Lorraine York. *Rethinking Women's Collaborative Writing: Power, Difference, Property.* Toronto: UTP, 2002. Pp. 205.

This is not a book for cultural feminists. In it, Lorraine York rewords the challenge issued by Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose in *Signs* a decade ago: "Can there be a coherent theory of feminist collaboration?" Blunting its political edge by substituting "women's" for "feminist," York answers the question in the negative. She may thus avoid shipwreck on "the Scylla of essentialism," but her thesis gets marooned instead on "the Charybdis of deconstruction" (Hilda Hollis's terms) (32).

Defining collaboration as "any overt co-authorship or co-signature of a work of art," York observes that women's collaborations (like men's) exhibit a range of power dynamics and ideological positionings, with "some more hierarchical, some more liberatory and subversive" (4). She concludes that "the act of collaborating on texts does not in itself determine a specific or consistent ideological stance" (3). York thus distances herself from "women's culture" intellectuals such as Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, Mary Belenky, Marija Gimbutas, and Riane Eisler. Addressing what she calls "the fusion versus difference issue in contemporary feminism" (134), York emphasizes differences and disagreements amongst women co-authors, right down to their metaphors, from "weeding" to "puking."

Like other researchers of collaborative creativity, York challenges the "male, agonistic model of the artist" (14)—that nexus of genius, masculinity, and solitude—which locks us into a patriarchal "individual author" paradigm. There is agreement that the individualism of the cult of Shakespeare or of the Romantic artist are "closer to aberrations in the history of writing practices than transhistorical norms" (64). They note, for instance, that collective or "social" authorship is typical of public poetry—epics, folk ballads, songs of troubadours, and Native oratory.

This book's emphasis is on contemporary women co-authors, several of them Canadian, and several lesbian. York takes a run at her subject by looking at selected "collaborative predecessors" from the Renaissance forward, in France, Italy, Great Britain, and the USA. Female pairs from the past include "Michael Field" (the turn-of-the-twentieth-century aunt and niece team of Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper), who co-authored 26 plays and eight collections of poetry, and their contemporaries Somerville and Ross (cousins Edith Somerville and Violet Martin), who collaborated on novels and travel writing—continuing even after Violet's death, via séance! We learn that this pair "evolved a shared writing strategy that openly acknowledged the role of conflict in their deliberations. One of

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Edith's favoured terms of criticism was 'puke' ... as Edith bellicosely commented: 'I know you must loathe my sticking in these putrid things [love scenes] and then fighting for them.... Please goodness we will have many a tooth and naily fight next month—but don't let us combat by post; it is too wearing'' (87-88).

York is persuasive in arguing that an intense concern with "parsing the collaboration, separating out the strands of individual authorship and ownership of the work" is misguided, a kind of pointless "find-the-suture game" (89). She postulates that this preoccupation may be, in part, a result of a long-standing "anxious closeting of same-sex desire," and particularly lesbian desire. Many female pairs are subjected to what York terms "critical voyeurism" with respect to their sexual orientation.

She analyses Americans Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum's Cancer in Two Voices (1991)—journal entries and letters that comprise meditations, mourning, and a history of their loving as a Jewish lesbian couple, until Rosenblum's death at 44. She compares it with Canadians Carol Shields and Blanche Howard's epistolary novel A Celibate Season (1991)—a light bourgeois comedy of North Vancouver heterosexual marriage. Shields wrote the husband's letters and Howard the wife's. They typed then xeroxed the drafts, posted them back and forth between Vancouver and Winnipeg, marked up each other's copy in the margins, and negotiated revisions. These two examples underscore York's thesis that the idealistic notion of seamless unity in relationship is "problematic or simplistic" (110). She cites Butler and Rosenblum's summation: "We typed, interrupted, criticized, added, paced, drank coffee, laughed, then grew thoughtful, intense, or joyous with relief when just the right word or image emerged. It was a making of love" (111)—which, of course, is a far cry from puking or getting "tooth and naily."

If one accepts uncritically—but I don't know any feminists who would—the old-fashioned notion that the goal of love or partnership is "two-becomes-one-immersion," then York's emphasis on differentiation, even to the point of discord, might seem a welcome relief or healthy corrective. But in this post-9/11 world, blown apart by terrorism, suicide bombings, and all forms of family violence, do we really need more champions of the blade rather than the chalice? of conflict even in the midst of co-operation? Linguist Deborah Tannen, fingering the academy and the media, has compellingly critiqued this kind of intellectual brinksmanship in *The Argument Culture*. It seems sadly ironic that York's book, which calls for humanities faculties to end their contempt for collaborative scholarship (as if it were "cheating and sneakiness"), should ground its

rationale for co-operation on squabbling—"rifts and differences" (124). A further unexplored irony is that this book about the inside workings and personal experiences of collaboration is authored solo. When is the medium not the message?

