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The People-Centred Vision of Jane Rule

A work of art is not a clever puzzle to be solved by clever readers; it is a passionately articulated vision to be intensely shared.

Jane Rule, "Before and After *Sexual Politics*"¹

Although the cover of Jane Rule's latest novel, *Memory Board*, proclaims her as "the author of ten highly praised books" and "one of Canada's pre-eminent novelists," to date there have been no substantial critical studies of Rule's work. Her books have been widely reviewed—in publications ranging from the scholarly (*Canadian Literature*) to the pedestrian (Vancouver's *Sun* and *Province* newspapers)—and in 1976 an entire issue of *Canadian Fiction Magazine* was devoted to her work. Yet she remains neglected even by recent Canadian feminist literary criticism. Coral Ann Howells's *Private and Fictional Worlds: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s* mentions Rule twice in passing, but only quotes from one of Rule's essays to bring into "radiant focus" (171) the preoccupations of another novelist. In the thirty-eight essays comprising *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing*, Rule's name appears but twice—both times within quotations from *other* sources. Worse, while the back cover of Lorna Irvine's *Sub/version* promises readings on the work of half-a-dozen Canadian women writers including Jane Rule, in fact the book contains nothing at all about her. This essay attempts above all to show that Rule's work deserves more serious attention than to date it has received. It counters criticisms of Rule by pointing to the sophistication and subtlety of her writing; it makes a start toward explaining how she can be understood on her own terms. Rule questions established assumptions about the primacy of the individual. She writes against attitudes which divide people, particularly against attitudes which categorize and isolate people according to

gender and sexual orientation. Rule is changing the world we live in by changing the ways we look at it.

Why have critics ignored Rule's fiction? There are probably three main reasons. The first relates not to the quality of her writing but to her homosexuality. As Geoff Hancock wrote in 1976, when the media finally began to pay attention to Rule, it was because of her private life rather than her writing: "Jane Rule has been practically ignored as an artist.... She has become the stuff of headlines because she is lesbian" (Foreword to *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 23, 4). In an essay significantly called not "Lesbian Writer" but "Lesbian *and* Writer" (emphasis added), Rule discusses this kind of publicity. She argues that "short of denying my sexuality, there is little I can do. It is not I but the interviewer or reviewer who is more interested in the fact that I am a lesbian than in the fact that I am a writer" (*HEM* 43). Nor does attention to her sexual orientation merely distract attention away from her work: it also excites prejudice in those people who are unwilling to accept homosexuals as fully human. Rule goes on to say that she believes this is one reason the literary establishment has not taken her work seriously: "in the academy, I am dismissed as a marginal writer not because some of my characters share my sexuality but because I am a lesbian, therefore somehow mysteriously disqualified from presenting a vision of central value" (*HEM* 42-43).

One member of the academy who clearly does not discount Rule's vision is W. H. New. In an editorial decrying the choice of nominees for the 1980 Governor-General's award for English-language fiction, New describes Rule's *Contract with the World* not only as "her finest accomplishment to date," but as a novel with strengths "of vision and of imagined character, which transform what could have been mere literary exercise into literary enterprise of an unusual order." He goes on to argue that "[i]t is this quality of literary vision, so elusive to critical methodologies yet so necessary to art, which gives a novel its sustaining vitality" ("Take Your Order..." 3). In a comparison significant because it implicitly elevates Rule to the level of more critically acclaimed Canadian writers, New says even artists like Margaret Laurence and Ethel Wilson are forgiven lapses in style and "frequent strains" on verisimilitude because what matters much more in their novels, and in Rule's (among others), is "the core of public values in which [such a novel] declares its faith, its passion for moral conscience and the possibility of individual choice" (4).

New's comments lead directly to the second reason that Rule is not endorsed by many literary critics, including feminists: her vision is

overwhelmingly positive. To use New's vocabulary, Rule consistently affirms her faith in the essential goodness of human beings, their moral decency and their ability (and willingness) to choose to act in ways beneficial to others as well as to themselves. But as Rule recognizes, it is not optimism *per se* but the specific circumstances of her optimism which antagonize many critics. For example, she thinks it would be perfectly acceptable to portray homosexuals as ideal, to say, "These are the liberated people who are going to teach us how to live in zero population and why don't you all get on the band-wagon?" (*Canadian Fiction Magazine* 90).² Although such a portrayal might be seen as complimentary to homosexuals, it distinguishes them from the rest of the population—in particular, from the heterosexual majority—and exaggerates their difference. Not only does this obscure the common humanity of people of whatever sexual orientation, it emphasizes that homosexuals are a minority. Too easily and too often minorities are labelled subgroups or subcultures, with all the connotations of inferiority the prefix bears. Rule's characters resist reductive categorization; her homosexuals are ordinary people, part of the ordinary world. This, she says, frightens some people: "there's this terrible fear that if you allow this kind of relationship in the ordinary world, it's like pesticide. It's going to kill all fertility, wreck our world, threaten the patriarchal structure. The gentler it is, the more ordinary it is, apparently the more threatening it is" (*CFM* 108). She hypothesizes that this fear in part accounts for hostile reviews of her work, although the connection might never be explicit. John Glassco entitled his review of *The Young in One Another's Arms*, "Her Goodness, Our Grimace," and a dean of Canadian literature, George Woodcock, condemned the same book perhaps more discreetly but certainly more thoroughly, with his oblique reference to a canonical standard:

The Young in One Another's Arms is written in too satisfying a plain prose to be just a failure, but its imaginative vision is not convincing. It is not merely that such accumulations of goodness are rare indeed in real life; it is even more that a novel in which everything always seems to turn to the good leaves too bland an impression on the mind to be remembered as more than an escapist exercise. We may long for paradise regained, but the human condition is a paradise lost. (91)

Interestingly, what Woodcock sees as a virtue—Rule's "plain prose"—is the third reason her writing has not received the critical attention it deserves. For years literary critics have privileged style in their considerations of art. As Rule said of her own academic education:

To be concerned about content was a grave error in critical judgment revealing a subjective and uncultured mind....

The best way to deal with content was to make it disappear. We were taught, "Form is content," studied therefore only the aesthetics of a work, image patterns, allusions, plot structures, sentence rhythms, devices for telescoping time. ("Before and After *Sexual Politics*"; *HEM* 16-17).

This list would of course need revising to accurately reflect the stylistic concerns of critics today, and feminist critics in particular do not believe that content and all influences on it—social, political, biographical, and so forth—are irrelevant to the study of literature. Still, contemporary Canadian feminist literary critics, anglophone as well as francophone, have been most interested in questions of language. Thus while they see women writers as having been marginalized by the traditional, patriarchal system, and are proud to claim that "out of the margin they have made many centers" (Neuman and Kamboureli x), they have themselves marginalized writers who like Jane Rule do not choose to challenge or subvert established cultural standards through their language.

