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PARADISE AS PRAXIS: DANTE AND A  
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She had once accused [her husband, Guy Pringle] of considering her feelings less than those of anyone else with whom they came into contact. Surprised, he had said: "But you are myself. I don't need to consider your feelings."

Olivia Manning

If there is to be a "we", it is not one tyrannized into supposed consensus but one founded on interaction.

Robert Sheppard<sup>1</sup>

The following preliminary investigation of some of the difficulties raised by the New York poet Bruce Andrews's extremely problematic text *Lip Service* draws quite extensively on two essays by Andrews: the title essay of his book *Paradise & Method*, in which he discusses the compositional principles and procedures of this nearly 400-page-long poem, and his major but largely neglected essay on sexuality in writing, "Be Careful Now You Know Sugar Melts In Water", first published in *Temblor* in 1987<sup>2</sup>. *Lip Service* is a line-by-line reworking and "near translation" of Dante's *Paradiso*. A number of readers have found

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<sup>1</sup>Olivia Manning, *Friends and Heroes*, in *The Balkan Trilogy*, London, Mandarin, 1990, p.765; Robert Sheppard, "British Poetry and Its Discontents" in *Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s*, ed. by Bart Moorc-Gilbert and John Seed, London, Routledge, 1992, p.170.

<sup>2</sup>Not all of *Lip Service* has been published, and I am grateful to Bruce Andrews for providing me with a copy of the complete typescript. I document all references to this poem as "TS" followed by a typescript page number. *Paradise & Method: Poetics and Praxis*, Evanston, Ill., Northwestern U.P., 1996; "Be Careful Now You Know Sugar Melts in Water" is on pp. 125-133; "Paradise & Method: A Transcript" on pp. 251-170. Later in this essay I refer to Andrews's "Poetry as Explanation, Poetry as Praxis", which is on pp.49-71. All further references to these essays are documented parenthetically in my text by short title.

especially the early sections of the poem to be extremely offensive, and it is certainly true that the experience of reading Andrews's poem is remarkably unlike the experience of reading Dante's. The following brief extract, from the seventh part of the fourth section "Venus", reworks part of Dante's ninth canto.

To get more joy out of sex, specify male or female –  
 keep away from clothes, air-brush your vanity  
 obstinately persistent & oblivious to circumstances,  
 oooh oooh oooh, besame mucho  
 delay pride's quake enhances  
 public esplanade.  
 Explosive smudge that silk  
 overthrows straight seeking empties with stamina  
 I yet squander – foresworn careful, sabateurishly culling  
 a sexual diversion for the noontime meal  
 but then he said my vagina was too big, taking coke with freon.  
 Ovum aura sordid chaise – I like disturbed  
 don't hatch married women are always martyrs in a Hurry:  
 I don't feel selfish about this, this is  
 something coming together between us –  
 exasperating deporting eroticism as decision;  
 I took a shit in the bed... dream abruptly ends.  
 Oh spring attacking cushion reference rest –  
 poutless ardor, winter iron spoiler  
 barb buy warmth on margin  
 preferring the mud to the fist, become nobody  
 lye sent us, sully refrigeration open to her  
 then, her – bones her repeat the frost

superb! - (TS 125)

All those voices, with the uncertain and shifting phrasal boundaries, the disjointed syntax. And the wit, the humour, the puns. These are all highly problematic: why do we laugh (if we do), and what at, exactly? The uncertainties of phrasal boundaries profoundly disorient the reader - and what of the pronouns? The "you" and the "I" encountered so often in this poem are who? The self? men? women? Can we differentiate with any certainty?

George Oppen once said that "the plain sense of the poem is the paradise of meaning".<sup>3</sup> But there is of course, a question: what exactly might the "plain sense"

<sup>3</sup> George Oppen, "The Philosophy of the Astonished (Selections from Working Papers)", ed. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Sulfur*, 27, Fall 1990, p.212.

of a poem – or any utterance – be? What especially, might the “plain sense” of this poem be, and – and which is much more to my purpose here – what is the connection between this poem, in his hellish vision of the world in which the word “love” scarcely appears at all<sup>4</sup> and in which *no-one* is beloved, and Paradise, specifically Dante’s *Paradiso*? *Lip Service* is an extremely problematical text. Not least among the problems is that of intelligibility – “plain sense”; closely connected to it is the problem of voice. Overall, like the work collected in *Give Em Enough Rope* (1987) and *I Don’t Have Any Paper So Shut Up (or, Social Romanticism)* (1992), there is a truculent in-your-face quality to *Lip Service*, which draws on many voices to sound its disposition. The poem *contests* the protocols of readership.

