

# line

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chirrup

cedes to the  
tringing-tringing-tringing  
of the trishe bell his  
bare feet pedal into  
oblivion

only the living  
bird-like tree descent  
not even traffic  
halts

as men do  
rush by, brush  
air, on their way to  
some other where

birds/  
sag

the res publica stays  
in place multi-  
layered

line

A Journal of Contemporary Writing  
and its Modernist Sources

number thirteen

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Word Processing Operators: Anita Mahoney, Sharon Vanderhook  
Production Assistant: Tim Hunter

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As a journal published in co-operation with The Contemporary Literature Collection, *Line* will reflect the range of the collection. Contents will be related to the line of post-1945 Canadian, American, and British writers whose work issues from, or extends, the work of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H.D., Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson.

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Correspondence Address:

*Line*  
c/o English Department  
Simon Fraser University  
Burnaby, B.C.  
V5A 1S6 Canada

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Cover: Section from Daphne Marlatt's *Penang Journal* in the Daphne Marlatt Papers, Literary Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Canada.

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#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

In this issue of *Line* we are pleased to feature a special section on Daphne Marlatt, guest edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Shirley Neuman, editorial advisors for our journal. Kamboureli and Neuman have gathered together a powerful collection of commentaries and interviews offering various approaches to Marlatt's writing and its theoretical ground. This section is highlighted by a selection of Marlatt letters and manuscripts from her papers in the National Library of Canada, as well as new writing. The focus on Marlatt is complemented by two other major pieces, Charles Olson's letters to Irving Layton in the 1950s and H.D.'s contribution to the Mass Observation project in England in the 1930s.

Smaro Kamboureli and Shirley Neuman have previously joined forces to edit *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing*, available from Longspoon/NeWest Press . . . Daphne Marlatt's novel *Ana Historic* and Lola Lemire Tostevin's latest book of poems *sophie* are available from Coach House Press . . . Frank Davey's essays *Reading Canadian Reading* and Dennis Cooley's essays *The Vernacular Muse* were both published by Turnstone Press . . . Janice Williamson's interview with Marlatt is part of a forthcoming book *Sounding the Difference: Interviews with Canadian Women Writers* . . . Lorraine Weir co-edited (with Sherrill Grace) *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text, and System* from the University of B.C. Press, and her book on Joyce's semiotics is forthcoming . . . Brenda Carr is a Ph.D. student at the University of Western Ontario . . . George Bowering's two most recent books are *Errata* from Red Deer College Press and *Imaginary Hand* from NeWest Press . . . George Stanley's poems come from a recently completed collection "San Francisco's Gone" . . . Tim Hunter's edition of the Olson letters to Irving Layton was originally a B.A. honours paper at Simon Fraser University . . . Diana Collecott, who sent her H.D. material from England, edited the special issue on H.D. from *Agenda*.

June 1989  
RM





ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY DAPHNE MARLATT

- A *Ana Historic: A Novel*. Toronto: Coach House P, 1988.  
 DI "On Distance and Identity: Ten Years Later." In *Steveston*. With photographs by Robert Minden. Edmonton: Longspoon P, 1984. 92-95.  
 FOS *Frames of a Story*. Toronto: Ryerson P, 1968.  
 FS "From Salvage." *Line 11* (Spring 1988): 41-51.  
 GTB "Given This Body: An Interview with Daphne Marlatt." By George Bowering. *Open Letter* 4th series, No. 3 (Spring 1979): 32-88.  
 HHS *How Hug a Stone*. Winnipeg: Turnstone P, 1983.  
 KW "Keep Witnessing: A Review/Interview." By George Bowering. *Open Letter* 3rd series, No. 2 (Fall 1975): 26-38.  
 LJR Letters from Daphne Marlatt to John Reeves, 1 May 1975 and 21 July 1975. Daphne Marlatt Papers, National Library of Canada.  
 LT "Long as in Time? Steveston." In *The Long Poem Anthology*. Ed. Michael Ondaatje. Toronto: Coach House P, 1979. 316-318.  
 LWS "Litter, wreckage, salvage." *Line 11* (Spring 1988): 41-46.  
 MHG "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts." *Capilano Review* 16/17 (2-3 1979): 45-95.  
 NW *Net Work: Selected Writing*. Ed. Fred Wah. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980.  
 OLS *One Life: Steveston*. CBC Radio, March 1976. Ts., Daphne Marlatt Papers, National Library of Canada.  
 R *Rings*. Vancouver: Georgia Straight Writing Supplement 3, 1971.  
 RPR Radio Play Roughs [for *One Life: Steveston*]. Daphne Marlatt Papers, National Library of Canada.  
 RR "River Run." Unpublished ms. 1988.  
 RW "Resurrection in Writing: HD." *Open Letter* 3rd series, No. 3 (late Fall 1975): 95-102.  
 S *Steveston*. With photographs by Robert Minden. 1974; rpt. Edmonton: Longspoon P, 1984.  
 SEBS "Syntax Equals the Body Structure": bpNichol, in Conversation, with Daphne Marlatt and George Bowering." *Line 6* (Fall 1985): 21-44.  
 SJ *Steveston Journal*, ts. 19 Mar 1973 - 21 Apr 1974. Daphne Marlatt Papers, National Library of Canada.  
 SR *Steveston Recollected: A Japanese-Canadian History*. Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1975.  
 SSF "Steveston. Support? Fish." *IS 14* (Summer 1973).  
 TT "There's This and This Connexion." Interview by David Arnason, Dennis Cooley and Robert Enright. *CV II 3* (1977): 28-33.  
 TTMT *Touch To My Tongue*. Edmonton: Longspoon P, 1984.  
 WM *What Matters: Writing 1968-70*. Toronto: Coach House P, 1980.  
 WOB "writing in order to be." In *Spellles: Poetry by Canadian Women*. Ed. Judith Fitzgerald. Windsor: Black Moss P, 1986. 66-67.

DAPHNE MARLATT

Correspondences: Selected Letters

[Bloomington, Indiana]  
 June 15/66.

Dear Frank -

The poems turned out fine [...] Sam's comment on the prose I read in Vancouver comes very close to the feeling of the writing (medium takes over intent) — anyhow the psychological aspect, visual-vision, concentration makes for the free-play in the 'mind's eye' of whatever drama is occurring, seen. I wrote an essay on Rimbaud's "Illuminations" as projected on an internal stage, statements in his famous Lettre du Voyant fit so well that staged (in all ways) aspect. The trick is to get rid of the ego which he doesn't do in Season in Hell, but does in the other where the image stages itself, he's it, but with that control that does close the poem (instrument & conductor).

Ah but you want to get down to technique, or ideas of (TOL, paid for the liberty of passing over that highway or bridge — yr critical comments — ah now you have yr own bridge-house!) I grant that what you say abt not passing over the value of the denotation (thing named) makes good sense — but to call it an additional bonus is cheap. There must be the exact change, value for value. It so happens that the chips & nail-polish & dirt on a used coin become part of that coin, & tho a nickel's still 5¢ it's also 3-dimensional. Some words lose their value (paper-money) thru changing times, thru over-use (like the bent coin won't work the slot-machine [...])

distant thunder & immediately the rain falls curtain-thick across the roof. I was going to say something about abstract words. more tomorrow.

OK (good morning, toll-keeper) abstract words: I was going to speak of my tendency to appreciate names for things & misunderstand (or get no realization from) names for emotional or mental processes/states, like retribution, indigence, restitution [...] I want the process always to be visible, the feeling of the state evoked — those words are only handles to refer to them quickly afterwards, as perhaps any word, but I know what guilt, or love, or fear is, having those processes continually in mind, & yet still would prefer to 'raise up' the thing loved or feared & sketch that field of energy between 'thing' and 'I' than to simply name it. That's

where Rimbaud excels in "Illuminations" — each poem presents a play of things as actors (& I is seen on that stage as merely another actor/object in the moving web of relations) — things move as things usually do not (the clock does not strike, the gems look on, the chalet rides down its rails) yet they are still these things, Realizable, not simply equations of words as in so many surreal poems.

R's not surreal in use of language, but a great re-alist — he *looks* at things until they start to move toward him. Exact change. Alliteration: words on the move. A word on the move (named thing moves across the stage) changes its relationships with other things, other aspects of the scene — the dynamics of change sketched in sound (alliteration moves into off-rhyme — echoes of position).

i.e. nothing is isolate. The element of change: even a nickel calls up 5 'coppers'. Partly why I find it so difficult to come to definitions in our discussion (valence is a nice abstract name) & distrust people including myself who don't restrict themselves to examples.

Despite theory, it turns out I think that we are pretty much in agreement (I mean that theory is easily used to defend what in a particular place does not work) — but I don't defend "globe," which is, you hit it, the weakest word, & simply used there out of imprecision as a word with limits for a sense of what had no limits & which I wasn't strong enuf at that point to admit.

I like David McFadden's Round Poems, despite the deterioration of & in the 1st one presented (weakest). The second one loses NO energy, (that's the virtue of the circle, no?) I keep rereading & each time it delights me.

Your last 'letter' (Dear George is just a formal excuse) gives a clarifying image to take off from, for which I'm grateful, & rounds off nicely what you've been talking about. I was feeling nervous & depressed wanting to concentrate on technique, wanting to finalize a sense of how the poem works, (Make Statements), & now realize that what occurs — in that garden, onstage, or wherever — is what the eye must be trained on, since it alone gives direction (to count the walls is to get lost). I still think that Fred's refusal to 'talk' is one of the most significant things you've printed in TOL [...]

[Carbon ts. of a letter from Daphne Marlatt [DM] to Frank Davey in the Daphne Marlatt Papers, National Library of Canada [NL], Box 13, f.11. Davey had corresponded with Marlatt about the valences of words, her "surrealism," and the "value of denotation" in letters written March-May 1966. TOL: *The Open Letter* in the 4th number of which Marlatt (Daphne Buckle) had published "Sixteen," "Early" and "Letter" (June 1966). Vancouver film-maker Sam Perry had written in a "Letter" in the same issue of one of his films that "the medium had overtaken (his) original intent just as Daphne points to the hand walking ahead and below the

mind to pull voices out (her prose is film script)" (14). The "content" - "technique" debate had included reference to "Illuminations" in Daphne Buckle (Marlatt)'s "letter" to *Open Letter* 2 (March 1966):6.]

Vancouver, B.C.  
July 26/69.

dear Robert,

my life it seems a series of uprootings. Surrounded here by boxes of books, no adequate light, newspapers, scales on the table from noon-time weighing (p.o. regulations). The house in chaos. On Sunday next we leave for Madison, Wisc. [...]

