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Amber L. Hollibaugh. *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. 278p.

Michael Kramp  
University of Northern Colorado

Amber Hollibaugh's *My Dangerous Desires* is truly a cumulative book; it represents the culminations of a life—both physical and intellectual—filled with struggle, passion, and most importantly, desires. The text brings together important prose from Hollibaugh's lengthy career in political activism, including various genres such as memoir, interview, essay, and dialogue. The majority of her recent activism revolves around the Lesbian AIDS Project in New York City, but her writing illustrates the influence of her history in earlier social movements, such as Civil Rights, Feminism, and Gay Liberation on her ideas and subsequent actions. Hollibaugh is a poignant writer who is able to expose the artifice of commonly held assumptions about sex, desire, and class; and while her book discusses the limitations of our current conceptions of sexuality and sexual identity, it deserves special recognition for its ability to reveal the realities of class in America culture and the great potential of human desire in the political arena.

In the "Foreword," Dorothy Allison recalls Hollibaugh's own desire to "speak to academics without fear" (xiii). Even though this compilation offers little of the critical apparatus of traditional scholarly writing, *My Dangerous Desires* does address important concerns of the academic community, specifically in relation to our conceptions of class, gender, and queer identity. Hollibaugh refuses to separate her personal history from her ideas and argues "that history matters, that it is one of the few tools within our grasp which we can use to reconstitute our understanding of our individual human lives and longings and our larger collective experiences" (4). Her use of personal history drives her work, and she suggests that this story of the individual allows one to express desires and create relationships with others. Hollibaugh's claim is strikingly reminiscent of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who theorize the revolutionary promise engendered by packs, or assemblages of desiring individuals. Like Deleuze and Guattari, Hollibaugh emphasizes the power of desire to incite revolutions, unite diverse people, and produce pleasure. She announces her interest "in writing about our actual, messy, passionate, imperfect, desiring lives"; and by doing so, she allows herself to imagine "the dreamed-about spheres of the possible" (7, 29).

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Hollibaugh's focus on this visionary realm of the possible, facilitated by the untidy desires she investigates, forces academics to reconsider their understandings of gender, sexuality, and class. Her writings powerfully detail the desires of gay individuals of color, sex-workers, members of the working class, and high-femme dykes; she unveils the immense capacity of these socially-muted longings to transform current academic conceptions of identity and pleasure.

Her discussions of the effects of desire on the construction of class identity are direct and honest. Although the academic community continues to struggle to enunciate the role of class in identity-formation, Hollibaugh manages to capture succinctly the importance of this social marker. She indicates that "being poor wedds itself to your essence, embeds itself in your spirit, your heart, wraps itself around the convictions you carry, around every expectation and dream you harbor" (10). Her poetic comments become quite real when she discusses such issues as the politics of the sex trade and the struggles of gays and lesbians within the labor movement. In "Sex Work Notes" she confronts the reluctance of the Feminist Movement to address women's realities in the sex trades. She recounts her own experiences in the field and argues that she and other women turned to various forms of sex labor out of financial necessity—"it always starts with just trying to get by" (182). She insists that "if sex work is work—and I maintain that it is just that, wage labor, service for a fee—then the issue of working conditions is something that a movement dedicated to the liberation of all women cannot choose to ignore" (184). Her comments underscore the immediacy of class in determining social identity, particularly for women. She treats class as a concrete feature of individuals' lives and desires that does not disappear.

She returns to her own class upbringing throughout the book to remind us of her own history and her incessant desire for cultural reform. While she illustrates the power of desire to promote social change throughout, she devotes numerous writings to her attempts to increase AIDS awareness amongst lesbians. In "Lesbianism is not a Condom," she points out that the "invisibility of lesbian risk for HIV is a classic example of the greater sexual and social invisibility we suffer in the world at large" (187). Her struggle to educate lesbians about their susceptibility to HIV leads her to encourage these women to name and proclaim their sexual desires. In a later essay she calls for a "lesbian sexual language . . . to talk openly about what we really do in bed with another women (or with a man)" (199). Hollibaugh demonstrates how dominant cultures, including heterosexual white middle-class feminism, will continue to erase lesbians and their participation in larger social crises unless we construct a way to speak freely about lesbian sexuality. Hollibaugh knows that candid discussions of lesbian desire will stimulate revo-

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lutionary changes in our conceptions of sexual politics. She wants lesbians to be knowledgeable about their risk of AIDS, but she also wants people, gay and straight alike, to announce unreservedly their sexual desires in order to make visible those identities that normative society has preferred invisible.

Hollibaugh's leadership in the Lesbian AIDS Project has enabled her to synthesize her passion for sexuality with her longing for social change. In the memoir portion of her book she admits "that every identity has its price" (16). She is not ignorant of the risks involved in enunciating one's sexual status and sexual desires; she knows this is a dangerous process, and this danger excites her. She concludes: "Before there is thought, there is sensation and desire. Always the miracle appears when there are no expectations left for its arrival. Sex has always been that way for me" (263). Her work upholds this nexus between sensory experience and intellectual activity; it urges us to consider our sexualities as a potent mechanism for exploring new ideas and possibilities—a mechanism that remains notably under-utilized in the academic community. Although these sexual desires can be dangerous and messy, they are also generative and pleasurable. Hollibaugh declares that "no gender system is natural, no system of desire organic or removed from the way culture creates human experience" (264). If this is true, her invitation for us to speak freely about our sexual passions has the potential to "create a movement willing to live the politics of sexual danger in order to create a culture of human hope" (269). And while this hope for true sexual diversity has yet to be fulfilled, Hollibaugh's work will help both academics and non-academics imagine new sexual possibilities and theorize the impact of desire on radical social change. ✨