L'exclue* (Paris : Mille et Une Nuits, 2000).
46. Here I insist upon the challenging, ironic use of the word 'commonsense' to qualify such discourses,

by recalling Barbara Brook's definition: 'Commonsense: when used in a sociological or philosophical sense, this refers to the shared assumptions of a group or society which go largely unchallenged in everyday conversation. Feminism is a challenge to 'commonsense' statements and beliefs about men and women'. *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (London & New York: Longman, 1999) Glossary, p. 158.

47. *Corps de femme*, p. 125 (my emphasis).

48. *Corps de femme*, p. 125.

49. *Il n'y a plus que la Patagonie* (Paris: Juillard, 1997).

50. *Corps de femme*, p. 130.

51. *Alina Poupée, anale nationale* (Paris: Zulma, 1998 [Pocket, 1999]).

52. Here I am borrowing Kristeva's definition of the sémiotique as a non-linguistic 'endless flow of rhythmic pulsions' (Jane Winston, 'Gender and sexual identity in the modern French novel', in Timothy Unwin, *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel: from 1800 to the present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.236). 'Kristeva uses the term 'semiotic' for the first pre-Oedipal phase of life [...] In the preverbal semiotic phase the child has acquired no sense of separate identity [...].' Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 144.

53. *Au Corset qui tue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992) back cover.

54. Christian Charrière 'Une Craquante coquine', *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 1 June 1992.

55. In referring to Alice as 'psychotic', I am invoking not only the clinical definition of psychosis – i.e. the pathological organisation of the personality, resulting in an altered sense of reality and relation to objects – but am also referring to the a-social, non-linguistic 'psychotic utterance' that Kristevan theory posits as resulting from complete rejection of the 'ordering presence' of the Symbolic. See chapter 6, 'Identities in Process', in Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism*: pp. 136-61.