Yr review surprises me in its directness, for wch I'm grateful, in situ (yrs), woman-poet — that particular position. The review a reflection on a review, wch I take to be yr letter to me. "The continental sun of rational purpose": it must have been that night, under the moon, with the dampness of night, that she realized how located, finally, she was, the moon a long way off but also, in solitude (at last? w. some regret) with her. What is a woman without a man? Strangely apt, the story of Adam's rib, as if woman exists only by definition "out-of-man" (man goes off alone into space). What is a woman alone?

& what is meaning? in relationship to you (as it only can be, from yr eyes). & then there is the speaking out of anything (signature, this is what I am) wch hasn't to do w. rational purpose - that moment after flight (hers, his pursuit) simply to *be* in. That in a sense rational purpose is only the arc of the will, wch takes its own meanings, makes it, as indeed is necessary daylight, to navigate by. then there is the standing still, when things declare themselves, no one above the rest (or, only after her heart stops pounding in her ears).

Coming to terms with: "conscious manipulation of the woman who is Language." With that equation a woman-poet must be a curious thing, who writes at a remove from/on herself (voyeur). Not so. She hears the world (this planet, hers now he's gone off in moon-pursuit) speak itself, the myriad within it, in any one place — why yr stress on mothers, yes, keeping of the language, teaching names incessant introduction to the world: "celery," in all its leafage/stalk/dirt (matrix) suddenly alive in hand.

So, what I can at this time make clear, seeing yr seeing, wch can only be what I see of it - & such emphasis perhaps determined only by immediate chaos.

Well,  
Christopher's growing, he'll be 3 mos old on the day we leave. Our temporary address c/o Psychology Dept, U of Wisc, Madison.



happy for the review. Still hope to send work to you for CAT but know it won't be till we're settled —

all best,  
Daphne

[DM to Robert Creeley. Xerox of ts. in DM Papers, NL, Box 3, f. 27.]

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October 25/73

Dear David,

[...] So many loose threads of thought, so much I want to say all at once. First, I hope this reaches you by November. Had forgotten you were leaving then for North Carolina. "there's more than bodies, more pathways (tho the body is Prime)." Ok. Meant only that the body is context & as such prime, as primal as context can be in terms of the "real," that term that seduces us & that we need. Re-reading Creeley's A Day Book am struck by his insistence on context, over & over. The attention at every step & the insistence that is, always, *here*, which is where it all happens, as opposed to there. Even tho that *there* be sensed as informing or source, where we pick it up is right here in all the convolutions of this receiving set, whose very limitations must be heeded, &, if possible, seen thru. I both want to see Steveston, its material presence, & see thru it which involves seeing thru my own vision of it, my take on it. As "mine." The real vs. what's real to me. Or, how do they inter-relate? Still think the "other" is closer term to what's going on here. Hopeless, hopeless muddles of words. [...]

[DM to David Wilk, editor of *Truck* magazine, who introduced himself to DM by letter on Jan. 21, 1973 after reading *leaf / Leafs* and *Ring*. Xerox of ts. in DM Papers, NL, Box 6, f. 24.]

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[Vancouver]  
Sunday, February 22  
something like

Dear David,

[...] But have something to send you, having just finished (this my big work weekend, TIME (space) to move into the work again, Kit being at his grandparents sat-sun) what, hesitate to say is more than 1st draft, of the last word (???) for the Steveston poems, or let's say maybe the last poem, dunno, but everything coalescing towards it so that (excited still) it seems a crest. Robert having asked for some piece (a piece! impossible) to "sum up" Steveston, my sense of its place, for an exhibition of [his]

Steveston work opening in the spring in a Toronto gallery. & at the same time doing a lot of work with death dreams, which I've been having frequently lately, at the dream workshop I've been going to every week. A fantasy-trip there supplying me with (out of the fire in a strange house) a directive: "trust—trésor, rust." The tresor in the dream being unearthed in the basement in the form of rubies organic as pomegranate chips which I recognized were my own blood, having come across my self earlier laid out on a bier, white & translucent as some sort of (mexican) white stone. & having dealt with several dreams or visions locating the sea as death, my fear to enter it. its bottom containing the rusted & disintegrating hulks of boats, as, covered with silt, the riverbottom at Steveston does too. bare at low tide. & of course fish being, in Steveston terms, the treasure. Thence, winding out of the fire (as the words actually did) trust, which I now see embodies my fisherwoman friend's words, which until now I didn't know why were there, at the end of the poem, & very much trust in language, a lot of (what Duncan calls "living in the swarm of language") language float going on, wow, just now connects with a major dream, the sea full of floating corpses & my fear of swimming there, touching them, brought into contact with, exactly what I'm learning to do, trust my swimming there (in language) & the apparent dead (isolate) words metamorphosing into living relation (this is exciting!) as "I" (simply consciousness, or the field (sea!) relation occurs in—current, between electrodes, a magnetic underwater field—in *relation* those words become current, i.e. alive).

accounts for things happening like  
my trying to recall exactly what followed crev- in what I remembered was shrimp stumbling across attraper la creve catch one's death

& the  
current relating, telling the story, (i.e. the river current as that which pushes forward out to sea) which more & more I sense as one of the electrode poles, that forward line, establishing a tension, currency, with that other which is not story, not forward but returning, a kind of sub/mergence of line in word, the immediate death of the line in the word's turn, return, (not ever being a return as Stein sez but an insistence) on what is here, what doesn't move forward (as a projection out of will) but being here is here & constantly changes, as we know death does, having always confused life with death seeing life as secure somehow, as static i.e. known, what we've managed to secure here (as if the very point of here isn't always on the brink). It's amazing to me & awe'ful that it took a town & that town's actual geography to tell me, make this known. I mean it's all so incredibly present, written out in concrete terms for us to see, if we will only read it. [...]  
later

I found 2 bones washed up on the sand, tide out, drizzle, 12 tankers sitting desolate, waiting to be loaded. Looking at the bones, one that looked something like a jawbone, its outside layer eaten away by salt, the marrow cells sucked dry, I wondered who or what it had belonged to, felt a little fear, despite the poem, & realized we are so serious, that the

touch in words, in relating, between persons or any living thing, has something of play in it, delight, even in contact, that excitation, excitement (to put in movement, call forth, arouse) & how easily I forget it, calling into static categories, trying to freeze meaning (that transformational current!) when all *that* is (the freezing) is the detritus of movement (life), leaving me lonely with the bones in my hand. (enough of this defective 'us'!)

& enough of this urge to form complete philosophic wholes! I'm feeling irreverent. The cat is pussyfooting behind this letter, trying to pick up the scissors in his mouth, almost knock over by the carriage return... that explorative thing in cats, & play, so close to hunting, any relational move.

A Parisian actress, Nancy Cole, was in town this week, gave a marvellous reading of Stein's work including, tour de force, "The World is Round" acted out, little girl's voice. Really hit home how much play there is in Stein. Plus bpNichol's being here, & reading, so much verbal & other play there, *Journal* a most disturbing & magnificent prose novel, fiction but not fiction. Articulating my response to that, to the way his mind moves there, a first step to all I said on the previous page about line & return. There's so much going on in town at the moment, too much to keep up with, readings every Monday night at the Western Front, readings every Tuesday at the college, Friday night readings & listening to various readings on tape one Bob Rose has collected over the years from Buffalo, SF etc plus the opening of a new bookstore by a friend of his that's going to be good, carry a lot of stuff previously unavailable except by mail. [...]

[DM to David Wilks, xerox of ts. in DM Papers, NL, Box 6, f. 24. Robert: Robert Minden, whose photographs appeared in collaboration with Marlatt's poem *Steveston*.]

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1455 Cypress Street  
Vancouver, B.C.  
August 4, 1974

Dear Barry,

Finally, tonight, the last draft of the last draft of the last draft — it's done. I've been typing up pages & pages for you, all unknown to you.

It began with a notebook I took with me on the trip up to Prince George, a little black notebook Roy had given me, in which, on the first page, I jotted down an exchange we had on the train. The page went:

The story, she said.

Who is telling this story, I want to know how it's going to end.

She wants to know who is going to tell the story, he said.

(Who's here? there? Is anyone there? Who knows?)

Just one of those stoned jottings. Later, when we got back, I added:

The story is being told right here.

And began to continue telling it, in hospital where I'd gone for a minor operation, & then later at home, writing an account of our trip, or the story of the story, I mean of the collaboration. In the meantime, Carole was typing up the 2 versions, interleaved page by page, & I think you got a copy of it — the 2 versions that we wrote on the trip. Her type-up began with your envelope definitions, which I also used for mine, as you can see, how Dwight got called crystal. That was one of those inspired appellations. But the story I wrote was written from memory, that is I didn't re-read the collaboration til after it was all done.

The next thing was, I was giving a reading at Richard Pender & decided to finish with the story (mine that is) & wrote a page-long introduction to try to explain, or rather frame it in some intelligible way, for those who weren't there. (It suffers from being referential to those particular circumstances & characters. I can't help that. That's like saying where you are & who you're with & what you're thinking when illumination (relationship) hits is irrelevant. That's a stoned afterthought.)

I also just realized I'm now giving you the story of the story of the story. The story is what continues. . .

So anyhow, most of the people on the trip were present at the reading & it was lovely, like offering a gift. In fact, they were all present. The only person not present was you, so I resolved to type up a clean copy & send it to you. That turned out to be a huge task, since in retyping I also refocused which meant some rewriting. But I wasn't satisfied—troubled whether its referentiality to this (original) story stood or not. Read it out in Richmond to Penny Chalmers who suggested using excerpts from the collaboration, interwoven with my story. Thus 2 stories on pages facing each other, the collaboration on the left, my story on the right. And each of them can be read on their own as a separate linear account, tho the spacing on the page suggests the interweaving. I went through the collaboration choosing passages that were integral (made a story) and that were also evidence of what to me was the real story (the one nobody's written but which each of us, whoever tries to write about the trip & the story, will try to approach, always hopelessly within the limits of our own (each) versions of what that story is). Naturally my version revolved around Brian and Roy, and the collaboration finally became a way for Brian & I to write things to each other we hadn't been able to say, always in the guise of characters within the story.