Despite its problems and contradictions, York's study offers some fascinating insights, for example, into the production of the Canadian renga collection *Linked Alive* (1990), initiated by Ayanna Black and Dôre Michelut, who enlisted Lee Maracle and Anne-Marie Alonzo, and two men, Charles Douglas and Paul Savoie. The renga is a poem composed by several poets who typically write successive stanzas of three and of two lines, without rhyme, but with a fixed syllabic measure. The Linked Alive poets chose to operate without any formal constraints except to take an image or underlying idea from the previous entry and work it to respond "in kind." Any member could hand back a segment for reworking if no linking idea or image presented itself. The "hand-back" rule led to tension and feelings of rejection. Tension as "encounter" may be productive, but it can turn to "acrimony" and "blatantly competitive machismo," "rupture," and a "two-way battle of egos." (133). Tellingly, these terms are applied to the female-male collaboration of Michelut with Douglas. Michelut chose somewhat less violent imagery to describe her same-sex collaboration with Black: "In turn elated and appalled, I became aware that we were bound and struggling to move together as in a three-legged race" (130). Or again: "We fought.... Then we embraced.... The balance struck between us was at times comforting, at times excruciating, and there were times when only the writing kept us together" (132).

York's emphasis on a "difference-based notion of community" is best illustrated in cross-cultural collaborations, such as that of Suniti Namjoshi (Indian) and Gillian Hanscombe (Australian) in *Flesh and Paper* (1986), or of Maria Campbell (Métis) and Linda Griffiths (white Canadian) in *Jessica*, a play based on Campbell's memoir *Halfbreed* (1970), and their post-mortem which became *The Book of Jessica*, one of the most extensive accounts of cross-cultural women's collaboration, which is filled with feelings of conflict and betrayal. Differing from many other critics who consider Griffiths to have made a thoroughly reprehensible power grab, York points to the lack of recognition by white critics of Griffiths' feeling of being "undervalued and never right," and to the contrast between white concern with appropriativeness and Native rejection of ownership rules. Campbell uses the metaphor of being "stuck to each other like Siamese twins" (180), two entities, not incorporations of one by the other. But her words are double-edged: "I don't know if I'll ever stop being angry with

you, but I want to adopt you [laughing]" (182). York's "epilogue" is aptly entitled: "Giving Each Other the Gears, We Are Still Engaged."

Negative tenure and promotion decisions are evidence, according to York, of the deep suspicion with which humanities divisions of North American universities typically regard collaborative work, yet "any reader of this present study would soon be disabused of the notion that collaboration represents the easy way out" (188). Recently, however, "'collaborative' is just as trendy a label as 'interdisciplinary' in academic circles, particularly in government-sponsored academic grant councils" (183), including SSHRC. While the university recognizes and rewards scholarly merit on an individual basis, York's search of the SSHRC website produced 81 hits for "collaborative." One of its richest grant programs is the мскі, which aims "to promote collaborative research as the central mode of research activity." Consequently, her book concludes with a call for a review of tenure and promotion policies. For initiating this discussion, we owe Lorraine York a debt of gratitude, even if, in her determination neither to reduce the collaborative whole to merely the sum of its parts nor to essentialize women, she retreats from provocatively "lesbianizing authorship" to zanily herding cats.

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Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson, eds. *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader.* Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000. Pp. 332. \$15.95 paper.

For anyone who has wanted to teach something of Margaret Cavendish's prodigious output, the difficulty has always been in making selections from her vast and varied literary corpus and in securing well-edited, affordable texts. Sara Mendelson and Sylvia Bowerbank have prepared an edition—conceptualized as a "reader"—of Cavendish's writings that will solve these problems for all but the most advanced teaching needs. In little more than 300 pages, they provide the complete texts of three of Cavendish's most discussed works—A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life; The Convent of Pleasure; and The Description of the New World, Called the Blazing World—a good cross-section of material from her other writings, a number of thematically-related texts by her contemporaries (including Francis Bacon's New Atlantis), a chronology and bibliography, and an informative and engaging critical introduction. As is to be expected, the choice of