To say this is not, however, to argue that stylistic approaches to Jane Rule are irrelevant. As New wrote, "Style matters, too, naturally, for it is the process that shapes the vision into meaning and gives it concrete form" ("Take Your Order...?" 4). But Rule explains that in her work for publication, she strives for unmannered clarity. She experiments with prose to learn new things for herself, to improve her technical skill, but does not feel she must share these "exercises" with her readers (*CFM* 88, 81). In *Memory Board*, for example, Rule never ventures inside the mind of one of the three characters, Constance, who has lost most of her memory. Rule says that truthful writing from within Constance's darkness would have been very experimental, disconnected, which she did not think would suit the tone of that novel (interview with Wachtel).

In her profile of Rule and *Memory Board* on CBC radio, Eleanor Wachtel observed that a "smooth, accessible surface has always been important to Rule in her writing. She wants her *ideas* to challenge, not her prose." But as Terry Goldie acknowledged, when faced with a straightforward, stylistically traditional novel like this one, "many critics—and I include myself among them—want something a bit more 'sparky,' something post-modern if you want to say it, something self-referential, all those kinds of things" (interview with Wachtel during her profile of Rule). Nor is only the style of Rule's fiction

decidedly traditional: its form is too. Reviewing *Inland Passage* (Rule's most recent collection of short fiction), Neil Besner wrote that "Rule has the courage, the imaginative vigour, and also—unfashionably—the kind of morality which calls for explicitly 'closed' endings." Although these endings occasionally seem forced, he allows that this might simply be "the price Rule pays for daring to suggest so openly that fiction is essentially moral" (140).

It is necessary to distinguish between fiction's moral nature and writing that *moralizes*. In the interview for *Canadian Fiction Magazine* in 1976, Rule discussed the unavoidable moral aspect of fiction in relation to authorial control of characters, saying that although a writer could be entirely unjudgmental in her or his comment,

there is no way a novelist escapes final judgement of a character, or a judgement of the whole environment they [sic] live in, by what happens to those characters. Some of them live; some of them die. Some get born; some don't. Some of them lose arms and eyes. Some don't get the people they want. So who's doing that? I am. (94)

At the same time she vehemently disagreed with the suggestion that it might be a writer's "duty" to "perpetuate moral values." She asserted that while an artist can communicate qualities and values she or he believes in, moral values are not something that can be taught or preached. This, she argued, is precisely the difference between art and propaganda: "The business of art is to manifest what is and propaganda is working at trying to make what ought to be" (86).

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How, then, should a critic who wants to be just approach the writings of Jane Rule? France Théoret says, "There is no such thing as pure criticism. Criticism has an ideological value, it is inscribed in ideological discourses. The critical text is inscribed at a particular moment in the history of ideas" (97). Therefore, she argues, the closest we can come to critical "transparency" is to have critics state clearly where they are speaking from (96). At the 1983 Women and Words conference Louise Forsyth said much the same thing, and also described in some detail the process she thought a feminist literary critic should hazard:

Because women's creative expression has been so devalued by our society, I consider the role of the critic to be, above all, that of serious and appreciative reader. In order to play this role, the critic must actively participate in the text; she must enjoy and vibrate with its creative power; she must celebrate its strength and put herself in the

place from which the text emerges, even though that place may not be seen as legitimate by the dominant culture. She must seek to understand the text she is reading and the language used by its author in order to talk about it on its own terms.... (87)

One critic who seems to have approached Rule's work in this way is Constance Rooke. In the *Dictionary of Literary Biography's* entry on Jane Rule, Rooke writes that "[f]or all its cool intelligence, her work invites a warm, personal response" (319). She describes Rule's novels as "passionate and tender and optimistic," her style as "clear and unmannered" though "complex." Rooke senses Rule's "respect and sympathy for her characters, in particular for their growth and freedom," and notes with thoughtful approbation that these characters "do not submit to definition by a single factor such as sexual orientation" (316).

Indeed, Rule herself objects to being defined by any single feature. She does not wish to be seen as a particular "kind" of writer—whether the label be "Canadian" or "woman" or "lesbian" (Introduction to *Lesbian Images* 10). And while she is frank about her sexual orientation, she finds that misapprehensions about homosexuality sometimes interfere with people's appreciation of her work—they expect it to be erotic or messianic (CFM 90). Rule argues that, as a homosexual, her world is not some ghetto on the fringe: "I have never lived in a subculture. I have never felt excluded from the human family or job or social life.... Most of the homosexuals I know live in the ordinary community, working, having dinner parties, being themselves and being known" (CFM 89). For those who wonder whether she does not go out of her way (i.e., distort the truth) to emphasize this in her writing, she answers: "I'm simply writing out of my sense of the world as I live in it" (CFM 90).

Rule's attitude to and portrayal of homosexuality brings up the question of the politics of her writing. One reviewer called *Lesbian Images* propaganda; Rule counters this with her belief that any serious, fairminded statement about lesbian experience is likely to be considered propaganda in the dominantly heterosexual, homo-phobic world we live in (CFM 110). And that other books of hers have been *used as* propaganda, Rule says is beyond her control—as well as alien to her intentions (CFM 86). In fact, she points out, some people in the women's movement and in the gay community object to her work because she is not political enough. Rule's response to them is that she has "a deep mistrust of any system as an answer" (CFM 65). Similarly,

k. o. kanne has argued against the subversion of art by politics of whatever kind:

When art becomes subservient to the practice of dogma, or is made to tow [sic] the party line, I believe that it is not art, but that it sinks instead into the morass of rhetoric, dialectical discursiveness, and moralization....

And with this conference in mind, I must say that this applies to the dictates of the feminist, and yes, lesbian, party line as well. Dogma is dogma. The concept "politically correct" is an elitist dictate that, as far as I can discern, arises out of fear of loss of power—the same dynamic that can be seen in any hierarchical power structure. It is as much a form of censorship as any I have known. (48)

Rule has ignored any number of pressures to toe party lines: she refuses to be less "visibly" a lesbian to please the editors of *Chatelaine* or in the hope that her work might be less often distorted and dismissed; she refuses too to listen to gay critics who want her to present only positive images of homosexuality, and to include fewer heterosexual characters ("Lesbian and Writer"; *HEM* 42-43).