*Of course* there's that interest in it for each of us there — who's who? Behind all the names, & the metamorphoses of character, who is saying what to whom? Character, I suppose, is finally what you do, includes what you say. But there is a strange way in which the story, the relating (of relations), outlasts character, is larger than. "outlasts" turned up there, but it's significant, because I think I'm talking about time. The story occurs in time, is chronological, simply in the successiveness of its telling, but the "real story" exists outside that sequence & every now & then we dimly perceive that, touch on it in some



way as if it were a hidden map of all of our touchings — and some of our lives have been in touch with each other for over 10 years. But, finally, the story if it stands stands outside the particularities of our own lives & our own names. It does for me, but I don't know if it does for anyone else. Tell me what you think. You will find yourself there too, through my eyes. But beyond that, outside of that...? Four months later, it still reverberates, that storied trip! All the way up to you, as we came.

love,  
Daphne

PS The references to a dream are to a dream I had about this trip (or one like it) almost 2 years before it happened.

[DM to Barry McKinnon. Carbon copy of ts. in DM Papers, NL, Box 5, f. 10. The letter enclosed a copy of *The Story, She Said* which began as a collaboration during a train trip which 8 writers took from Vancouver to Prince George. The occasion was a poetry festival which Barry McKinnon, in Prince George, and Gerry Gilbert organized at the College of New Caledonia. The 8 writers were DM, Carole Itter, Dwight Gardiner, Roy Kiyooka, Brian Fawcett, George Bowering, Gladys Hindmarch and Gerry Gilbert. Penny Chalmers is Penn Kemp.]

---

[1455 Cypress St.]  
Saturday, Nov 16/74

Dear Warren,

it was last night, lying in front of the fire listening to Penny Chalmers' lost & just-found tape of Dorn's reading the Gran Apacheria & notebook findings at A Space last spring, —listening to him talk more casually, again read from the notebook, such a visual orientation the strange effect of hearing him hesitate, making out his own handwriting, as if, & stumbling on the words, rolling them on the tongue, trying them out, as if, again, (can't get that as if) co-ordinates is the word that keeps coming to mind for Dorn, the coordinates of the visual-aural, reading language, reading reading, language OUT there as if each word were an intersection for what the mind can make of it, some landform out in unmapped desert & what does it signify, knowing there are animal & other intelligent trails which use that landform as landmark tho unmapped, hence unknown to us, this curiously western conditioned intelligence & Dorn always outstripping that conditioning—my as if, had to do with an image I had of him reading as of some crystal-gazer staring at forms which are only just beginning to make themselves apparent in any signifying way

(and what are the forms? are there messages coming in we are only beginning to make out? I keep getting the word transmission also

(Spicer) & thinking of Gladly [...] but, no it was Roy telling her, us, of a radio programme he'd been listening to in the studio the other night, a man who claims to be hearing voices, after doing 10 years of yoga, that come in from space, a generally-benevolent higher intelligence, whose burden it is to bear witness to that intelligence, traps vibrations (energy) in some form (sounds like Reich's orgone box) initiates to his sect can use — i.e. voices, not Voice, as in God)

but we, Roy & I, had been arguing (that's not quite the word, but a conversation w/ some thought differencing) as to whether Dorn was "shy," Roy thought you'd mentioned it in your letter, I'd forgotten yr account of his reading, went to get it & found the date, my god Sept 27, & already all that time has flowed by. loco/motive, you said. Well, assuming that the driving power has nothing to do with the ego as what usually drives the usual locomotive down any straight track, good ol' western will, etc., yes, loco— there's a child's book, Kit has it, abt a little train that has great difficulty learning it has to stay on the track, keeps jumping off to race black horses to the river, make daisy chains, etc.

& I look up, & there's the photo of Burroughs at his desk (advertising Sunday's appearance), that bony skull Kerouac described, transmitting & receiving—who knows more abt thought control? Roy just came in wanting to spell Mephistopheles. Everything coheres at some point, doing the dishes, thinking of writing you, thinking of last night's recurrence of yr letter. What's the difference between Mephistopheles & the Devil? I cd only think he's more sophisticated. Roy just read out: "yet with human & lonely brown eyes."!

So the Devil turns out to be our own image calling us back to ourselves. But what are these formless messages, these 'vibrations' we keep getting thru the grid of our own knowledge, & certain ones standing in the desert like crazy signposts gesturing: *all* meaning, every silhouette, every shadow (Don Juan), every contour of the landscape-language all previously established (brain) circuits make of everything OUT there shadowless & absolute, as if, we begin to see, thru the shadows our own forms cast, that there is some *other* ground these forms we take to be landmarks (ours) barely signify (anything) in.

I suppose that the only peculiarly American gift will be learning to be lost—unmapped country, over & over.

Well, I'm sitting here trying to figure out where all of that came from, which is ridiculous. Not writing is the same as wanting a new language,



or that's where it seems lately—some language that doesn't operate as much in nouns.[...]

love,  
Daphne

[DM to Warren Tallman. Xerox of ts. in DM Papers, NL, Box 6, f. 11. Roy: Roy Kiyooka; Gladys: Gladys Hindmarch; Kit: Christopher Marlatt, DM's son.]

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February 13/75  
1455 Cypress St.

Dear Warren,

Wonder Merchant, yourself! After all it is you crying the wares of modernist poetry in Vancouver in your own inimitable voice. It's a fine piece—the care & love evident throughout, along with a judiciousness that sets the balance right (I'm thinking of your passage on Birney — & I'm particularly moved by what you say about Gladys, articulating her silent judgements at the centre of Tish people). Happy too to see Fred, who so often seems to disappear into the hills, i.e. the background, in such discussions of Tish, given full account — “a speech so deeply musical that it sways tree thoughts, presences & impulses into the presence of the words.” I respond to that as a deep accuracy of process (that's what HAPPENS!), as I do to the statement you made of my work — “drawn to places where the city is caught up in an almost brooding dream of itself, she dreams it back awake.” To have those processes which are so internal, the process of imagination in each of us, if imagination is the right word, a kind of “tuning in,” absolutely characteristic in mode for each writer (just as yours is evident in every piece I've read, a way of moving phrase to phrase, sentence to sentence as the perceptions move), to have that articulated is both frightening (now it is externalized & that's dangerous, as, that is, seeing the glass through which you look, or seeing the landscape *through* the glass — watch out, it cracks into a million slivers) & delightful in the recognition it gives. But, despite the fear, happily, happily your criticism (& *that's* not the right word, vision?) doesn't pin any one as specimen to the wall—it's living, not glass, seeks to light up the living movements of each in language.

Only, I feel a wareness (what an incredible mis-spelling, yes, I'm wary of being a ware, or too aware as ware that is, the self made a ware: I balk at that double sense of the self as *subject* of the writing: that is, the self is *not* what is written about though it is what is written out of. Subjective insofar as it is proprioceptive & the body is ground, yes, self transmits—but not, not the subject of the writing as what is written about, not so simply, only in that one cannot ever escape self because there is no other ground, & yet seek

always what is “other” than self that frighteningly small dominion, or to use Robin's terms here, “What has been spoken is me.” I can't believe that Olson reduces to “L'état c'est moi.” Or, again, not so simply. Especially considering the historical resonance of that phrase. & even biologically the head is not the whole. And yet (& where I hear your use of it) the state can be “got” (to continue the tuning-in or radio metaphor) through “me”—that is, (given consciousness) the whole resonates through any one point.

Does this make any sense? It seems an important a crucial distinction to me, & yet I don't know if I'm able to make it clear here, or any clearer. When I turn to the syntactical model, your formula makes sense to me (i.e. self as subject of the sentence, as carrier of the action), & yet that other sense is contained too, & that's where I have trouble.

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[DM to Warren Tallman in response to his essay “Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver during the 1960s,” published in a special Tallman issue (*Godawful Streets of Vancouver*) of *Open Letter* 3rd series, No. 6 (1976/77). Carbon copy, DM Papers, NL, Box 6, f. 11. Gladys: Gladys Hindmarch; Fred: Fred Wah; Robin: Robin Blaser.]

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Friday  
Happy Valentine's Day!

[...] Spent much of the Christmas holidays doing a bibliography of all things for the Canadian Studies Foundation, which had approached Reid Gilbert who's chairman of the Humanities Division at Cap about doing a BC bibliog. He decided to focus on poetry & asked me to compile it, so I put together as complete a listing as I could of titles of poetry books published by “B.C. poets” (that was hard to define) 1970-75. Some 260 entries not counting anthologies & little magazines, which I also covered. Though hopeless to feel that it's exhaustive since there must be so many unconscious omissions. Tried to include all I could of Cotinneh books, for instance, Barry's New Caledonia, Granny Soot, etc. not to mention all the Vancouver little presses. Strange to do something quantitative instead of qualitative—mapping out the terrain, I guess.

I'm still re-editing the original Steveston handbook/sourcebook based on the Japanese interviews Maya did down there for the Oral History people at the provincial archives. I don't suppose I'll get into any new writing until I get all these things finished. I tell myself that, anyhow, but still feel rootless without that sense of work by which to “see” — all this phenomena. [...]

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[DM to Warren Tallman, carbon copy in DM Papers, NL, Box 6, f. 11. Cap: Capilano College; Maya: Maya Koizumi, who did the original interviews in Japanese for the oral history *Steveston Recollected*: A

[1455 Cypress St.]  
Easter Sunday '75

Dear Warren,

[...] Which is all to say that I disagree with your opposition of our work in your last letter. I feel close to Robin just here, in what you call his metaphysics. I recognize a solitary consciousness that does not hide its solitude, that speaks out of it & addresses itself to the problem of the 'public', to language, to all that joins us to each other. I respect him immensely for this, for the integrity of this consciousness that continues to face its solitude. The solitude that most of us do everything we can to hide from ourselves, from the pain of, to evade by clinging to others, or joining a movement, or promoting 'action' especially collective action that might somehow obliterate it. Paradoxically, I know little of the private or personal Robin & somehow feel reluctant to know more. Perhaps the respect gets in the way. [...]