If *Lip Service* is, like Dante’s *Paradiso*, a portrayal of the Beloved, then that portrayal of the Beloved is pretty horrific. One reason why the *Paradiso* informs and models this text is because – in Andrews’ words – his own poem seeks to map and contest “sense in a particular present (of ‘late capitalism’) where sexuality figures so prominently in a near-totalizing machine of social discourse” (“Be Careful” 125), and his own poem “reverberates with the romance and utopia-saturated materials” (“Paradise” 251) of Dante’s poem. The portrayal of the Beloved in *Lip Service* runs savagely counter to the myth of women and sexuality purveyed in the market place and the entertainment industry (to say nothing of the *Paradiso*), yet at the same time it clearly reflects it: by and large, women in this poem – and especially in the first five sections – are, like women in advertisements, unreflective and largely uncritical creatures whose major interests and passions revolve around cosmetics, breasts implants, sexual performance and social standing; vain, manipulative, inconstant, they seem by and large to participate more or less willingly in a life which is, by any standards, undesirable and indeed dehumanised – as the poem proceeds, its title comes among other things to suggest joyless oral sex. This paradise is a Hell in which women are more or less willingly complicit in their own damnation. It is a world of “hot narcissism” (TS 121) in which “falsies exult” (TS 124); it is a world of “mimetic emptiness” (TS 70) in which women are as scornful of their own bodies as they are callous towards the men they exploit but are dependent on, whom they despise and condemn. The explicit sexual language, the events referred to (“I took a shit in the bed”) are horrible.

So horrible, in fact, that we tend to overlook other aspects of this text. If we read the predominant voice in the poem as female, then we are obliged to reco-

<sup>4</sup>“Love” first makes its appearance in the eighth part of the second section, “Moon”, reworking a section of *Paradiso* Canto 5: “no sapphire can make of your love a seductress” (TS 54), while the opening of the third section, “Mercury” (*Paradiso* Canto 6), talks of “love’s winterization” (TS 71).

gnise three things. First, that many of these utterances suggest the extent to which the speaker is caught up in a system not of her own devising, and is in fact as much a victim as an exploiter of the system. Second, that on occasion the speaker is remarkably self-aware of her condition and position, and sees no escape from it save through sardonic and grimly comic, often sexually suggestive or even explicit, expression: "I traded my brain / for legwarmers" (TS 58); "I find that having a personal life / just keeps me home more" (TS 95); "nice guys are finished first" (TS 104) – these women have intelligence and wit: "think me ostensible, I need a good social personality / because I don't have any ideas?" (TS 58); "if I'd been a ranch – which is often / – they'd have named me Bar Nothing" (TS 124). This is very much the language of satire: "I traded my looks for my health – bad bargain" (TS 60); "Men use intimacy to get sex; Women use sex to get intimacy" (TS 136). And third, that quite often the voice is not necessarily female: on occasion it is male, quite often it is indeed completely indeterminate. Who is it that says "today Joan of Arc would get thorazine" (TS 60), "what you call reflection / I call constipation" (TS 54), or "'there are no rules' means 'women get hurt bad' " (TS 86)? Sometimes the speaker might well be an authorial third-person omniscient and genderless narrator commenting ironically on what we've just read, or simply giving us, in neutral voice, the "facts". Who, after all, tells us that "the most popular in all cosmetic surgery is breast-size increase" (TS 92), or reflects that "poverty comes more and more a women's issue" (TS 104)? Overall, the world portrayed in this version of Dante's *Paradiso* is joylessly bereft of the personal, and the poem is astonishingly difficult to take except in short doses, because it is almost unrelievedly so very disturbing. Indeed, Andrews himself has said "*I'm* upset by that material. That material makes *me* very nervous, it's very unsettling because it's about this social machinery which is horrifying [...] I have a horrific response to what I write, myself"<sup>5</sup>. It is a vision and version of Hell, and it is not exclusively gendered female – as the poem proceeds we discern that men too are trapped in and victims of this world they seem to have made; they are, perhaps, their own creatures. As Robin Blaser reminded us in his poem on Dante, "Hell" said Ezra Pound, "is *here*". How, then, can we glimpse Paradise? That is the task of the poem.