Rule's attitude to the women's movement is consistent with her dislike of all attempts to categorize and label, which she sees as limiting. "The women's movement matters enormously to me and I'm interested in the political part of it as well, but as a human being who happens to be a woman," she says (*CFM* 65). In her essay "Integration," she declares that although she does not believe that separatism in itself can solve problems, she supports "the right of any beleaguered group to have opportunities to be exclusive" (*HEM* 96). However, Rule believes that

...exclusiveness must be a stage in development, not a goal. A group of people who have suffered as much as women—and particularly lesbians—from being excluded can seize separation as a right for themselves only in revenge. We have instead to learn to overcome our passive education and continue to insist on taking up the duties and privileges that should belong to every individual. In short, we have to teach men to stop being separatists, not embrace their mistake for ourselves. (*HEM* 97)

In *Memory Board*, for example, Diana (a gynecologist and obstetrician) does not advise her troubled young patients "to give up men," she tells them about "the number of ways there are for having sexual pleasure without penetration" (191), helping them to become less passive rather than more exclusive. And although she does not think the laws should allow discrimination based on sexual orientation, she says that if she had any political energy at all, she would fight not for

gay rights but with Morgentaler for abortion on demand (193). Jill (a lawyer) does difficult, often discouraging work for minorities and women, but is guided by her broader loyalty to *human* rights (68). Whether either Diana or Jill counsel lesbians like themselves does not matter to them; as professionals their commitments are to those “duties and privileges that should belong to every individual.”

Literary critic Toril Moi discusses the theories of Julia Kristeva in similar terms. According to Moi, Kristeva promotes a three-tiered view of the feminist struggle, which begins with women demanding equality, then proceeds to women “rejecting the male symbolic order in the name of difference.” This stage she calls “radical feminism,” because in it we have “femininity extolled.” The third and last tier, which Moi sees as articulating Kristeva’s own position, is that women “reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical” (Moi 12). Moi argues that while it remains “*politically* essential for feminists to defend women *as* women” to counteract patriarchal oppression, the danger of approaches based on the second tier is that they may be nothing more than inverted sexism, “uncritically taking over the very metaphysical categories set up by patriarchy in order to keep women in their places, despite attempts to attach new feminist values to these old categories” (13). Rule is wary of any categorizations or labels, because they are necessarily over-simplifications which can easily serve a purpose entirely different from that for which they were intended. In *Memory Board*, David realizes that Diana resists being identified as part of the gay community not because she wants to hide her sexuality but because the label allows people to “dismiss her views as a lesbian plot against men’s privilege and pleasure” (195). In other words, Diana thinks that proclaiming her sexual orientation is more likely to result in her rights being willfully denied rather than just quietly ignored.

Perhaps ironically—given her unwillingness to toe feminist or gay party lines—Rule’s determination to write according to her own world-view rather than anyone else’s is firmly rooted in her experiences of books as a female child and as a young lesbian. From the time she learned to read, Rule found books alienating. School readers told of “Dick” running, and “Jane” looking admiringly on, whereas Jane Rule ran *with* her brother. She loathed most of the literature—like *Ivanhoe*—she had to read in high school. She arrived at college thinking that literature was either hypocritical or it was not about any world she knew and needed to understand—not, as she would later write, that she was only interested in telling the truth about relationships

between women, but because a literary tradition which excluded an experience so central to her could not but be "generally mistrusted" ("Staking out the Territory"; *HEM* 59). Not until she was thirty did she encounter (because, she claims, it had not occurred to her to look for) a book "even remotely like the work [she] was trying to do in setting, in tone, in emotional climate"; and it was only when she was commissioned to write *Lesbian Images* that she read a range of novels by or about lesbians.

In "Lesbian and Writer," Rule explains how her alienation from the literature she encountered early in life affected her choice of profession: "I decided to be a writer not because I was a great reader as a child or had any natural gift for language, but because I wanted to speak the truth as I saw it" (*HEM* 43). A desire to speak the truth is Rule's overriding concern in all of her work, as much in what she calls her "warm, gentle" writings (like *Memory Board*) as in her "tough" ones (like *Contract with the World*). Asked how she knows her truth will be of value to others, she says that that is not what matters—it's very important to her (interview with Gabereau). Telling the truth "as she sees it" is essential to her artistic integrity:

I owe to own my art all the honesty and insight I have, not simply about homosexuals and artists, both of which I happen to be, but about the whole range of my experience as a member of a family, a community, a country. I don't write Harry and Anna stories to cater to *Chatelaine's* heterosexual readers though I like the cheques well enough when they come in.... I write them out of affection for those men and women, like my own parents, who care for and love and enjoy their children and because I, too, have cared for and loved and enjoyed children. There are heterosexual men and women in all my work because there are heterosexual men and women in my life and world, to whom I owe much of my understanding. ("Lesbian and Writer"; *HEM* 45)

This, then, is Rule's answer to those members of the academy or of the gay community who see work like her (cheerful family) "Harry and Anna" stories as a sell-out, whether to consumers of popular (as opposed to literary) fiction or to the oppressive heterosexual norm.

One critic has written tolerantly of these stories, as ones in which parents "suffer the vicissitudes of raising children in a material world, doing what they can to introduce genuine human compassion into their lives" (Rooke 319). In an interview in 1986 Rule spoke of the importance to her of such compassion, acknowledging that as she grows older she increasingly thinks "if we're going to change anything we have to move with compassion toward all views, and be much more inclusive" (interview with Gabereau). Kanne argued the power of

artistic vision to change our world at the 1983 Women and Words conference, where, sounding much like Rule, she defined this vision as “seeing what is.” kenne believes that art which presents a vision centring on human needs (such as nurturing) is subversive, because it counters the ruling powers’ “idea of existence that is linear, materialistic, competitive, patriarchal, and exploitative...” (47).

Because Rule’s accessible style makes her audience broader than it would be if she wrote more experimental or “post-modern” prose, but especially because she communicates her compassionate and inclusive vision with passion as well as intelligence, Jane Rule’s fiction has the potential to change people’s world-views. In 1976 Rule was asked whether her fiction had changed anyone’s life; she replied, “Mine” (*CFM* 112). Ten years later, whether or not she is heralded by the gay community or the women’s movement or the literary establishment, Rule *is* quietly altering people’s attitudes to those around them and to themselves. As one critic testified (Besner 140), her writings “transcend engagement to transform, by delicate but enduring degree, the way we imagine the world.”

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If Rule’s fiction has the power both to engage and to transform, it is because of her characters. In her profile of Jane Rule and *Memory Board*, Eleanor Wachtel said: “When you talk about a Jane Rule novel, you talk about people, and how they relate to each other.” Critic Terry Goldie agreed, recognizing that “these aren’t people, these are just fictional characters—but it’s as *people* that you care about them” (in Wachtel’s profile). Although Rule’s characters are based on real people, it is only in a very general sense:

When I present a character, I neither take a real person I know nor invent a being out of an ideal concept; rather I take half a dozen people I’ve known who similarly have faced circumstances I want to write about—the loss of a parent, rivalry among siblings, political defeat—and draw even more widely than that on physical attributes, inheritance, social circumstances to make up the character I need for the experience I have designed. If that character slips easily into the slot I have made, I am suspicious, wonder if I have been superficial or glib. A character should, like a real human being, resist categorizing, resist simple-minded solutions. (“The Practice of Writing”; *HEM* 6)

She distinguishes this approach from autobiographical fiction—like that of Audrey Thomas, for instance—and says that she writes as she does less to protect herself and other people than because of “the

freedom real fiction gives me to express all I understand without inhibition" ("Notes on Autobiography"; *HEM* 34).