Warren, the self as subject thing is clear to me, especially with your "the subject of a sentence...surely means that which is under consideration"—no, that turns on me again. Is clear with "subject of the state," i.e. subject of the king. (isn't that the normal phrase? I mean, in a democracy we aren't subjects, government "by the people" etc.) No, what confused me is that, going back to grammar, if the subject is that which is under consideration, but it isn't self, it's everything beyond self, as it is transmitted by or through self (Olson & Gloucester again). Grammar: this is how I'd thought of it anyhow—simple sentence like "I (or he) kick(s) the ball," so I (he) is that ego that carries the action—it's the confusion of subject & topic, that's what it is. *Sub* does mean "under" & I get that. But the subject of the sentence is also, more broadly, what the sentence is about & if it's about self it's not interesting—what is interesting (the damn linearity of English) is the kicked ball, the kicking, the impact of ball kicked rising back through the self into consciousness which, at the crisis moment of kicking (let's assume the context of a football game) registers "ball! kicked!" (goal in itself, or "object" of the whole ballgame)—kinetics! Forgive me, Warren, I got carried away with playing (language). I think my only point is, that to emphasize the syllabic etymological emphasis on 'sub' you need to underline that part of 'subject' just to prevent people making the broader subject/topic confusion that I made. Sentence to paragraph. Teaching English is dangerous. Isn't it curious that traditional grammar puts so much stress on the subject when it actually means that thing that is put under (subject *to* — death), put under the action of the sentence, verb (Fenollosa) as prime—which is how we, as subject to the authority of the state, for instance, we as citizens get obscured by the endless & infinite act of governing

(bureaucracy!), & do become subjects of the state, owned as it were, our power limited there.

I suppose self after all is a sort of transparency, it's a frame like the edges of one's field of vision, it's a way of locating where the action stops. Otherwise that kick would resonate through the whole universe. (& maybe, given some other vantage on time, we'd see that it does, like a time exposure at night of traffic. Which is not even a good simile, except perhaps from the street's point of view. Well, everything, every category would change, subject, object & action. Moving into a new language.)

Enough! My capacity for 'metaphysics' is limited by my needing always to return to the body, to sensation (the street simile arose, believe it or not, out of remembering what it felt like to give birth, something "like" a kick resonating through the whole universe, at least the closest I'll come to it as "I") & that's where your observations are right on, Warren. After all, it's what everything comes through—the sweetness (relief) & power of those lines of Allen Ginsberg's "I always wanted, / to return / to the body / where I was born." [...]

love,  
Daphne

[DM to Warren Tallman, carbon copy of ts. in DM Papers, NL, Box 6, f. 11.  
Robin: Robin Blaser.]

[1455 Cypress St.]  
August 2, 1975

Dear Penny,

so much, so much has happened since I saw you, including my mother's dying suddenly just around the time you wrote your last letter to me. Basically, everything is the same & yet my head has been subtly altered, & I'm still turning it over, trying to feel out what/where I'm going, how much of it is going with me, etc. I've begun to seriously work on the HD & that seems to move with it. We went to the Kootenays for a week, camping with Fred & Pauline & Erika (who got on marvellously with Kit, they spent hours together playing out a fantasy trip with her Fisher-Price camper—Jennifer was away at camp) & I finished Trilogy there, making notes, & got halfway through Tribute to Freud again, the Writing on the Wall sequence. Then we got back here only to be caught up in the usual incredible round (there are some dozen people in the house right now) & I'm feeling resentful that HD's been pushed into the background again, but hope to somehow snatch a clear week when I get back (I'm leaving tomorrow for Inuvik) to work on it, despite pressure from Pierre to get down to retranslating the poetry for the Quebec issue (the translations we got were on the whole awful—no attempt to move the



poem over into a whole new language equally viable as the original.  
Anyhow, anyhow—how *are* you? [...]

Daphne

[DM to Penny Chalmers (Kemp), ts. in possession of Penn Kemp. *Is*: a little magazine which Kemp was editing. Fred and Pauline: Fred Wah and Pauline Butling; Erika, Jennifer: their children; Kit: Marlatt's son; Pierre: Pierre Coupey; Quebec Issue: a planned special issue of *The Capilano Review*. Marlatt was working on a "review" of H.D.'s *Trilogy* and *Tribute to Freud*, published as "Resurrection in Writing: HD" in *Open Letter*, 3rd Series, No. 3 (Late Fall 1975): 95-102.]

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[1455 Cypress St.]  
August 13/75

Dear Penny,

I actually have (have!) something for you, for the mag, tho I don't know what to think of it (don't know if you will either). But it's the only thing not occasional written since Steveston, & really worked at. Some sort of peculiar hybrid, utterly necessary at the time. & I think (after severe pruning just given) what it says still holds. Anyway, I'm curious to know what *you* think of it, whether you want to use it, etc.

God, you're amazing—you see, your plans for the summer continue *despite* hospital traumas, look at all the work you're doing! Your letter was wonderful, all the off the cuff HD notes, comments. Of course you read your concerns into her, just as much as I do. I can't think in terms of the Other with her, I'm thinking of a process & I guess what it comes down to is nothing less than resurrection. I'm still fumbling with it & don't want to get too much into it here (the energy should go into the piece itself) but I'm a little shy with it because I also dimly feel what I have to say about it has to do with my mother's death, or that this is the closest I will come to opening that. Which is why, probably, I don't feel like doing a collaboration with it, at least not right now. Want to get at, get out what I have to say about her first. Certainly feel tho, that her vision in *Trilogy* is lifted above the personal by the pressure of the war & a sense of writing for those she calls her "companions in the mystery," "we nameless initiates." That she is revealing an infinity (in process) for all those torn by the war, the temporal. I'm using *Tribute to Freud* (that's tribute believe it or not!) conjunctly, since "Writing on the Wall" was done the same year as "Tribute to the Angels" & "The Flowering of the Rod." Myth time & the present, always, always these two to put in relation, & HOW she does it, wow, how to get my fingers (words) on that.

Why don't *you* tell me what you mean by defining the "feminine vision" (is there such a thing?) as subjective? Creeley's pretty subjective. So's Duncan, on a different order. So's Newlove. I must be feeling argumentative tonight. Certainly feeling my solitude, both Roy & Kit away. Had hoped to get a lot done this week (done? nothing ever seems done in that sense, finished with) but find myself struggling against a lassitude. Sure don't want to get back to the college, (it's started already, meetings, etc.) tho I'm looking forward to teaching the poetry course again (just WB, EP, WCW & Olson—lots of heavy reading for me!) Still don't seem to have got over the cold I brought down from Inuvik (nightmare\* of a reading tour: came down with laryngitis in Hay River—all of which is a long story, funny, I'm tired of telling, but I did read, & the North! & how mixed my feelings, & how come I can't seem to get my feelings/thoughts straight lately? I KNOW I haven't worked out everything about my mother, keep moving in & out of it, no real grief, just very peculiar sensations, the complexity of her life, of her death even, & where is she in me, *that* I still haven't sorted out, origins (imagination! instinct! passion! terror! insanity!), all my own fears. If you run into a spare guiding grandmother-spirit, would you pass her on? [...]

love — & glad you're more mobile  
—  
& forgive the fractured tone of  
this missive  
Daphne.

[DM to Penny Chalmers (Kemp), ts. in possession of Penny Kemp. College: Capilano College. \*Marlatt has hand-written in the margin: "not that the tour was a nightmare—mixed, exhilarating & exhausting. Loved the tundra. Saw the arctic coast, flew over it."]

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[648 Keefer St.]  
Tuesday, September 2/75

Dear Penny,

THREE long & thought-full letters to respond to (trilogy of you), & I can hardly keep up with the energy bombarding me off those mistyped pages, faint ink, faint ink of your handwritten notes, fainter pencil, a tenuousness the movement of thought/syntax *belies*, pushing through its own associational extensions & then you shining thru, some wry comment, some outloud laugh. Ah Penny you're *full* of it the mad energy exciting to hear.

(Roy just walked in the front door with 2 jars of coffee, 2 or 3 at his studio, the ways we all use differently & me? I get stoned on what doesn't always come thru, something from the "other



side" (your phrase re Hermetic Def. notes), some strange hotel of dream, the presences that rustle thru my solitude alarming me, a soft ebb & flow—I'm now in the ebb (with the waning moon) & feel that discrepancy in writing you.

So to answer your last question first: yes, I'm moving on, inevitably into school (which begins next week), Yeats (reading his plays for the first time, "The Dreaming of the Bones," "At the Hawk's Well" etc., those out of Noh.), working my way through the [...] Chamberland of the Quebec poetry we've got, wondering how come Paul Chamberland who I read (badly no doubt) in French in Guy Silvestre's anthology, isn't represented, having loved those pieces in Silvestre, his feel for the land, ground of socialism, a sensitivity not imposing but moving through the real material of those connections [...]

& meanwhile, & how echoes keep coming back to me, reading/decoding/ revealing what Robin has to say of Jack Spicer's work in that incredible essay "The Practice of Outside" (*Collected Books of J.S.* now finally out from Black Sparrow, have you seen it) I'm still not even halfway thru. & somewhere back of this my reawakened interest in shamanism via Tedlock, & my god, Penny, how does all this fit together?

The question Robin takes up is a vital one, the closing of language & how to open it, how to break open its public closure or fixing. "It is within language that the world speaks to us with a voice that is not our own." How Jack worked to remove ego/I from the composition so that something other than self, what Robin calls sometimes "unknown" could enter. Which connects with what you're moving through with HD, what so many of your notes point to, as reminders, pointers to yourself. /what you say about meditation, about the object, the other. /what I keep revolving about in *Trilogy* (& why, tho I haven't had the time to re-read *Hermetic Definition*) your note to the effect that she was seeking to define *herself* surprises me)—that that may be necessary but is anterior to the work, like trying to define feminine-consciousness, is just not very interesting, because the work seeks to trace out the shape of something that self is inside of, threatened by (even negated by, like all the power of that Thunder God entering the solitary figure dancing on a mountain top, "crying for a vision") & at the same time figured thru (emblems, emblems, HD knows this). Robin again: "poetry is primary thought before it is vision, fiction or transcendence." There's something tremendously exciting about that statement & it reminds me of that quality of suspense (over the "edge," into the possibility of *not* articulating it at all, of losing it completely—something to do with "narration" in the sense Robin uses it, & I think Olson) that particularly marks "Tribute to the Angels," & "The Flowering of the Rod" where, in the last, 31, 32, 33 move so far out into connections that seem at first impossible to span I kept wondering whether she was going to lose it & of course she doesn't, she brings it up *thru* those connections, which fall into place as if they had been *planned* (Jung's synchronicity?) when it's that range operating to place them all

concentrically & in depth around that single speck, f flaw, grain revealed, not the speck itself, but the connections. And even those connections only approximate what is essentially and at the same time *unconnected* (tho HD won't go as far as Spicer here, not anywhere near), or, to use another duality, what is shadowed forth in the light of that flaw, in the light of language, is essentially unutterable, unseeable, in the sense of that "glimpse of the invisible" Kaspar is given. And how, how do you bring that up, out in language & still remain true to its unutterable quality, i.e. without fixing it?