Drawing on materials he began generating in 1986, and written from 1989 to 1992, *Lip Service* is divided into what Andrews calls ten "planets" corresponding to ten "bodies" of the *Paradiso*, and each is divided into ten parts: Earth, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Fixed Stars, and Primum Mobile. The complete poem is in two large sections, the five "planets" of Part One corre-

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Andrews, Talk and discussion at the Kootenay School of Writing, Vancouver, 18 May 1990. My thanks to the Kootenay School of Writing for the loan of a tape-recording of this event.

sponding with Dante's cantos 1-13 and the five of Part Two – "a little less critical & more optimistic" than Part One ("Paradise" 252) – corresponding with cantos 13-33. In "Paradise and Method" (252-4) Andrews maintains that he is using "thematic cues" from Dante as well as "resonance" between his own materials, topics, imagery, and sound-patterns and those found in Singleton's edition of Dante<sup>6</sup>, including "cognates or so-called 'false-friend' relations with the Italian", as well as punctuation and paragraphing based "strictly on Dante's punctuation & tercet structure", but I have not correlated Andrews's text with Dante's at all, and do not discuss it here. In "Paradise and Method", written when he was about two-thirds of the way through writing *Lip Service*, Andrews outlines the great intricacy of its structure. In writing the poem he superimposed the detailed thematic outline of *Tips for Totalizers*, a projected book on poetics, not only onto the overall organization of the complete work, but also in "increasingly detailed" form onto the "internal organization" of each of its one-hundred parts, "sometimes" using the three-part breakdown of that poetics project "even to organize a fifty – or one-hundred word paragraph". The intricacy, that is to say, echoes something of the intricacy of Dante's poem, and provided him with a set of technical difficulties to work with and against.

The materials for the poem, and the compositional procedures, are another source of the poem's great and even manic energy. For several years Andrews has generated materials for his poetry by recording phrases, words, and scraps of sentences, usually though not always fragmentary samples of speech and discourse, on small cards, 1 to 20 words each. They might be what he overhears on the street or in the bus, on radio or television; they might be what he reads, in academic journals, government publications, billboards, newspapers. He files these (in chronological order) at the end of every day, and when he started the preliminary work on *Lip Service*, he sorted the thousands of cards he'd gathered during 1986, 1987, and 1988 into some sort of thematic coherence. What is worth noting here is that all these words are public utterance, overheard or read: *none* of these words or phrases is Andrews's own. Sorting them as he is up to three years after they were recorded, they have each of them lost their original context, and come from a now unidentifiable source and voice. It is very much to Andrews's purpose that voice – the origin of any given word or phrase if you like – be uncertain and multiple and hence unstable: it's almost impossible, reading *Lip Service*, to decide where any given voice comes from, who might be speaking. Gender blurs. It is equally to Andrews's purpose that these are all extracts from *utterance*, and discourse in the public rather than the private or personal

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<sup>6</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Translated, with a commentary, by Charles S. Singleton, Bollingen Series LXXX, 6 volumes, Princeton U.P., 1970-1975.

domain – this is *public speech*, public language, at varying removes from the personal. It is worth reminding ourselves here that our identity, our sense of who we are, our sense especially but not only of gender, comes very largely from the language in which we live and by which we are surrounded: we do not easily *choose* how to behave as men and women: we are defined by the institutions and practices that govern our social and linguistic lives. As Andrews was sorting his cards, one theme he pursuing was what he calls “Existential action – issues about mediation & subjectivity and relations” (“Paradise” 251) – the major thematic focus, that is to say, of *Lip Service*.