One of the ways Rule ensures her own engagement with the characters she creates is by giving each one something of her own—"a habit or fear, a cough or a favorite word, an old jacket or a childhood landscape. Whatever it is, however small, it is a kind of talisman against any petty or vindictive treatment" ("The Practice of Writing"; *HEM* 6). For example, Rule's family used to say "it's better to be right than president" (Gabereau). In *Memory Board*, Rule gives that line to the lawyer who works hard for the rights of women and minorities: Jill Carlyle claims she would "rather be right than rich" (68).

Rule often listens to chamber music, and likens her characters and the ways they relate to each other to "the tonal controls, the balance of voices, and the relationships that instruments express together." Her analogy is quite specific:

...I think of the *timbre* of a character. I think of the range of a character. I think as you might of an instrument, that a certain character can play a certain tonal part in a novel. A tuba cannot do certain kinds of things. A violin cannot do certain kinds of things. When I'm working to make a concert of characters, I listen to chamber music and think about relationships. It's something I do in every piece of work I do. There will be certain pieces of music I associate with certain books simply because the conflicts, the resolving harmonies, the movements and tonalities *belong* to the problems that are in the book. (*CFM* 67-68)

The practical consequence of this for Rule as writer is that she can amend narrative parts of her fiction much more easily than dialogues: if one tonality is off, she finds she must often start the dialogue all over. Dialogue is vital in Rule's fiction, carrying "emotional information," which she describes as "the whole tonality of relationships" (*CFM* 80, 81). Rule thinks people often find her dialogue difficult because they are used to conversation which reveals facts, while with hers "you really have to *listen*, you really have to *hear* what people are saying. You can't glance through it to see what time breakfast is" (*CFM* 81). And the ability of her dialogues to convey emotional information unambiguously is determined by thorough groundwork, not overt statement: Rule wants a careful reader to know how a character is feeling without Rule providing what she calls "stage directions"—adverbs like "angrily" or "happily," for instance (*CFM* 82). Rule's stylistic groundwork includes the cumulative effects "of image, of landscape, of moment, of building character" (*CFM* 83); in the dia-

logue itself she carefully controls “spoken language, vocabulary and rhythms that manifest the emotion” (CFM 82).

Another very important aspect of Rule’s fiction is the way she uses point of view to express the way she sees the world. In an early novel like *The Young in One Another’s Arms*, the story is told essentially from the point of view of a single character; in later works, Rule uses varying points of view to express multiple perspectives. For example, in *Contract with the World* six of the eight main characters have sections all to themselves. To return to the analogy with chamber music, each character in this novel carries the theme for a brief time, then must rejoin the other harmonizing instruments as another takes up the lead. Rule explains why she no longer chooses to write from a single perspective:

The North American novel of the single perception, of one person being central and everybody else secondary, seems to me a misapprehension of how we live but a fulfilling of the fantasy. I mean, we all of course would like to be the centre of attention and everybody else less important.... [I]t is a fantasy we all share. But if we’re really going to learn how to live, we have to realize our interdependence, that we are one of many, and one of an important many.... (interview with Gabereau)

The difficulty in trying to present that interdependence in prose, says Rule, is that the writer can work with only “one thin line.” While a composer can gather all of his instruments at once, in fiction “to create the illusion of all together is an interesting technical problem” (CFM 91). To suggest the interdependence of the twins in *Memory Board*, Rule shifts the centre of consciousness between David and Diana frequently. She also has each one think about the other with such empathy that although it has not, at times the centre of consciousness seems again to have shifted.

Rule’s themes as well as her style reflect how important people’s interdependence is to her. While many Canadian novelists have concentrated on rural communities and traditional families, what fascinate Rule are the communities people now often create for themselves, after they have moved away from the places and families into which they were born. She is particularly interested in what she calls “voluntary relationships”—the support groups people gather around themselves to fulfil functions that used to be the family’s. According to Rule, one of the difficulties today is that a friend may act as a surrogate mother or sister, but there are no words that “describe to us and make us conscious of the importance of their being in our lives” (interview with Gabereau). However, she believes the words will come once

society becomes more aware of the prevalence and importance of these kinds of relationships. Rule works to speed that awareness not by introducing new expressions but by including in her fiction the kinds of voluntary relationships she sees all around her. Thus in *Memory Board*, Diana is not distressed that Constance sometimes mistakes her for her own mother or sister (who were killed by a bomb in London during World War II): "Diana had tried to be mother and sister to Constance as well as lover all their lives together" (35).

Not surprisingly, Rule is interested too in relationships which are involuntary, and the effects these have on people. She is very much against social conventions which encourage people to think that some have the right to control others. She recalls that when she was young, parents were given stars to put in their windows to show that they had lost sons to the War: "It shocks me, for instance, that people think their children are something they own, that they can give to the world.... Then I hear 'And God so loved the world He gave His only Son.' And I think embedded in that mythology is what terrifies me most about the values of our culture" (*CFM* 65). Rule's distress at such notions of ownership informs her attitudes to the institution of marriage and the principle of sexual fidelity. In her introduction to *Lesbian Images* Rule discusses her own first sexual experiences in these terms:

I am not sorry that the guilt I carried about my first sexual experiences was tempered with real love rather than with correct heterosexuality. Nor do I regret that there was nothing of conventional pairing in that first relationship which required of me, instead of jealous exclusiveness, real generosity and love for someone else's husband and children. It confirmed for me very early the value of loving, the awareness of sex as one of the languages for loving rather than either an identity or an act of possession. To be a lover was no more a label, under these circumstances, than to be a daughter or sister or friend, responsibilities and pleasures I have not, even now, devalued in order to own and be owned by another person. Cleaving is an activity which should be left to snails for cleaning ponds and aquariums. Multiplicity of relationships does not create the number of conflicts the morality tales of our culture would have us believe if the basis of each relationship is the autonomy of the self and the freedom of the other. (4-5)

Rule expands on these ideas in an essay called "The Myth of Genital Jealousy" (*HEM* 90-92). In an argument with feminist overtones, she points out that the "so-called" principle of sexual fidelity historically was based on a concept of property—"the method by which a man ensured that he was not getting used goods and that his wife's children would be his own, entitled to inherit his property." Because today

many relationships—not just those between homosexuals—are “formed without motives of protecting property or progeny, based on attraction and companionability,” she questions the appropriateness of the “possessiveness and deprivation inherent in sexual fidelity” (90). She suggests that the principle continues to be upheld because people believe that sexual fidelity is a metaphor for loyalty and trust, and that sexual jealousy is both fundamental to human passion and destructive of love. Neither belief justifies the principle to Rule, however, because people betray one another in many other ways, and because she attributes the destructive power of sexual jealousy largely to a narrow morality which sanctions no other jealousies, thereby making sexual behavior the “dumping ground” for all kinds of insecurities (91). But Rule is not advocating willful promiscuity; she is simply sticking to her concerns for truth and community. If we could see more clearly the prejudices which masquerade as principles, she believes we could “design a marvelous variety of relationships to suit the variety of people we are”—various in our sexual interests because we are influenced by “other people’s needs as well as our own in what we choose to do or not to do” (92).