And I suppose that's why we have a symbology, a magic, a series of remedies that operate elliptically. And that all of these can be closed systems & must continually be exploded open if they are to still "speak" to us. [...]

your focus on ceremony & ritual in light of shamanism etc. "Method of conjuring the vision." Yes, go on with that because it will continue our dialogue: I'm less interested in the conjuring and more in the uttering, as you can see. the outering. No longer "what comes through, walking" but "what comes through, speaking," or "what comes through speaking". & if it's a vision, that is a gift, or a terrible visitation.

i.e. re your Jung quote, he assumes psyche with all its collective "immeasurable duration" is "part of the human species". Spicer for instance goes for something non-human or outsideofhuman & I see *now* what the Spicer-Tedlock connection is for me, yes, that the powers are *not* necessarily human & that, yes! believing they are dooms us to an anthropocentric cosmos, with all its ignorance of Earth, earth.

I want to answer your letters! & this keeps continuing. All right, specifics re news, etc. You're really moving into mags., 1st the West Coast issue how this new series at A Space, marvellous. The HD idea sounds interesting but let's not channel it there for now, let's see what happens. But yes, I would like to see what Maxine's take & Lindy's take would be. I just don't want to limit our own idea transmission—limit, in that funny sense of it's being published, publishable always is. The central thing seems to me to be *your* working with HD—so far this exchange of letters, writings has been marvellous but who knows where I'll go from here if anywhere now school's beginning & all that complex of concerns. But I'd love to be kept posted on where your ideas are going with her work & if you want to continue using me as a sounding board I'd be pleased. [...]

love,  
Daphne

[DM to Penny Chalmers (Kemp), ts. in possession of Penny Kemp. Robin: Robin Blaser; Tedlock: Dennis Tedlock, who writes about Amerindian oral traditions; Jung quote: in a letter of 26 August 1975, Kemp had quoted Carl Jung, "the unconscious psyche [...] is part of the human species just as much as the body, which is also individually ephemeral, yet collectively of immeasurable duration"; Maxine and Lindy: Maxine Gadd, writer, and

Lindy Hough, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, whom Kemp had proposed as contributors for a special issue on HD which, she had suggested, she and DM might edit for the "series of mags at A SPACE" with which she was connected.]

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[648 Keefer St.]  
August 11/79

Dear Frank,

wow, when you resume correspondence, say "human relations," you do, you do connect! Just re-read "The Arches" & it's powerful, it says about your father what i haven't been able to say about mine yet, tho i've felt it. Been too — that was an l i just wiped out, accidentally made by a finger resting on the key as i thought "not busy, but that's not the word" — so tool came out, ok, & that's the leadin to generative, him, the father. but i was going to say i've been coming to some slow, o it takes so long, meeting with my mother in that way, but i know the hole in my Penang writing centers in what i haven't been able to say about my father. Do we always need to do that with our parents? seeing either one or the other as the rule-maker & the other as generatively lawless & victimized by the rule-maker?

"The Arches" does crystallize how your mother & father appear throughout War Poems. Women as the rule-makers of the household, in the right. Father as often wrong (that lovely anecdote about the hydrangea), but generative (finding the shoots), humbly, no that's it but not it, persisting to be, alive. More dreamer he, singing about her arches. (& the honeysuckle *was* there, but it must have gone for her, & where? why?) [...]

Anyhow, i started out to tell you that i was recognizing how much we have in common all the way through that interview (& i hadn't before, or rather our history stood in the way of my remembering) & then to read how you'd gone to Vancouver Poems was a remarkable exchange. Sure there are differences too, but i always thought they were more!

It's late, cars are swishing by in the rain on Hastings street, almost midnight, they're getting fewer & farther between. First rain in weeks & weeks. Laying the dust, a smeary sound as they go by.

I've talked about my switch to the long line in the statement for Mike's Long Poem Anthology. But i'll see, when it's out, if i've anything more to add. Not sure i can pull together "a retrospective of the notation goals in each of (my) books" but i'll think about it.

& for the umpteenth time: will OL exchange with periodics? Paul would like to see the mag more regularly & i'd like to keep you posted on periodics anyhow? Sending exchange copy of #5 by separate mail.

best, as ever

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[DM to Frank Davey, xerox of ts. in DM Papers, NL, Box 3, f. 30. The interview referred to is with George Bowering, titled "Given This Body" and appeared in an *Open Letter* special issue on *Three Vancouver Writers*, 4th series, No. 3 (Spring 1979). Davey had written to Marlatt 5 July 1979, asking her to contribute something about the long line in *Stepeston* to an upcoming "notation" issue of *Open Letter*. He had included a copy of "The Arches" with an earlier letter. Mike: Michael Ondaatje; Paul: Paul de Barros, with whom Marlatt was editing *periodics*, a little magazine devoted to new prose writing.]

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648 Keefer St.  
Vancouver V6A 1Y4  
October 22/81

Dear Barbara,

i flew home with my head buzzing! it was a wonderful conference, especially for the access it gave on what is going on in Quebec. i think most of us anglophone Canadian writers/critics were so impressed with the developed focus of that work that we failed to look at what is really going on on our side of the, our side rather straggly, field. as if with such a brilliant moon shining so articulately (& i love it, love what Nicole Brossard & Louky Bersianik are doing), but still that somehow under the full beam of all of it we receded into inarticulate shadow. i wish i'd had more presence of mind to say more about conditions as i feel them: that silence of the wilderness, yes, but also the redneck attitude towards culture that a frontier has, how anything articulated beyond & against that is a small victory, whether written by men or women — that a male poet in this society is enough of a perversion, & attacked as such, that us women poets *have* felt a comradeship there, despite the [gender] differences. of course it's double-edged, of course it's even harder for women to get out from under the conventional woman's role in such a society, but in Vancouver, which has so recently been a small town with a small town's suspicion of anything cultural as non-productive, the women & men have fought together against that attitude & women's presence has been strongly felt, if not in the Tish group, though there as it were behind the print, but certainly in the Blew Ointment-Intermedia group. (& weren't women strong in the group around Alan Crawley & the original CV? somebody ought to do a history of women's influence & writing in Western Canada, recent as it is.) but perhaps more importantly we've felt the struggle as one of developing regional identities, i mean



we've worked with men in this struggle together — which is what feminist writing in Quebec developed out of, isn't it? first of all the Quebecois struggle.

feminist writing in

English in Canada has been largely sociological & referential, hasn't involved much experimentation with language or structure (at least in poetry — that's not so true in fiction which has Audrey Thomas, Sharon Riis), the experimentation in poetry has been initiated by men, the Tish group in the West & the Four Horsemen, particularly Nichol & McCaffery, as well as Victor Coleman at CHP, in Ontario. their struggle to be heard is pretty much won, at least in certain quarters, & they're in danger of becoming the new establishment. i've been part of all that, in fact those men, along with Michael Ondaatje, have given me most encouragement & support over the years. which isn't something a feminist conference is likely to understand, but i think most women writers in English Canada have been isolated from each other & have found their encouragement & support coming from men writers — i think of the isolation of Phyllis Webb, Margaret Avison, Gwen MacEwen (? i've never even seen her). but things are changing & maybe we're at a crucial point in that change — a conference like this one, *Fireweed, A Room of One's Own* with their recent Quebec issues (recent, the last 3 years?). yesterday a copy of CHP's first catalogue of women's writing arrived in the mail. on the way back downtown on Saturday evening, i was talking to Kathy Mezei & Ann Mandel about the need for a cross-Canada feminist magazine, one that would publish theoretical & critical articles like those we heard at the conference, as well as poetry & new writing by both Quebec & English-Can. women writers, as a regular practice, not just in special issues. i'd like to see a magazine with the intellectual rigour of the Quebecoise writers. it could be very exciting, but of course there are the usual organizational problems: how could it be funded? where should it be based? who would do it? perhaps you know of something like that already beginning, Barbara? i'd sure like to see more of a continuing dialogue with people like Nicole & Louky & Louise Cotnoir.

i was also looking forward to meeting Marian Engel & was sorry she wasn't there. [...]

[DM to Barbara Godard, xerox copy of ts. in DM papers, NL, Box 4, f. 18. The conference was the "Dialogue" conference held at York University, Oct. 16-17, 1981. CV: *Contemporary Verse*; CHP: Coach House Press. The magazine proposed here became *Tessera*.]

648 Keefer St.  
Vancouver V6A 1Y4  
Dec 4/81

Dear Barbara,

many thanks for the cheques & for the copy of your article on *The Double Hook*. curiously (only these things are never "just coincidence") i was teaching that book when your letter arrived & i'd already found a reference to your article but hadn't tracked it down. the timing couldn't have been better. i like your treatment of the novel & the way you put it in historical perspective. i don't know that i entirely agree with Cixous' & your judgement that "women have been alienated from writing." from Literature, the practice of it as profession, yes. but not from writing, especially when you look at all the women who've faithfully & tenaciously kept journals or diaries over the years (do you know that marvellous little anthology *Revelations: Diaries of Women*, ed. by Moffat & Painter?) in fact i think this kind of writing has been crucial to women as a necessary mode of self-definition, as the practice of consciousness *against* the mindlessness of most "women's work (is never done)," or "against" the lack of any affirmative & real image of themselves in a Literature dominated by male consciousness & property values. a Literature & *Life* so dominated (i'm still thinking of *Revelations*) & that much Literature written by women rises out of the seed-bed of that kind of writing (Woolf, Richardson par excellence). it was Kathy Acker who turned me on to *Revelations* & she's a contemporary example.

anyhow, all this would be fun to discuss in a feminist magazine where others could throw in their comments too. besides which, your article exhibits all the intelligence & vision i'd like to see as the hallmark of such a magazine.

so you can see i'm still sold on the idea of doing one, a bi-lingual one because i think continuing the dialogue with the Quebec writers would only hasten our (anglophone) development. actually such a magazine could incorporate your idea of a feminist version of something like the TRG as a regular feature. i don't think it would need to come out more than twice a year in the beginning, but the advantage of it, of a *continuing* phenomenon rather than a series of special issues in other mags, is that there's a single accessible place where the dialogue can continue, where people can write in objecting to or supporting ideas expressed in previous issues, where the conversation can listen to itself.

all of which still leaves the beginning problem of funding, of finding someone with time & energy to be managing editor (i envision a group of contributing editors from all across the country). Kathy Mezei writes from Montreal that she's been talking to France Theoret, Gail Scott, Nicole Brossard & others who all seem interested in the idea. i keep thinking isn't there some vital Women's Studies Program somewhere with a strong literary bent that might take it on? isn't Mair Verthuy the head of some such program? at Concordia or where? what would she think of such an

idea? (i loved her defence of women's schools based on her own experience). Sandy (Frances) Duncan of the Writer's Union here, to whom i also mentioned this idea, suggested the magazine should be based in New Brunswick or Winnipeg where there's already a strong French factor & where it might be easier to get funding for bi-lingual projects than in Quebec. do you know anyone who might be interested in pursuing this?