Reading the poem is a bit like listening in on the powder-room of a somewhat sleazy night club in the down-market end of town on big night out, the sort of conversation, peppered with smutty jokes, obscenity, and scorn for human tenderness and individuality, with boastfulness and derision about sexual performance and the human body, more traditionally or conventionally associated with men in country-club locker rooms than with woman as customarily viewed in public discourse, as sexual object or as Beloved. The language of the poem reads like a detritus of social, political, and commercial language in a world of “hype” (TS 52). Trade names abound (Kotex, Breck, Lavin, Camay, Hallmark), as do phrases from government publications, earnest sociological reports, newspaper advertisements, hard rock, rap records, book reviews, political economy, and above all personal conversation in a world suspicious of the personal and vulnerable, suspicious of feeling and passion. It is composed of what Barrett Watten fittingly calls a “semiotic rubble”, salvaged from one sign-system after another, which suggests two things: first, that whatever desires these speakers might be giving voice to in this world of consumer gluttony, appetite, disappointment, multimedia confusion, and (that remarkably astonishing word) cupidity, those desires are not their own, but originate in a series of manipulations – the social fabrication of a desire which the Self rejects – all too often, in this text, the sexual stimulation of the body to produce unwelcome desire. This is a world which, in creating unwanted desires, thwarts them in what Charles Bernstein has called “the congealed / syntax of forced instrumentation”.<sup>5</sup> Thwarting and frustrating interior life, then, and undermining – or at least rescripting – one’s sense of one’s identity by at the very least blurring the distinction between inner and outer, personal and public, individual and social volition.

At the same time, this semiotic rubble (and this is my second point) is in

<sup>5</sup> Barrett Watten, “The World in the Work: Toward a Psychology of Form” in *Total Syntax*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois U.P., 1985, pp. 159-160.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Bernstein, “Part Quake” in *Islet/Irritations*, New York, Jordan Davies, 1983, p. 99.

highly disrupted, discontinuous, and even incoherent (yet still offensive) language and syntax. Nothing in this text, if we take it item by item, phrase by phrase, line by line, is stable, yet overall it is thematically clear and horrific: an upside-down world where vanity and self-regard are ever-fixed, and love is flimsy in its caprice: an inversion of the mutable and immutable. Venus (or whatever) the poem may be, but nevertheless sublunary throughout. The mixing of vocabularies and discourses is extreme, and the unassignability of voice, moment to moment, unsettle the understanding as the pronouns shift.

How do we make sense, and what sort, of lines like "Oh spring attacking cushion reference rest –" (TS 125) or the radical shift of voice with the two words "*it* burns" in the sequence "a burning phallus for modern times, / pronoun burns – *it* burns – faithless freshness" (TS 124). Those shifts, those difficulties, undermine what stability the text might seem to possess, demolish and dissipate any sense we might have of unity of voice, and as a consequence work to disperse any concept we might have of coherent and stable individual human identity. Because the poem so often implicitly invites the reader to put together a paraphraseable meaning (what we might think of as plain sense) – for there are clear islands of lucidity, of clarity, in this text – the poem forces the reader both to construct possible meanings and to see how that construction itself is determined by larger social and historical forces outside the reader's control, as much as it is by one's own psychic volition.

The aim of the poem is to enable its readers to become, as Andrews has suggested, "less of an exile in our own words – the words we read by writing" ("Poetry as Praxis" 58) by undoing the language of control, the language of use and ideological manipulation, the language of definition and of promise. The first task of the poem is to undo the power of the sign which promises liberation and play but actually enthralls and limits; to undo the boundaries of legitimized content and consent.

Hence the poem reveals the essential inaccuracy, meaninglessness, arbitrariness and profound irrelevance of the sign, of the institutionalized cliché, of the word, of public and private language, of advertising, of government, of conduct, the language which defines and indeed appropriates desire by laying out an illusion of presence in a world which prizes use above felicity. The poem, with its blockages, its non-sequiturs, its very turbulence of sound and syntax matched by the horrific self-contradictions and denials its propositions make, is itself felicitous. The uneasy pleasure it affords demonstrates, as no expository writing could, how the users of this language are also its victims.