The last paragraph of this essay provides an excellent introduction to *Memory Board*. Rule writes:

I care very much about loyalty and trust, about involvement that lasts and grows, about harmony and about joy. Sex is only one of the various languages in which to express those values and is not the basis of any of them. Love is. It can be celibate, monogamous, multifarious. But it cannot be bought, insured, taxed or sold. We are not each other’s property, in bed or out of it. The children gay people cherish are mostly not our own. What we could leave them is the knowledge that they are not sexual “things,” owned and bartered, but people, free to love as they can find out how. (HEM 92)

Although Rule has described her latest novel as “exploring memory and reconciliation” (interview with Wachtel), it would be equally accurate to say *Memory Board* is about “loyalty and trust, about involvement that lasts and grows.” Now aged sixty-five, David and Diana are twins who have hardly communicated with each other for forty-three years, since David’s wife Patricia ordered Diana and her lover, Constance, out of the house while David stood silently by. When the book begins, Patricia has been dead for nearly a year, and David wants to renew relations with his sister. Not surprisingly, Diana is less eager to undertake the effort; as well as having reasonable grounds for holding a grudge, she already has an emotionally demanding life—

caring for Constance, who has lost most of her memory. Diana tells David she is not capable of nostalgia, that she does not “entertain with any pleasure the idea of evenings caught between someone who rarely remembers the past as we’ve lived it and someone who wants to remember what I’d as soon forget” (38). The main narrative of the novel follows the evolving relations between these three characters, as they come to terms with one another—to see what they can “do and be for each other in the present” (38)—and as David and Diana come to terms with themselves.

For David to come to terms with himself, he must come to terms with his past. The first chapter of the novel is narrated essentially from his point of view, and provides an overview of the twins’ childhood. Of course it is *his* overview, but Diana later only adds to (rather than contradicts) his remembrances of times past. Like David Copperfield before him, David Crown never knew his father, loathed his stepfather, and imagined the circumstances of his birth to be unlucky—twins being a bad omen in nearly every culture he read about. Although until they went to school the twins were “two halves of an harmonious nature” (3), society quickly taught David that girls were lesser creatures: “...in a single day David learned not only to drop Diana’s hand but to call her all the new names of the kindergarten playground, chief of which was ‘girl,’ the generic insult from which all others stemmed” (4). Nor was David’s attitude to his sister merely a public pose. At ten, “deposed” from his mother’s sphere by his stepfather, David clung to the mythic sense of himself as a twin not for identification, but for “proof of absolute difference, to have a negative, a shadow self, a perfect inferior, available to him at all times when comparison was to his advantage, otherwise invisible” (2). The stepfather contributed to this attitude later, when he rescued David from Diana’s choking grip, and insisted to David that from then on—despite Diana’s advantage in size—he must treat her with “protective gallantry, which was the only decent manifestation of his natural superiority over her” (9). Ironically, as soon as he realized he was expected to be superior, David became terrified that he was not, and envied Diana because “[i]f you were a girl, you didn’t have to be somebody; you could be yourself” (7).

In David’s view, Diana *was* herself. While he accepted the teacher’s judgment that being left-handed was babyish, Diana “not only refused to use her right hand but refused to read aloud any story she didn’t like, and, since most stories reflected David’s [i.e., a male’s] view of the world rather than her own, she was often silent” (6). While David

could not stand to be left alone, Diana often “exiled herself, preferring her own company” (6). Later, he believed, the “self knowledge which had made her left-handed had also freed her to love Constance, had given her the direction to become a doctor, sure that her life was her life” (226). By contrast, his life seemed “fixed by accident, shaped by other people”: the accident of his father’s death left David the “man” in the family until the advent of his stepfather; when his stepfather went to war (and came back a broken man, to die long before his wife), David again took up that post; when his infant son died, his wife withdrew from him; and then his wife herself died, leaving him to help his two grown daughters and their families as best he could.

For most of his life David has used others’ expectations as an excuse for not taking full responsibility for himself. Now, retired and a widower, David feels at loose ends, with “nothing but a marginal role to play in the strife and striving of family life” (18). But when one of his daughters suggests he should remarry, he is shocked into realizing that what has always seemed protective now feels confining, that he is ready to shoulder, to whatever extent it may be possible, the burden of self-determination:

[T]hough he missed his wife and lacked her defining presence, he had no desire to hand himself over to yet another responsible keeper. He needed his freedom even when he did not know what to do with it.... He had spent his adult life not doing what he shouldn’t, being told to do what he should and doing it, occasionally with grace. Any way forward now had nothing to do with beginning again but somehow with returning to these blank destinations where as a boy he had broken himself to his life and lived it. (18-19)

Of the things he must return to, none is as important as the rift between himself and his sister.

Rule prepares us for Diana not only through what David tells us about her as a girl, but through David’s description of what she has become:

He had watched her change from a handsome, self-possessed young woman, Dr. Diana Crown, obstetrician and gynecologist, into an increasingly heavy and slow-moving middle-aged woman until now she seemed old, much older than he, having given up at her retirement the habit of expensive clothes and her hair dresser. Now she wore loose smocks with large pockets full of things, trousers and flat, loose shoes to accommodate her arthritic feet. (22)

In the second chapter of *Memory Board*, although Rule’s respect and compassion for her characters always mediates, we encounter Diana

from a point of view more nearly her own. While the importance of the past to David is obvious from the lengthy account of it in his chapter, the importance of Constance to Diana is clear from Diana's concise, rhythmic first sentence: "Diana, wakened by her absolute interior clock, touched Constance's face, and there were the dark worlds of her eyes, always the first territory of day." The quality of their relationship is further defined by the third sentence: "Waking was silent, intimate, even after all these years faintly arousing." Whereas David described the aging Diana from without, she tells us "this morning there were autumn messages in her bones," then goes on to list the medical hardware—cane, upper and lower bridges, hearing aid, glasses, pills—that now is part of her self (23). Constance, though two years older,

had all her own teeth, could hear birds sing, and only needed glasses for reading, which she had pretty well given up, and for intimate weeding of the garden which she could still do, hunkered down for minutes at a time and able to rise as swiftly and agilely as a young girl. (23-24)