(later, after driving Kit to the doctor, attending Pulp's publishing party, paying my rent, cooking dinner, driving the kids to a local bowling alley — in short, the day erupted in the midst of this, & in the midst of rain, wind, how it storms these days. [...])

all best,  
Daphne.

[DM to Barbara Godard, xerox of ts. in DM papers, NL, Box 4, f. 18. TRG: Toronto Research Group who published reports from time to time in *Open Letter*. Mair Verthuy was head of Concordia's Simone de Beauvoir Institute. Pulp: Pulp Press.]

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Chestnut Street  
Winnipeg Sept 1st '82

hello hello hello HELLO darling Bet —  
just wanted to say hello [...] can't go for more than a couple of days without some contact with you. just figured we talked on Monday & i'm already looking for your next letter [...]

this is the kind of letter an 18 year old might write. i feel ridiculously young with you. (& here i've begun writing this draft of the novel with a middleaged narrator who keeps talking about being middleaged! well i should'n't say keeps — i've only done 2 1/2 pages.)

Cocteau, i just remembered & looked it up, has a fine passage about his "interminable" childhood & his mother being "a lively old child. She recognized me, but *her* childhood situated me in *mine*, without, of course, the two childhoods coinciding. An old little girl, surrounded by her little girl's acts, questioned an old little boy about his school, told him to be a good boy the next day." isn't that marvellous? perhaps it's only as i recover my childhood i can understand my mother's "old little girl." & you? does it make any sense when applied to your mother?

the problem of keeping the old little girl alive in the midst of all the responsibilities of the young old woman!

[...]

it's been raining here this morning & i wonder if it's raining there. are you still eating breakfast out on the bench with Sam padding around, Minouse looking up through the planks of the bench, Tux whisking by? & how is the new member of your menagerie? [...] as for here i've learned that J.'s ginger cat is, predictably, named Ginger (i was disappointed in her) & that J. lives such strange hours because she sells Avon products at night [...] J. leaves copies of the National Enquirer in the bathroom, open at bizarre articles like the one about the woman who's looked after her diabetic daughter who's been in a coma for 13 years & has to be fed through a tube in her stomach every 2 hours or else she'll die. this woman has 14 alarm clocks, 12 of which she sets to go off every 2 hours & she's lived like this for 13 years! the miracle of a mother's unending love the article was headlined. last night J. also left a large alarm clock ticking by the bath.  
i haven't figured out what this means yet.

[...] thank you for the red leaves — i'm so glad for any colour to put on my walls. red pileated yourself. saw my first red leaves in the distance today but i can't believe summer's over already although it's still cool & changeable, one minute i note the sky is blue, not a cloud to be seen from the window & twenty minutes later it's thunder & lightning & a heavy downpour. reminds me of Indiana. your observations about this being like the midwest (your journal notes) were accurate, especially the way you described the men & the women. i've had that feeling about the women too, searching faces on the street & feeling them so hidden or dispirited. it's the young men (on their bikes) who have all the life. the charge from their machines.

[...] loved that detail [in your letter] from Jean Houston's talk about how much language we're losing. 7,500 words in the last 80 years! what erosion — the glaciers our tongues have become! how much is this the result of a mass subscribing to pop language, current lingo? like everything's cool or terrific or excellent for years at a time. there must have been much greater variation in pop dialects from region to region before television, & the mutual enrichment of speakers moving from fringe to fringe, like peddlers at medieval fairs bartering language instead of goods. i still remember being excited in the late 50's, early 60's when i heard jazz lingo for the first time.

[DM to Betsy Warland, transcript provided by Marlatt, who was in Winnipeg for a half-year appointment as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Manitoba. Jean Cocteau: *Professional Secrets*.]



Chestnut St.  
Winnipeg Sept 5/82

Dearest Bet,

it's Sunday morning & sunny & i've been thinking, my mind going off on a score of different tangents. has thought begun to move into the painful "absence of (your) presence"? i was rereading your article [in *Broadside*] on the feminist culture conference in Montreal. it's dense with thought — i like your style of reporting, quick, packed, & close to the bone (if you'll forgive those mixed metaphors!) [...]

flipping at breakfast from the Borges quote in Talbot's *Mysticism & the New Physics to Broadside* is enough to do anyone's head. it's a wonderful quote from Borges where he says we have dreamed the world, "We have dreamed it as enduring, mysterious, visible, omnipresent in space & stable in time; but we have consented to tenuous & eternal intervals of illogicalness in its architecture that we might know it is false." from there to Glazer's speech to the "Fight the Right" coalition. but there's a thread between Borges & her satirical summation of the Right's dream of paradise & Daly as a "weaver of webs" as you report her: the absolute importance of "how we imagine the world, the power of such dreamings-up, their strange ability to change what is, given a large enough collective dreaming, hence Daly's insistence on language, our greatest dreaming tool. Talbot says: "consciousness & the physical universe are connected by some fundamental physical mechanism. This relationship between mind & reality is not subjective or objective but 'omnjective.'" & "We cannot observe the physical world, for as the new physics tell us, there is no one physical world. We participate within a spectrum of all possible realities." & that last statement links back to Daly & meditation & *The Wanderground* & & — writing as a form of participation, one of the most important.

oh oh, i can see the vortex has begun to spin, a kind of obsessiveness that happens when i start to write on a daily basis—*everything* begins to connect with a kind of excitement that continues to speed up until i get exhausted. It's like going mildly crazy. so forgive me if i begin to sound obsessive in my letters to you. there's lots to talk about!

[...]

D. from next door, about 50 & wearing the strangest accumulation of clothes, arrives twice a day to feed [Ginger, while J.'s away]. she's a compulsive talker & mysteriously drops her tone to a whisper in the middle of a story. every story reminds her of another story as she backs downstairs still talking, comes up again, backs down again, patting her blouse for her housekey which she pins inside to her brassiere, & extricating the long stick she carries by a black elastic band around her wrist from the bannisters & odd corners of furniture. she told me about her

Sunday visit with her old friend (she's 89) & how the other people in the lounge kept shushing them up because they were talking too loudly & interrupting the tv — they were talking about her friend's regret at never having had children & whether or not she was too old to start. i love this kind of blissful disregard of "reality." no wonder D. had trouble at school — when she heard i'm a writer she told me a long sad tale about her failures at English, how she'd taken Grade 11 English twice, how she'd tried to write the exam four times (the highest she ever got was 37%)... & yet, she says, i'm a great letter-writer, everybody tells me so. now why can't they (peering at me sternly through her glasses) consider a letter in English an English composition?

this reminded me of a passage i read last night in Peters' biography of Lou Salomé. it's about a woman, Malwida von Meysenburg, a German feminist & revolutionary, exiled after the failed 1858 revolution to Italy where Lou met her. P. is reporting a passage in Malwida's book where she "deplores the educational system of her time which keeps people, especially women, "away from the great liberalizing influences, from association with elemental forces, from everything primitive, & thus destroys all originality in them. To be able to give oneself up to great impressions with real zest is what makes people strong & good. To seek intercourse with stars on bright, lonely nights, to step boldly into the most difficult labyrinth of thought, to harden one's body by struggling with storms & waves, to look death fearlessly in the face & bear its pain with understanding..." (my underlining). It reminded me of you, & sounds, in its complaint against the educational system, absolutely contemporary.

originality: back to your note in your review re Daly: lust (sexual desire) as "origin, fertility of the planet." lust for life which, from what i've read so far, seems to have characterized Lou Salomé (& got her into a lot of trouble) — of course, as Mary Daly would say, given a necrophiliac culture. it's scary how much we (collective) have forgotten how to love life. Smaro just called & i asked her to check the etymology which she did in the Oxford (wonder what the American Heritage would say): the closest connection with Daly's seems to be a 16th or 17th c. meaning, "fertility of the soil" but also given are: "source of pleasure" & "appetite or relish or inclination for something" (there's the beginning of lust for life). loving the very ground we stand on, live on/off/by, & which (contrary to nuclear arms thinking) supports us.

4 hours later

so that was a long diversion! ended up with Bob & Smaro in the Old English Garden of Assiniboine Park, smelling the roses, opening the snapdragons (Smaro says in Greek they're called puppies because their mouths open) but i was thinking of another mouth, thinking of you. it was wonderful to be out in the sun because the sun comes into my rooms only in the morning [...] & it was all because Bob said, or Smaro, can't remember

which, come over & use the other dictionaries (B. has several) & have lunch. all because of lust i end up smelling roses (this sounds familiar): missing you takes various forms!

anyway i discovered that, as the Weekley Etymological Dictionary notes, "lust" has developed "peculiar" & negative connotations only in English because the Latin in the Bible was early translated into the "lusts of the flesh." in other languages lust has life-affirming senses: Old Norse *lusti*, sexual desire; Gothic *lustus*, desire; Latin *lascivus*, wanton, playful; Greek *lilaiesthai* (isn't that a lovely sound?) to yearn: Sanskrit, *lasati*, he yearns & *lasati*, plays. there's a quote from Francis Bacon in the Webster's 3rd Internat.: "the increasing lust of the earth or of the planet" which is the closest i found to "fertility of the planet." an intense longing, a craving, is one of its other senses. a tide that comes & goes, like spring fever in the plant, that suffuses us. a yearning.

[...]