So the first task of the poem is to undo the sign, to address how reference

works in language. The second task of the poem is to address the larger context of language. How meaning arises in a social context, in the whole framework of a discourse whose assumptions are so pervasively distributed throughout our culture that we cannot easily identify them or escape from them, so deeply embedded that they are the blind spot of our vision. If Andrews's theme is that late capitalism so constructs women – and indeed men – in public as well as private discourse, then it is essential to his project that the language in the poem be not his own, but *found*, and that the poem undermine, indeed, through demonstration, any delusion we might have that our words are, in this particular moment of history, our own. If Andrews's project is to succeed, then the complete undermining of language and discourse effected by the poem will lead to the reader's rediscovery of meaning through the construction of a meaning or rather series of meanings which can then, indeed, lead to a re-inhabitation of language, a realm or discourse in which we can dwell, and find and found our lives. "Paradise", Andrews has said, is "a total repertoire of possibilities" (Paradise 268). So is language, when we live in it. The aim of the poem is to make such a repertoire available. A total repertoire, for Paradise which is also "Infinity" (Paradise 259), is outside the confines of any tight system, and the poem, by laying bare the device, seeks to undo an established order which "in sewing itself up into permanent stability sews us and our meanings up inside it" ("Poetry as Praxis" 58). *Lip Service*, then, is a Utopian project, in which reading is a form of writing, in which the difficult practice of reading, of choosing among an increasing plethora of possible meanings and holding them all at once, is a praxis of Paradise. There is no suggestion – in Dante or in Andrews – that Paradise is an easy place, either to reach or to maintain.

All of this points towards the programmatic base, the theoretical underpinnings, of the poem. Andrews is not the only so-called Language Poet to draw on and rework Dante in a quest for a poetic mode which will bring to an end our exiled condition in language, bring readers home again: one section of Ron Silliman's long serial project *The Alphabet*, for example, is called *Paradise*; Lyn Hejinian has in her critical writing come back again and again to the nature and possibility of achieving paradise through and in writing, language: one finds it a recurrent theme in the work of Susan Howe and Rosmarie Waldrop. It may very well be that such interrogations of Paradise derive, in their more or less immediate ancestry, from Ezra Pound's famous conclusion in *The Cantos*, "le paradis n'est pas artificiel". Pound was pointing, first, to the futility of believing that we have any life other than this one, and second to the actual possibility of the individual achieving, however momentarily, a sense of paradise. Moments of coherence are unstable and transitory, but they are in Pound's view nevertheless paradisaical and actual; if they manifest the transcendent, that transcendence is secular



and earthbound.

More recent writers have emphasized that the achievement of Paradise, however fleetingly, is also *linguistic*. What is important to realize about the Language Poets in this narrative is that in their investigation of Paradise and its possibility of potentiality, they are deeply suspicious of those moments of coherence, and it is very much a part of Andrews's project in *Lip Service* to *undo*, to destabilize, the authority and unity of signs, to undo any security there might be in the referentiality of words. It is a part of his project, that is to say, to negate the "plain sense" of the poem, to undo George Oppen's "paradise of meaning". Hence the extreme problematics of the poem.

To get at the reasons for this, a brief historical recapitulation may be in order. From 1978 to 1981 Bruce Andrews, with Charles Bernstein, edited *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, which in those years was a key instrument in gathering together the work of a number of writers who thereby came to see themselves in more or less formal and theorized terms as sharing that endeavour which since came to be called Language Poetry. By and large the language poets were all teenagers or attending college during the intense heightening of the Viet Nam War from 1965 on. Starting in about 1970, they seem initially to have worked and written independently of one another, but they found themselves published alongside each other in the same little magazines, or published by the same publisher, and thus declared an affinity of interest.

A significant feature of the Viet Nam War was the sanitizing language in which news was reported, and the image – and media – manipulation which apparently accompanied it. Everyone who lived through those years will remember a language in which military attacks were spoken of as "surgical strikes" and the "pacification" of a village or a district signified the violent death of everyone in it. Andrews has commented on more than one occasion that the collapse of public discourse which such language signalled to him and other Language Poets contributed in no small way to his decision not so much to become a political scientist (he is a professor of political science at Fordham University) as to specialize in American foreign policy in south-east Asia following the fall of Dienbienphu. Possibly echoing Nietzsche, these writers considered that "grammar masks a military practice"<sup>9</sup> in that the meaning of any utterance rests upon a series of unquestioned, possibly unconscious, but certainly readily accessible ideological assumptions by means of which a writer controls meaning, and hence controls the reader's response.

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<sup>9</sup> I adopt the phrasing in Steve McCaffrey, *The Black Debt*, Toronto, Nightwood, 1989, p. 102. In similar vein a line in *Lip Service* speaks of "grammar as your model for misunderstanding" (TS 71).

