

KAREN KOVACIK

*MY LIFE AS A RABBIT*. AN INTRODUCTION

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Izabela Filipiak and I worked together on translating this play from August through October, 2005, she in California, I in Indiana. We traded drafts, tightening the dialogue and sometimes changing the allusions—Russia became Chechnya, for example—to make them relevant for an American audience, as the play was later performed by a readers’ theater in Berkeley. The premise of *My Life As a Rabbit* is at once simple and brilliant: the entire action revolves around a lesbian couple, H and Z, watching TV. Commercials, science programs, and movies prompt the women to reflect on their lives and the future of their relationship. As critic Elwira Grossman has observed, “This ostensibly light-hearted comedy is a revealing metaphor for how our thinking about gender and sexual behavior is constructed by the outside world (represented here by TV).” H and Z take on topics as far-ranging as motherhood, violence, gender roles, desire, and body image with the click of their remote. Arranged in 38 micro-scenes, the play mimics the quick pace of channel surfing.

Their conversations touch on archetypal images of women—madwoman, mother—as seen on TV. When the actress Isabelle Adjani makes an appearance as Victor Hugo’s daughter or the unhappy lover of Rodin, H observes that too often she portrays women who die a horrible death. “Why do they all have to go crazy?” H asks. And when a commercial for a famous brand of bottled water comes on, a mother and baby on its label, H encourages Z to rock their water bottle like an infant. Ambivalent about motherhood and the ad’s marketing of mothers, Z nonetheless

gives in to the absurdity of the moment. She cradles the plastic “baby” and even pretends to burp it.

The form of the play allows the couple to move fluidly through time, transitioning easily from memory to reality to fantasy. In one scene H recalls getting in trouble at school for refusing to wear a dress. In another, a Tony Kushner-like “goddess” emerges from a mirror on the wall. Z, unhappy with the state of the world, asks, “Maybe you’re the goddess of light, truth and beauty, peace talks in wartime, and better communication in families?” (Mount Olympus, meet *Claudia!*) In response to that question, the goddess vanishes. Many of the scenes give voice to the women’s rage, which the culture tends to ignore. Z imagines her mother murdered her father, and H threatens to slit the throat of the brother who hit her in the head.

In all these ways, the play talks back to power—or at least to the corporate television programming that passes for conventional wisdom. In 1974, in the *Twenty-One Love Poems*, Adrienne Rich wrote, “No one has imagined us.” Filipiak’s play, in 2005, phrases the matter of representation differently: “This is how *they*’ve imagined us, and here’s what *we* have to say about that.” Elwira Grossman notes that in its exploration of what stereotypes conceal, *My Life As a Rabbit* raises provocative questions: “What happens when female sexuality is placed outside the ‘heterosexual regime’ where it can freely explore and express itself? . . . How does a woman’s sexuality — when it is liberated from heteronormativity—affect her behavior, views and attitudes? And finally, how does a woman’s perception of the world change when she becomes a ‘knower’ and ‘explorer’ rather than an object to be known and explored?” Even as it addresses those questions, Filipiak’s play wears its theory lightly. Her characters are quirky humans—not placeholders for intellectual posturing. They dazzle us and make us laugh as they struggle with the difficult art of loving.

In the end, H and Z recommit themselves to their relationship by turning the TV off. They place the television on the couch, and take up their position where it previously stood. Now presumably, the TV will take its cues from them.

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