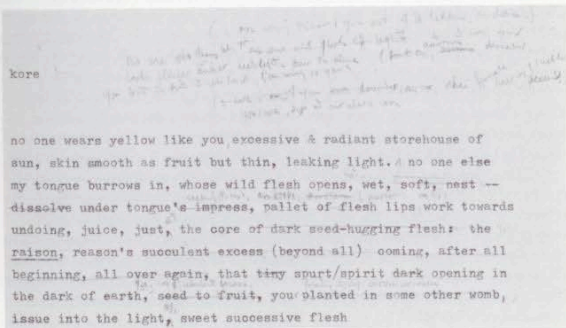
Friday

[...] i respect those women who've spoken up on feminist issues but am unwilling to let idea dominate language in my own work — in fact i think the work i have to do refuses it, because it does involve not knowing/digging up (Cocteau's "archaeology") where it's fatal to know what you're looking for beforehand because then you can't "see." i want to work at that edge [Nor] Hall speaks about "where things can turn into their opposites," which she associates with the threshold goddesses like Demeter. (it's a lovely term, thresholds of the houses they visited bringing, like the Norns, fate.) that edge makes fun of any label because it immediately brings up what the label excludes. it's like the lesbian videotape from Montreal where they spent quite a bit of time discussing butch-femme roles, their political implications, freedom to express yourself, the subversive comment on conventional heterosexual roles, etc., but what nobody *said* was that these images & roles are actually erotic for some women. for me too — there was an incredibly handsome woman there (to use your term) like a lesbian version of Mae West, long tightly curled blonde hair down to her shoulders, tweed blazer & jeans & boots, thumbs hooked in her belt, smoking a big-bowl man's pipe, the kind English squires are always pictured with. She had a Mae West voice too, drawly & husky. now if that strange combination isn't erotic! [...]

[DM to Betsy Warland, transcript provided by Marlatt. Smaro & Bob: Smaro Kamboureli & Robert Kroetsch; Nor Hall: *The Moon and the Virgin*.]

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Draft of "Kore" [in *Touch to My Tongue*]. Literary Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Canada.



Daphne Marlatt:  
Writing in the Space That Is Her Mother's Face

this is undefined territory, unaccountable, and so on edge  
(A, 1988, 81)

... the whole weight of me shifted, changed value in fact.  
(FS, 1968, 6)

If Daphne Marlatt's writing has not been absorbed by the zero, the blank, as she claimed in an interview published in 1979 (*GTB* 60), a preoccupation with charting a territory within frames and rings, against the invisible, the unrepresented, has been at the core of all her work. In her first book, *Frames of a Story*, published in 1968, it is against Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale of the Snow Queen, "white as of the white room" (*NW* 23), that her persona makes her appearance. Considering the theme of woman as absence in her last novel, *Ana Historic*, it is possible to draw a circular link from her first work to her last. (I understand a collaboration with Betsy Warland has just been published and its title alone, *Double Negative*, coincides with this essay's focus.) Marlatt's work continues to be defined by "a lot of white space . . . for language to resonate in" (*SEBS* 36) or "the magic circle we stepped inside of" (A 148).

To be absorbed is to be engulfed, swallowed up, to disappear, and at the heart of Marlatt's writing is the concept of phenomenology, the science of appearances, the way in which animate things and human beings show themselves and are perceived. As Frank Davey tells us, "The phenomenological method of *Frames* results in some extraordinarily elaborate and detailed evocations of consciousness . . . [and] Marlatt's next book, *Leaf/leaves*, similarly emphasizes the pre-reflective aspects of consciousness" (194).

I feel somewhat uncomfortable using a philosophical term like phenomenology within the context of "Can. Lit." "It smacks of foreign authority," a professor of English literature said to me once, as if the concept were too lofty for the Canadian literary tradition. Yet Marlatt's writing has been informed by numerous writers and various sources. At the beginning of her writing career she claimed Canadian influences such as bpNichol, Michael Ondaatje, Fred Wah, as well as influences that extended beyond borders: Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, D.H. Lawrence,

Virginia Woolf, Henry James, H.D., Louis Zukofsky, Gertrude Stein are but a few names mentioned (*NW* 9). For her M.A. thesis, she translated the French poet Francis Ponge, from whom she learned "the technique of description through negation . . . the phenomenology of an object by discarding comparisons, of analogies, until the object emerges in its linguistic selfness" (Ricou 207). Earlier there were philosophical echoes of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, while in her later writing, she quotes Julia Kristeva and Mary Daly. She has collaborated with feminist theorists/writers Nicole Brossard and Betsy Warland, as well as photographers/artists Robert Minden and Cheryl Sourkes. Some of her writing reflects the modernist view that the only way to make contact with events is to imagine their fragments falling into kaleidoscopic patterns in the imagination, as in *Steveston's*, "Imagine a Town" (S 13), yet in the best postmodern fashion, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, much of it "debunks the humanist notion of art's 'universal' accessibility . . ." (Hutcheon 132).

There's little doubt that "Marlatt is convincing" (Ricou 215). So much so, that her texts, her language, emanate what I can only refer to as "existential authenticity," although it seems a contradiction to use that term. Not only is it "foreign," lofty, and somewhat passé, but Sartrean existentialism is often branded as ideologically sexist, depending on how one has read Sartre. His concept of *en-soi*, the individual who is acted upon and lives an inauthentic existence by avoiding responsible choices, is often associated with the passive female, whereas, the *pour-soi*, the type of existence in which one acts as an aware subject initiating free choices and responsibly assuming the consequences of actions, is usually associated with the male. In Alice Jardine's words, "the notion that the female connoted (natural) *en-soi* could ever modify itself with the male connoted (human) *pour-soi* in order to attain the dignity of a being created in, of, by, and for itself is rejected by Sartre . . ." (Jardine 76). Yet, so much of Marlatt's writing traces elaborate and detailed evocations of a consciousness that transgresses and modifies, through language, the female connoted *en-soi*, in order to attain the dignity of a being created in, of, by and for herself.

With the publication of *Rings* in 1971, a book whose linguistic structure is "one of the most beautiful in our literature" (Davey 195), it became clear that all aspects of Marlatt's life were engaged in her writing. Its theme, which reappears in subsequent books, revolves around a strained marriage and the birth of a first child. The acts of giving birth and writing are never isolated acts for Marlatt:

like the mother's body, language is larger than us and carries us along with it. it bears us, it births us, insofar as we bear with it. if we are poets we spend our lives discovering not just what we have to say but what language is saying as it carries us with it . . . the immediately presented, as at birth—a given name a given world. (TTMT 46-7)

The immediately presented, the process by which the author not only articulates the past but brings it into the present act of writing, defines Marlatt's entire work. She is one of those rare writers able to maintain such a precise vigilance over each word, that even though she often refers to the past (content is always a thing of the past), the reader is aware of the text as presence. Beyond the presence of content situated in the past, there is the presence of form, of language, taking place in the moment of writing. The book's space is presence, its time is present, writer and reader caught up in the body of language where we all live.

Daphne Marlatt is often referred to as a "language poet," which always puzzles me since I was always taught that the focus of poetry should be its language. She's certainly in good company. The most memorable writers (not to mention a philosopher or two) have always been acutely aware of how language can approximate the essence of a thing or place only if the writer defers to language's own essence. Perhaps what distinguishes Marlatt from those who skeptically refer to her as a "language poet" is the relevance of language to the fine honed intelligence of her subject-in-process:

Marlatt's writing is based on a response, literally, to her own consciousness (in the body) as she writes rather than to an outside (projection) more commonly recognizable use of language as reference, as the means by which the world is referred to. When she explained to me how reading D.H. Lawrence in the early sixties had made her realize how it was possible to write about consciousness rather than plot, she defined consciousness as 'thinking about thinking; thinking about sensing and perceiving and feeling' . . . .

For Marlatt, the 'word' is a place to focus the energy of the intelligence, not simply a sign for some other content. (Wah 15, 16)

From the beginning, Marlatt's writing has probed the potential of words, unveiled their aura, each one carrying its memory trace, its own evolution. In response to the realization that women have been excluded from, defined by, or have inherited a contaminated language, feminist writers continue to question, examine, dissect, displace, subvert the linear line of traditional literature. In her first publications, well before she was known as a lesbian feminist writer, Marlatt was already a major proponent of a writing that was eventually identified with the "feminine," in spite of early claims that she was "suspicious of that word, 'feminine'" (GTB 54). Although most of her texts do not displace the conceptual opposition of the couple, man/woman, they bear many of the qualities we have come to associate with Kristeva's theory of the split subject which posits two types of signifying processes: the symbolic, which refers to the linguistic model as defined by syntactical rules, and the semiotic, which stresses the dynamic generative movement of language that is best articulated through drives such as rhythm, texture, puns, misspellings, etc. Her short lines, which are invariably followed by

exuberant (libidinal) long lines, often within the same poem, generate exchange, an engendering of forms that play and flow against and into each other. Many of them invoke the Lacanian "not-yet-subjects who are seen as closest to the presubjective, maternal space" (Jardine 107).

Wordplay, the etymological breakdown of words, the story of language within language, has allowed many women to establish a newly found intimacy with language. Granting a word an ultimate definition, a final authority in its most ancient meaning, posits an origin, a truth, with which some women have felt comfortable. The etymology of "etymology," *etymon*, from the Greek, states the true literal sense of a word according to its derivation, its fundamental original signification. "As Mary Daly shows . . . certain words (dandelion sparks) seed themselves back to original and originally-related meaning" (TTMT 48).

Much of Marlatt's use of etymology proliferates meaning but more and more her work relies on originary/original meaning. "In etymology we discover a history of verbal relations (a family tree, if you will) that has preceded us and given us the world we live in" (TTMT 46). This genealogy, the *filiation* of a direct line leading back to a fundamental original signification, parallels the search for the lost mother on which traditional Western philosophy and literature are based and contradicts the open-endedness and new beginnings of *l'écriture féminine* which attempts to displace and exceed authority, truth, and the illusionary essence of origins. Marlatt's theory differs from Hélène Cixous' theory of *écriture féminine* which also emphasizes textual play and language as presence, but which does not maintain a source, does "not say originary, because obviously there is no origin" (Conley 130). If each of Marlatt's books is an additional ring in the progression of a dynamic circular chain that grows and moves from past to present, each book also conveys a nostalgia for a source, an origin:

hidden in the etymology and usage of so much of our vocabulary for verbal communication (contact, sharing) is a link with the body's physicality: matter (the import of what you say) and matter and by extension mother; language and tongue; to utter and outer (give birth again); . . . to relate (a story) and to relate to somebody, related (carried back) with its connection with bearing (a child); intimate and to intimate; vulva and voluble . . . (TTMT 46).