Such an oversimplification should not go unchallenged, but it nevertheless holds as a general truth that the language poets sought, as did many a generation of young writers before them, to retrieve and recuperate a public language which they saw as degenerate and corrupt, and to reconnect language to the actual physical, political and social experience of its users. Given the sheer opacity and apparent unreadability of much of their work, this sounds absurd, of course, but the poetry itself is no less than an attempt to regroup language practice in individual and group experience by "returning language elements to their primary meanings"<sup>10</sup> while at the same time exploring its social origin, function, and context – an ambitious undertaking indeed. The basic notion which underlies all this writing – and especially *Lip Service* – is the insistence that meaning is not produced by the writer, but by the reader, and that the task of the writer is to force the reader to produce the meaning. To write simple, straightforward "sense" in which we all come away from the poem with a clear sense of what the poem is about and what it "says" is a betrayal of the writer's social and political responsibility. It is also a violation of aesthetic principles. "The expository", says Andrews, "is hideous" ("Be Careful" 127). It is so precisely because the expository act, claiming knowledge and/or understanding the reader presumably lacks, defines the reader's desires or interests in the writer's terms.

The political and the institutional, demanding discursive, narrativized and explanatory modes of language as they do, conventionally subordinate both reader and matter to the writer, in the interests of hierarchized social and political powers, and at the same time subordinate the writer too to those hierarchized social and political powers. Reader and writer are themselves, of course, habituated to and themselves produce similarly hierarchized discourses, apprehending "intelligibility" in similar ways. The central and impossible theoretical project, then, is to find a means of escaping the bounds of one's own language and discourse. The crucial practical problem is how to teach the reader how to read without hierarchizing the author-reader relationship by asserting your own power over her or him. If reading is the production of meaning, how can you tell the reader what to do without pre-empting, usurping, the reader's means of production?

Roughly speaking, conventional (i.e. political and institutionalized) modes of language are to be avoided, since they erect discursive or narrative scaffoldings which alienate the reader from the physical immediacy of language as experience. They point to a translatable and referential content by asserting the primacy of a hierarchized ideological/political frame. Yet at the same time meaning,

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<sup>10</sup> Steve McCaffrey, "The Death of the Subject: The Implications of Counter-Communication in Recent Language-Centered Writing", *Open Letter* 3rd series, 7, Summer 1977, p.73.

no matter how or where produced, is by its very nature social (hence political), as are the acts of writing and reading; one cannot avoid the political and institutional by apparently transcending the temporal, thereby inviting the reader to contemplate the poem as an aesthetic object which turns its back on its ideological frame – to do that is to re-institute the gap between language and experience, language and the social and political context in which it exists, and is thus to legitimize in one's practice exactly the hierarchized structures of discourse one seeks to undo. Safeguarding the independence of the reader from the writer's authority and control is thus an acute formal problem.

For Andrews this problem is inextricable from the problem of Love, and of the nature and identity of the Beloved. Love, after all, impels speech and is a making possible, which is why Guy Pringle's words quoted as epigraph to this essay are so monstrous. Love cannot freeze the multiple subjectivity of the Other into uniformity and stasis. The identity of the Beloved – though inevitably perceived through and thus structured by the Lover's own eyes and desire – must be always autonomous, independent, Other. And inevitably it will be concealed if not withheld, so that the Lover and the Beloved may live in what Andrews calls an "erotic mutuality of self and other" ("Be Careful" 125), recognizing a "You, the Outside of *this* experience.

If love is a *making possible*, that is to say, then it resists definition and *refuses* possession: the Beloved is always a YOU, a not-me, and it is multiple. By the same token the world is equally a "you" – that is to say, a not-me or a not-us – for it has its own ardours and desires, its own possibilities struggling for recognition. The Beloved extends beyond the individual, and is an extension of the individual, an extension of the personal, and takes a multiplicity of forms. The Beloved is Language, Language is the Beloved; the word; words; always beyond the writer's and reader's control, always skirting and pressing the edge of the writer's desire. Language, the realm of possibles; "a total repertoire of possibilities". Paradise, and the language of the poem. Hence the poem's apparent incoherence: for the writer Andrews must not control the *reader* Andrews, nor by that token any other reader. The reader, like the language, is the Beloved, and therefore MUST remain "an Other, an Outside which is a not-us" ("Paradise" 251), autonomous, independent, Other.<sup>11</sup> The reader, too, then, takes part in, shares, this "erotic mutuality of self and other".

