

2011 AATF BOOK CLUB

POUR DE VRAI, POUR DE FAUX

Francine D'Amour's latest collection of short stories, *Pour de vrai, pour de faux*, (Montreal: Boréal, 2009) examines a variety of modern-day and personal yet thought-provoking themes with which young adults, teachers, or parents may identify. The writer, herself a teacher of literature, explains the genesis of each story by including preambles and/or apostils to let the reader know from where the inspiration came for each *nouvelle*. With elements of autofiction, meta-reference, *mise en abyme*, and self-referential narrative, the task of the reader becomes to sort out what is fiction and what is real. Readers of D'Amour's previous novels and short story collections will recognize recurring characters, themes, and locations, yet the author kindly explains these references and sometimes reveals when she has fictionalized her own life situations.

The first story in the collection, "Le Bouchon," is well-suited to advanced high school as well as college students as D'Amour's style is *recherché* and filled with a wealth of rich vocabulary. This story will serve to introduce learners of French to the *Québécois* tradition of celebrating *le réveillon du jour de l'An* with one's extended family, complete with gifts and traditional dishes. Younger readers will relate to Jérémie, the protagonist who totes an MP3 player and Game Boy, listens to Eminem, prefers the company of his dog to that of most people, and is already planning the drinking parties that he will have when he turns eighteen. Universally recognizable is the family fight that erupts during a holiday traffic jam on the way to Grand-maman Pauline's house, yet this one leads to the untimely announcement by Jérémie's mother that she has begun the steps necessary to file for divorce.

Because the idea for this story came from a composition turned in by one of the author's own students, the reading of this story might be preceded or followed by a similar writing assignment. Whereas the story is written primarily in the third person, its apostil, "Lettre d'amour signée Gros-Jean," reads like a sequel from the point of view of Jérémie's father and is written in the first and second persons. Both parts could serve as a model for problem-based learning assignments in which students must change perspective, tone, and writing style as does D'Amour.

These first two selections give the

reader the opportunity to explore the intertextuality suggested with *Le Survenant*, Germaine Guèvremont's classic *roman de la terre*, and with *En famille*, the 2006 album by Mes Aïeux, both of which affirm city life and show the passing of time which has eroded the traditional *Québécois* attachment to agricultural traditions. D'Amour strategically mentions both texts as her characters venture from the city back to the countryside for the once-a-year event.

In "Fatouma," the reader revisits the terrorist attacks in London of July 7, 2005 from the point of view of both a *Québécoise* en route from Mauritius to Quebec via that city and a Pakistani woman whom she meets there. Because the protagonist, Geneviève Gentile, a travel writer, is reviewing her stay at the Prince Maurice Hotel in Port Louis in an article that she entitles "Une invitation au voyage" which includes the famous refrain, "tout n'est que luxe, calme et volupté," one could certainly use this reading prior to or following a unit on Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* or on a unit on la Francophonie. In the "Apostille à 'Fatouma'" D'Amour also reminds her readership that Bernadin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* takes place on that island, proposing yet another possible pedagogical application of her work.

Because of the contemporary nature of this collection and of its themes, and because the author is *Québécoise*, its readers can gain a greater understanding of the contemporary culture of our French-speaking North American neighbors all while realizing that they are not that much different from those of us here in the U.S. While each story contains a variety of geographical, literary, and historical references, each can also be used simply to teach vocabulary and conversation by stimulating students to speak and write in French about their own fears and problems.

Heather A. West
Samford University
[hawest@samford.edu]