But Constance too has her infirmity, her memory loss; without Diana's help, she "might forget that it was morning and be putting herself to bed again by the time Diana had finished in the bathroom" (24). Because of this Diana retired from her medical practice at sixty, exchanging the "intimate, limited, impersonal" demands of her patients for "the limitless intimacy of Constance's need" (26). To help Constance be more independent, Diana begins each morning by writing a list of the coming day's activities on a slate, making explicit even activities usually taken for granted—like eating meals. That the slate and its list also represent a limited or "prescribed" life, despite their helpfulness to Constance, is implied by Rule: "The last three items had been scribbled impatiently and had to be erased and redone. Even taking care, Diana formed letters only Constance and druggists could read" (24). Still, Diana tries to recapture some of their former light-hearted intimacy with the list, heading it with an item intended to amuse Constance: "Put on your clothes" (24).

Our understanding of Diana's character is not precisely limited to her own point of view. A subtle stylist, Rule chooses her words with great care: adjectives like "absolute" (Diana was "wakened by her absolute interior clock"), "singular," and "upright" ("Diana was reluctant to leave their bed to confront her singular upright self") prepare us to discover that, as David's son-in-law later puts it, Diana is "a pretty tough bird." The second time David comes to visit, Constance does not recognize him, and threatens him with her garden fork despite his

claims that he is Diana's twin brother. Diana rescues David from physical harm, but is unwilling to console him, responding to his hurt feelings with characteristic bluntness:

"Do you think she'll ever recognize me?"
 "Probably not," Diana said, dismissively.
 "Isn't there anything I can do?"
 "Oh, David, just accept it."
 "But I'd like her to be able to trust me," he persisted.
 "If she really did remember who you are, that might be more difficult." (57-58)

David realizes then that "[i]f there was to be a reconciliation, he had to do the work of it and offer it to her as an accomplished fact to accept or refuse" (59). While our sympathies may be with David, Rule ensures that we understand the wisdom of Diana's apparent heartlessness; after all, this is the same brother who did nothing when his wife banished Diana and Constance, and who has let others tell him what to do all his adult life.

The morning after David's first visit, he drops through Diana's mail slot a note acknowledging his presumptuousness in assuming he could "walk back into [her] life, apologize, and go on from there," and blaming himself for perhaps just wanting to clear his guilty conscience (35-36). He perceives that Diana resents his attempt "to drag this corpse of remorse into her house, stinking of adulation," and that he will have to improve on his "groveling, maudlin act" if he is to win her respect (29). In fact, after that visit a reversed rescue took place: Constance defended David to Diana, who was angry that she seemed to have no choice about whether or not to make up with her brother:

"You don't like to be forced to be as kind as you can be."
 "No," Diana said and smiled.
 "Is he dependable?"
 "I suppose so, within his limits."
 "I'd like you to have a brother, or someone of that sort."
 "Why?"
 "For when I can't any longer keep you in mind," Constance said.
 "No one else would do for that," Diana said.
 But after breakfast she went to her desk to draft an answer to her brother. (37)

The tonalities of that conversation are a blend of the gentle humour, tender intimacy, and sad awareness of their own mortality that are all part of the relations between Constance and Diana. The letter Diana drafts opens the way for David and Diana to try to discover what they

can “do and be for each other in the present,” less to re-establish their old relationship than to begin a new one, based not simply on familial ties but on *mutual need*.

Diana thinks of her need not in terms of having someone to replace her life-long companion, but in terms of having someone to share with her the emotional strain of watching the person she loves become ever more dependent. Constance’s memory is not deteriorating rapidly, but Diana is increasingly aware of how her own physical disabilities affect them both, aware that it will not be long before she will be unable to care adequately for Constance. David recognizes his sister’s need long before she admits it to him—perhaps even before she fully admits it to herself—and it strengthens his resolve to win her respect (65). Diana’s willingness to accept him depends on both of the factors Constance raised: David’s reliability, and the progression of Constance’s memory loss. Thus Diana first admits that she is learning to need David when Constance goes missing in the city (122); by the end of the novel she is willing to risk that his continual presence in the house will further confuse Constance because she sees that Constance’s ties with reality are breaking anyway, and she herself “couldn’t any longer manage without him” (309).

For David the need is not just to appease his guilty conscience, it is to make a “real life of his own” (316). He is not content with his role as father to two grown daughters and grandfather to five young people; his apartment in the basement of his own house is a metaphor for his sense of dislocation within the traditional family scheme. It is only when he goes to Borrego Springs for a holiday with Diana and Constance that this becomes clear to him:

[W]hat pleased him most, what he could not have said he wanted beforehand, was his sense of being one of three people equally engaged in the routines and pleasures of the day. He had not ever expected to get over feeling alone, only hoped gradually to be more resigned to it. But now for two weeks he was going to be one of three, and his being alone, walking along the desert road toward the town, toward the mountains, only seemed to emphasize the connectedness he felt. (225-26)

David’s sense of equality is particularly important, differing as it does from his sense in the past that he had to do what others expected of him—that he was not equal, in other words. But David’s feelings are important in still another way: he feels an equal in a relationship where the other two members are lovers. Here Rule very subtly expresses one of her truths about the nature of homosexual relationships—that the erotic aspect is but one among many—and one of her truths about

intimate relationships—that they need not be exclusive. Both of these truths come up earlier in *Memory Board* too. Before David's son-in-law has been introduced to Diana, he tells David that he wants to meet the woman who has kept Constance's fancy for forty years because "I very much doubt it's what they do or don't do in bed" (64). And quite early on in the novel, Diana recalls for Constance the years when they lived with a third woman, Jill, because Constance had not wanted to choose between her and Diana (40, 44). While that relationship had its difficulties, Jill is now Diana's "old friend" (68), and when Constance disappears it is Jill to whom Diana can turn, "full of simple gratitude that there was someone else she could trust to look for Constance without caring how great the odds against finding her had already become" (120).³

David's feelings of closeness to Constance and Diana result in part from relief at recovering or re-establishing the ties with his twin. But he has also established a relationship with Constance. At his first visit, when he burst into tears it was not his sister but Constance who "went to him, put her hand on the back of his neck and gently rubbed it," then continued to rest her eyes on him, concerned (27-28). During subsequent conversations, Constance frequently takes David's part, most openly when David mentions that he has been reading *The Body Politic* to learn something about what he calls "Diana's world." Like Rule herself, Diana bristles at the suggestion that she belongs to a separate world; but Constance responds to his openness (at least), and warns that if they are going to fight, she is on David's side (192). Now at Borrego Springs, David recognizes the nature of his feelings for Constance:

He was, he supposed, in some quite simple way in love with Constance. Perhaps he had always been. He certainly remembered the first day he had met her, the shock of her loveliness so beyond his ambition as a lover. He had also known, without articulating it to himself, that his sister was in love with Constance. When Patricia put an ugly name to it, he was stunned at first and then a little in awe of them. When he made his yearly birthday visit, he had the irrational sense that he was the one who was banished, that his ordinary life didn't qualify him for any intimacy with them. (226)

A little later he becomes even more sure of his love for Constance, and Rule expresses this in a paragraph comprised of just one sentence, a sentence which captures syntactically as it does thematically the sweep of time past and present:

How easy it was to detect Constance's young face, there like an afterimage, so that loving her, he could be aware of always having loved her, this time with her therefore a gift that seemed to him as natural as it was amazing. (232)

But David is astute enough to recognize too that his love for Constance must be expressed only in ways that will help *her*, not relieve *him*. At no time is this clearer than when she disappears during a walk the three of them take on a mountain trail near Borrego Springs. Standing not ten feet apart, David and Diana watch a hawk in the sky; they look down to find that Constance is no longer between them. When David at last finds her, she is crouched against a boulder, her eyes "blank with terror":

"Constance," he said softly, "it's David, Diana's brother."

She trembled violently.

"You're all right," he said.

He was close enough to her to take her in his arms, but he dared not touch her. She could die of fright. He could think of nothing to do but stay there beside her, murmuring reassurances until somehow his voice might push through her fear and she would recognize him. (240)

David has been badly frightened himself, both by Constance's disappearance and by a reminder of his own mortality—the heart-attack of another walker vividly recalls to him the deaths of his father and son before him. But the embrace that would reassure Constance is Diana's, not David's, and he checks his inclination to reach out for Constance, concerned more for her vulnerability than for his own needs.

After this incident David feels even more responsible for Constance. Diana tells him that Constance looked at her with similar terror (as if each in their turn were hawks) when Diana dug her out of the bombed-out rubble that buried her for forty-eight hours (and killed her mother and sister) in wartime London. David is reminded of a tribe where people would not rescue one another "because to save a person's life was to be responsible for that person from that time onward," and he feels that "having persuaded Constance that there was nothing to be frightened of, he was obliged to prove it" (242).

When David decides to live with Diana and Constance, he thinks that "[t]hough he might live the rest of his life with Constance, she would not know who he was. But whether he lived with her or not, he would love her and she would not know him" (302). David suffers from this in direct proportion to his love for Constance, as is apparent when he first visits Diana and Constance after their holiday. Diana greets him warmly:

"How long it seems to be now," she said.

The real passage of time, however, was there in Constance's eyes. She did not know who he was. David checked his hurt like a physical pain from which he must not flinch and fell back on his old comic gallantry, bowing, offering up his daffodils as he said, "I'm David, Diana's brother."

She smiled at him, but in her smile was that almost hectic brilliance of will rather than the warmth of recognition. He felt punished by it, as if he had failed in some basic duty of love. (287)

But unlike during his very first visit, when he burst into tears and had to be comforted by Constance, this time David allows himself not a moment of self-indulgent grief, reminding himself that "[h]e had always known his love for Constance had to be entirely independent of any recognition from her.... If she never knew him again, he must refuse to mind, or he would turn all his ease with both his sister and Constance into tension and sadness" (287). Rule's use of the word "independent" here is particularly significant, recalling as it does David's earlier dependence on other people, and their expectations, for guidance. It suggests that now he is truly ready for the responsibility he wants to take on, that he is not, as so often before, simply playing out a role.

When Diana invites David to live with her and Constance, she warns him that it will not be like the desert holiday, that he and Constance are likely to outlive her. She thinks that "what his living with them really meant for David was taking on a burden intolerable without love, occasionally intolerable even so" (255). Diana knows, with a part of herself at least, that there is some kind of love between Constance and David. Years ago, she had at least twice fallen in love with a young woman her brother was interested in (34). She warned him away from one who returned her feelings—one David liked because she reminded him of Diana—with the admonition that he should be "more original than to act out [their] incest taboo" (34). Now, when the three of them are leaving Borrego Springs, David's intimacy with both the women is emphasized by Constance's surprise when she hears that David has lived with them only for two weeks, because she feels "used to" him (254). Back at home, Diana relays that exchange to Jill without thinking, then hears in the answering silence that "of course Jill could still wish that, if there were to be three, she might be the third" (265). Diana passes the receiver to Constance, who tells Jill that her only news is that they are living with a man. Jill clearly directs Constance's attention to the connotations of that phrase, for Constance replies, "Nobody has to remind me of *that*, love. I'm senile, but I'm not crazy"

(266). Indeed, Constance's sexual orientation is never ambiguous, least of all to David. David feels Constance's affection is for him as a person, not as a member of his sex. When she gives him backhanded compliments, such as "You're quite good-looking, for a man," David feels he is "exempted by them rather than reduced, as he sometimes was by his sister, to a category." The difference, he thinks, is that Diana never admits prejudice as Constance candidly does (250).

While Diana clearly recognizes that Jill views David as a competitor, she herself either does not feel threatened, or feels her need of David is greater than any danger he may pose. She has, after all, decided years ago to break out of her jealousy of Constance's many loves, realizing then that "Constance had, after all, never chosen any of them over Diana, and perhaps it was time Diana believed her when she said she never would" (41). Yet Diana's sense of security about Constance's attachment to David is probably largely the result of his gender, for when she thinks about David's daughter, Laura, she "wasn't sure she Diana herself hadn't used Constance's confusion and fear as an excuse to cut her off from the long habit of diverse intimacies. Constance had, after all, got used to David, as she put it" (255).

This revelation by Diana, coming long after Laura's visit, is important too for what it shows about the reliability of Diana as a centre of consciousness: namely, that even in the sections written primarily from her point of view, she presents only part of the truth. Some of Rule's clearest indications of this are given when Diana meets a friend of her great-nephew, Richard, who has AIDS. Talking about it, "Diana was grateful that her professional training had taught her not to stiffen at anything, but far below the surface, where it couldn't be read, her guard had gone up" (269). And when Richard tries to cope with his sense that maybe somehow his illness *is* a punishment for his sexuality, Diana refuses him the comfort an honest admission of her own orientation would bring (275). Until this incident in the novel, Diana's deep-down guard has been imperceptible largely because in conversations with David, Constance supplies either her less guarded version of the truth or "non-sequiturs" behind which Diana can hide.