<sup>11</sup> This does not necessarily, of course, imply "separation". At the Kootenay School of Writing in 1990 Andrews talked of the drive in his writing to investigate "the seducing aspects of identity creation, stemming from quite pervasive social conditions" and spoke of "trying to lay out some way of mapping, of implicating, the social conditions which are constitutive of identity across the board".

For things to be otherwise – for the poem to be an exercise in “communication” where the reader comes to share the thoughts and experiences, the desires and needs and conclusion, of the writer – for the poem to be, shall we say, wholly intelligible, is to engage another sort of Utopianism altogether, the dream of tyranny. The poem which seeks to persuade the reader, to hand over a “meaning” in the sense of a paraphrasable digest which can be separated out, cashed in at the end of the reading in exchange for the knowledge-claim that “this is what the poem means”, is a closure of the possible, an imprisoning of desire in the interests of achieving “perfect communication”. It assumes that we all come to see exactly the same things in exactly the same ways, that we assume an identity and uniformity of “reality” and “perception”. The aim of such communication is to eliminate difference and to standardize desire, to catch us all up in the same web of pre-existent established order. Such communication is, indeed, the closure and elimination of desire by construing identity in terms of an achieved and uniform meaning: a form of possession in which the Beloved – Language, the Reader – is absorbed into, bound into, the Lover – the writer. In such a case we see the Disappearance of the Beloved, and the Disappearance of the Reader, who becomes a chimerical fantasy, inaccessible in her or his own identity/reality; destroyed. Or all too delusorily accessible as the Lover’s Mirror. “Language” Philippe Sollers astutely observes, “turns upon and possesses he who believed he possessed it but in fact was only one of its signs”.<sup>17</sup>

*Lip Service* is thus an attack on so-called “romantic” love, that alluring and seductive face of brutal sexism, because “romantic” love seeks to destroy the Beloved by Possession: the reader shall be subject to the writer, the subject obedient to the Author, the material of the poem utterly subservient to its Creator and User. Hence Andrews’s poem is indeed what at the Kootenay School of Writing he called a “mad-dog attack” on antifeminist practice, upon institutionalized notions of the feminine, upon institutions. It undoes Romance. And if, then, women in the poem seem dehumanized, then the poem assaults too the notions of “human” and “humanized” which lie behind that, and which produced their “dehumanized” “nature” in the first place. The poem thus shifts the ground of meaning from what perhaps can best be called a series of cultural imperatives to the very act of reading itself. Value is thus shifted from artifact to process: the voices, the play in and of language, the dialogue with the poem taking place in the reader’s consciousness, all moving toward some sort of cognition and recognition of meaning which cannot be separated from the decisions made within the writing/reading.

“Paradise”, says Andrews, “is translated as Love and as Language”

<sup>17</sup> Philippe Sollers, *Writing and the Experience of Limits*, ed. David Hayman, Trans. Philip Barnard with David Hayman, New York, Columbia U.P., 1983, p.33 [italics in the original]. I am grateful to Robin Blaser for this reference.

("Paradise" 258). Language, "an Other or an Outside which is both a not-us and a not-yet" ("Paradise" 259); language as a complex and difficult ongoing activity (a PRAXIS), most readily to be identified as "a total repertoire of possibilities": that which is to be realized, that is to say, only as a plural of potentialities, a promise or rather promises which can never come to completion or fulfilment but shift, change, illuminate, suffuse. Paradise, then, is the experience of potential, a perpetual opening up of perhaps ineluctible possibilities, fostering and furthering. It is a making possible, and the Language of Paradise – the language of the poem – is by necessity INcoherent. Paradise is, in this view of things, a rage for Disorder, though a disorder of a very specific kind. Hell may be *here*, but so too may, in its difficulties, be Paradise. The essential problem of Paradise is a problem of method. Whether *Lip Service*, with its tortured and torturing difficulties succeeds in its aims is after all necessarily up to the reader, for the task of the poem has been regrounded, outside the poet.