Nor is David an absolutely reliable centre of consciousness. In the last pages of *Memory Board*, Diana says that they "had had fewer personal talks in the three months of being under the same roof than when they were awkwardly getting to know each other over the year before" (316). Diana is afraid to discover that David might regret what he has done in moving in with her and Constance, so does not question him about his silence. It is not until Laura tells Diana that David has

not seen his other daughter, Mary, since he moved that the real reason for David's moodiness is revealed. By giving the last chapter—which begins with David moving in with Constance and Diana—to Diana, Rule has the structure of her novel both imitate and disguise David's silence.

Neither this silence, nor the gaps in David's reconstruction of the past (necessarily selective, of course) are as serious as the omissions in what he tells Diana. He does not, for instance, tell her about his love for Constance. But even more importantly, when he speaks of *The Body Politic* as describing her world, he does not admit that he himself "could feel the unthinkable." David acknowledges only to himself that "if he had had a different moral nature," he could have been the lover of a man he knew to be gay. But in keeping with his usual pattern of letting other people make the decisions about his life, David did not reveal what he felt. Peter's warmth was "indiscriminate and constant. David responded to it as passively as a plant and was nourished" (185). Thus David is preoccupied with Diana's refusal to be identified as a homosexual at least in part because of yet another of his needs to exorcise the past. David had felt this attraction to Peter in the period after his own son's death, at precisely the time Patricia inveighed against the love between Diana and Constance. His silence, then, is a double betrayal of his twin.

Although *Memory Board* has been called one of her "warm, gentle" books by Jane Rule herself, that label should not blind readers to its complexity. The shifting point of view is only one aspect of this complexity; irony adds to the complexity too, as do the numerous and varied images of confinement, with their allied themes of birth, "ownership," and trust. This novel demonstrates clearly that Rule's writing is not stylistically bland: what she calls "tonality" could undoubtedly be analysed in linguistic terms; her imagery is highly suggestive; her irony can be so subtle that it goes almost unremarked despite its powerful effect; and further work needs to be done to indicate more precisely how varying point of view contributes to the structure of her fiction.

Rule's vision as an artist deserves new and careful attention. Hers is not only not a "marginal" vision, it is not a simplistically optimistic one. In their fictional lives her characters do not always escape categorization or labelling, nor do they (or Rule) expend all their energy fighting against such strictures. Rule shows how difficult it can be to counter established conventions, particularly when these concern close relationships between people. Tradition, habit, jealousy, the

need for emotional security—her characters confront these very real forces, against which ideas are often poor ballast. What she writes about rules applies equally to her distrust of ideas: “I am very leery of any rule that is made after asking, ‘What would happen if...?’ I am on surer ground with ‘This has happened. Now what?’ ” (in “Rule Making”; *HEM* 149). In *Memory Board*, Constance believed that it would be better to live with both Diana and Jill than to have to choose between them. This non-traditional arrangement may or may not have been the cause (even in part) of Constance’s breakdown. In any case, the arrangement did not last forever, and the women do not regret their effort.

Similarly, Rule’s characters struggle with their needs—learned from and sanctioned by society—to own and/or be owned by other people. Diana learns quite early in their relationship that Constance cannot be possessed by her, and though at times she clearly finds it difficult, she relinquishes her attempts to hold Constance back from other relationships. What she discovers is that it is her attitude toward Constance’s need for freedom rather than that freedom itself which might have spoiled their relationship. When Constance’s memory becomes so unreliable that Diana must actually put locks on all the doors of the house to keep her from wandering out and losing her way again, she is crushed by Constance’s response:

“Make your own home into a looney bin in just one easy step,” Constance said brightly.

“I don’t like it either,” Diana said, “but you scared me out of my wits.”

“Is that something new?” Constance asked.

“No,” Diana admitted.

Constance turned away and did not speak again, even when she was spoken to, all through dinner.... Diana sat mortified by Constance’s implication that here was at last the excuse to lock her up as Diana had always wanted to do. How could she explain that in all the years of enduring Constance’s freedom, Diana had come not only to accept but respect it, that locking her up now was as great a defeat for Diana as it was for Constance? (127-28)

The locked doors continue to weigh on Diana’s conscience, especially since Constance tests them several times each day and each time Diana has to explain again why they are locked. But of course the locked doors are also a metaphor for the relationship that now exists between Diana and Constance. Diana has become the keeper of Constance’s short-term memory, and no matter how truthful Diana is, as Constance points out, Diana can only tell *her* version of the truth (128). The refrain that echoes throughout the book is Constance’s allusion to

this situation: " 'Never mind,' Constance said, as if to comfort Diana, 'my real prison is trusting you' " (156). But if *Memory Board* demonstrates that ownership of another human being is something generally to be shunned, Rule shows that even this principle cannot be adhered to absolutely. Diana explains to David that what makes her present relation to Constance so terrible to contemplate is the contrast between what was and what now is. Constance was never at home in the "cage" of socially-sanctioned relationships the way most people are: "She had to be free, whatever the cost. But I own her now. What else can I do?" (243). There is no easy solution to Diana's dilemma, which illustrates with painful clarity that life cannot be lived according to abstract rules—paradoxically, not even according to a rule which outlaws conventional rules.

Neither a more rigorous study of Rule's technique in this novel or in her other fiction, nor thoughtful consideration of things she has said or written in other forms, need be reductive. If criticism—which, as Forsyth described, at its sympathetic best requires the critic to engage intimately with the text—is entered into with good faith and conducted with generous responsibility, it may help to broaden appreciation for the work considered. The challenge for feminist critics is to contribute "to the creation of an interpretive community which is attuned to reading women's texts and to seeing them as part of a body of culture made up of many inter-related strands and pieces" (Forsyth 88). Today, the challenge for anyone who appreciates the work of Jane Rule is first of all to see that her texts are no longer undeservedly ignored by critics.

NOTES

1. *A Hot-Eyed Moderate* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Denys, 1986); 20. All further references are to this edition and appear in the text, abbreviated "HEM."
2. Subsequent references to Geoff Hancock's interview with Rule in *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 23 (Autumn 1976), hereafter abbreviated as "CFM," appear in the text.
3. That the relationship between Diana, Constance and Jill did not last indefinitely would not, in Rule's terms, be seen as proof that such relationships are impossible. This assertion can be only briefly explained here. In "Walking Canes" (HEM 77-79) Rule writes:

Relationships, like houses, can be outgrown or can outgrow the people involved. Like houses, they can become too small or too expensive. We aren't inclined to think of houses left behind as failures unless we were duped or used poor judgment at the time of purchase. Most relationships, entered into with good faith and lived with generous responsibility, shouldn't be considered failures if they are not life-long. (78)

Jill moved out when Constance's breakdown occurred, which seems particularly reasonable if Diana's assessment of Jill, that she was "not good at crisis, her forte a long distance intelligence, dependent on being in control" (68) is accurate.

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