There is perhaps no other book of Marlatt's that demonstrates so perfectly how language gives shape to place as *How Hug a Stone*, published in 1983. Mapping her way through a travel journal is a favorite form (*Vancouver Poems, Zocalo, Steveston*), and the listing of unknown (foreign?) names in *How Hug a Stone*, the reciting of magpie rhymes, the stream of speech, the dense texture, all contribute to uproot the reader from her own familiar place/space to join in Marlatt's search for her dead mother. The reader is led to Reading England, Prospect Park, a Pilgrim's cottage, a room where "a voice like coalsmoke" (HHS 28) narrates stories,



and to Avebury where a circle of stones sits as mute as Marlatt's dead mother. (Mute ring mutter /ing?) By the time she comes full circle and returns to Reading (the end of the telling of the story), she has arrived at the full realization that the stories about her mother are just that: "she is not a person, she is what we come through to & what we come out of . . ." (HHS 71). At the heart of loss, there is, however, the dance of words, "where live things are" (HHS 79). There is the presence of mother tongue as well as mothering of her own son who accompanied her on the trip, essential factors in the progression and completion of circles:

By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself. She thus actualizes the homosexual facet of motherhood, through which a woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her own psychosis, and consequently, more negatory of the social, symbolic bond . . .

*The homosexual-maternal facet is a whirl of words, a complete absence of meaning and seeing; it is feeling, displacement, rhythm, sound, flashes, and fantasied clinging to the maternal body. . . .* (Kristeva 239-40)

If the language in *Touch To My Tongue*, published in 1984, was the most sensational (in texture and content) of Marlatt's writing to date, it was also, in Ricou's words:

the most overtly feminist of Marlatt's books . . . Just when we seemed educated to the ultimate importance of matter in Marlatt, we find things (or things signified) disappearing in favor of ideas . . . Marlatt looks more to Sappho than to Olson and Duncan. The poem is ecstatic lyric and in no sense documentary. In spring the world puts on its dress of flowers to greet the return of Kore (Persephone) from her annual exile in Hades . . . (Ricou 211)

If language is still very palpable in *Touch To My Tongue*, its nearness, its immediacy, is displaced by a sense of distant memory and evocation. Where we had become quite comfortable in Marlatt's house of language, we suddenly find ourselves lost in the titles of her new poems; this "place of contradiction," "houseless," on a "prairie," in a "hidden ground," "in the dark of the coast," "coming up from underground." When in the poem "down the season's avenue," Marlatt writes "i'm coming home" (TTMT 29), it is a return to the original space of Woman that she longs for. The text's spectacular language does not create a new space as much as reinstate signification/significance to an old one. In spite of her claims that "language . . . does not stand in place of anything else, it does not replace the bodies around us" (TTMT 45), *Touch To My Tongue* is nevertheless centered in traditional symbols of the feminine, making it difficult to disassociate them from overdetermined associations.

The return of Kore (core, nucleus, essence, crux, heart) from exile in hell with a patriarchal figure, provides the perfect setting for Marlatt's recent and first full-length novel, *Ana Historic*. Although two stories flow into each other throughout the novel, and narrate the lives of two women from two different centuries, it is the hysterical, alienated figure of the mother, an oppressed victim of fate, marriage and society, that keeps haunting the novel. One story takes place during the nineteenth century, and centers on the imagined life of Mrs. Richards, a woman of no apparent importance who appears briefly in the 1873 civic archives of Vancouver. The only factual information we are given is that she is a young and pretty widow from England who has been hired to fill the vacated post of school teacher in Hastings Mill, a small pioneering and lumber village in British Columbia. Virtually nameless, we know her "only" by "the name of a dead man," Mrs. Richards (A 37). She is without history, an ahistoric character whose invented story meshes with the contemporary Annie Richards' own fragmented life. Against the blank page of history that wrote her off, an unspoken urge insists itself into words as Marlatt not only retrieves Mrs. Richards from absence, but insures that the contemporary Annie Richards' personal history which is also her mother's history, is not repeated.

As she does with all her texts, Marlatt denies *Ana Historic* the solace of "proper form," in order to explore new constructs of representation. By shunning prescribed rules of what a novel "should be," she imparts a sense of the unrepresentable. Annie Richards' story begins where her mother's ends "where nothing is conveyed" (A 83). To write a story of a no-name woman is to speak the unspeakable.

The contemporary Annie Richards is initially defined mainly in relation to her husband, a history professor. As his research assistant she is an appendage whose main recognition comes in the form of acknowledgements at the beginning of significant history books which usually read "to my wife without whose patient assistance this book would never have been completed." His language is the invaluable language of definition and documentation on which the groundwork of history is built, while hers is the language of an interior history, 'scribbling' she hides under the bed or under piles of research material for his project. When he enters her study or hovers at her shoulders, he imparts an intimidating authority that makes her feel as if she is the one who is trespassing. And indeed by writing herself into history, by imagining herself into the empty space of women's activities that were never deemed important enough to be recorded, she crosses the boundaries of a history that excluded her. Because women were left out of the imagery, as in the photographs taken on the front porch of the houses they kept, Annie Richards trespasses the boundary between absence and presence and changes the picture. Through a leap of imagination she imagines the "historic" Ana's story differently, since to repeat the probable story would mean never changing it. As Luce Irigaray has stated, "If we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again . . .

Words will pass through our bodies, above our heads. They'll vanish, and we'll be lost. Absent from ourselves" (Irigaray 205).

Although a boat race, in which the boats all bore the names of women, was deemed important enough to record in the city archives, the first birth in Hastings Mill was not worthy of attention, so Ana Richards imagines it and writes it down. Against the blank page, a white sheet, she traces the quietly bent knees of a woman, between which the first "syllable of slippery flesh slide[s] out the open mouth" (A 126).

As Erich Neumann points out in *The Great Mother*, "The positive femininity of the womb appears as a mouth . . . and on the basis of this positive symbolic equation the mouth as 'upper womb' is the birthplace of the breath and the word" (cited in Gilbert and Gubar, 265). Through word as child and child as word, women no longer need to feel alienated by language. Through writing, through the alphabet, Annie "capitalizes" on Ana's initials, takes the initiative and graphs herself on the blank pages of history.

The powerful ending of the novel, which Marlatt has titled "Not a Bad End," will undoubtedly be unsatisfactory to some readers. Because the formal strategy of the novel so brilliantly subverts cohesion and narrative syntax and is not bound by master plot or one heroic voice—on the contrary, the narrative voice embodies many voices—its climax, both literal and literary, is unexpectedly conventional in its utopian vision. Through a "monstrous leap of imagination" (A 135), Marlatt joins those women writers who through the Imaginary, dare dream of a non-oppressive society. It is a writing of *jouissance* which cultivates, culminates in the pleasure principle and evokes the imaginative power of women writers.

While the radical rewriting and rereading of dominant forms aspire to displace master narratives, whether they be historical, mythological or literary, many women may find solutions to complex social problems limited if confined to the sexual sphere. In *No Man's Land*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar raise the question of whether anatomy is linguistic destiny. Is the womb a metaphorical mouth and the pen a metaphorical penis? Is the displacement of "phallogocentrism" by "vulvalogocentrism" sufficient or is it a simple reversal which remains, in Teresa de Lauretis' words, "within the conceptual frame of a universal sex opposition . . . mak[ing] it very difficult, if not impossible, to articulate the differences of women from Woman?" (de Lauretis 2). Does difference based on gender (and sexuality?) not "ten[d] to recontain or recuperate the radical epistemological potential of feminist thought inside the walls of the master's house?" (de Lauretis 2) When Marlatt writes, "mouth speaking flesh. she touches it to make it tell her present in this other language so difficult to translate. the difference" (A 126), it is evident that she is referring to the difference, keeping it within the traditional concept of binary opposition.

While lesbian-maternal texts are crucial in exploring the unrepresented, the unthought, it is important they are not prescriptive in their attempt to describe women's writing and lives:

The complexities of the intrinsically erotic choice of an 'object of study' aside, the attempt to posit a new form of catharsis—to purify (women's) writing of male topoi—is a return to the worst extremes of our metaphysical tradition. The elaboration of a feminist strategy of reading and writing reaching through to the other side of and perhaps even beyond that tradition while in dialogue with it is what is most difficult. (Jardine 41)

Now that the leap of the imagination has been made, it seems more vital than ever that the mutual containment of binaries that has traditionally defined our society be deciphered and unraveled so that the female subject writing herself on to "the blank" page of history conceive herself not only as the difference, but as a multiplicity of differences that cut across sexuality, gender, form, class, race. It would seem more vital than ever that in our newly created spaces we discover not only the multiple differences that exist between men and women, between women and women, but perhaps more importantly, within each woman.

Since the publication of *Frames of a Story*, Daphne Marlatt's "whole weight" has shifted and "changed value" many times, but her main story has remained that of language, and few people in Canada tell it so well. In the spirit of the generous dialogues she's had with so many writers during the last twenty years I would like to end with a quotation from Maurice Blanchot. "The book rolls up time, unrolls time, and contains this unrolling as the continuity of a presence in which present, past, and future become actual" (Blanchot 146).

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Words and Stones in *How Hug a Stone*

*How Hug a Stone* begins—"June 14, 1981. we fly to England . . ." This introduction offers what appear to be the circumstances of the writing of the book. The writer and her "Canadian-born son," "one 39, one 12," "fly to England for a month of visiting" the writer's "side of the family." The writer was last there 30 years ago, and before that lived in Malaya. On the present visit the son "will now meet" his English relatives and the writer "perhaps . . . will come to understand" her mother (HHS 11).

An unsigned introduction such as this is by generic convention 'from' the signator of the book; in the case here the details offered connect intertextually with other materials associated with the signature "Daphne Marlatt"—particularly her "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" (1979). The effect of this introduction is to mark *How Hug a Stone* as autobiography, that is, as a construction of its signator rather than of a 'persona' or 'character.' Inside the text this mark is repeated in five italicized passages that begin, like the introduction, with dates (HHS 14, 22, 42, 58 and 64). Each of these follows an interior table of contents and a reproduction of a highway map. On each highway map one or more elements are circled and on some pencilled words have been added. The maps, like the introduction, insist on factuality, while the pencilled additions act both to insert the narrator into this factuality and to document that someone was actually 'there'.

The claim that these various pages repeat is that "Daphne Marlatt" is represented by this text, that the text is not 'just' fiction or writing, that before it is these it is something that 'really' happened. Here too there are intertextual echoes of elements associated with the Marlatt author-name—the marks of journal and autobiography carried by *Rings*, *Zocalo*, *The Story*, *She Said*, *What Matters*, the maps on the covers of *Stevenson* and *Vancouver Poems*, the photograph of the author on the cover of *The Story*, *She Said*. Beyond the claim of 'real' events is another insistence—that the text itself is in no sense 'framed' or relativized by irony, that there is no significant distance of 'disagreement' between the signator of the text and its first-person 'i-narrator'.

Throughout *How Hug a Stone* various directions to the reader are strongly foregrounded—directions in how to frame, order and interpret its narrative passages. The reader is given, in addition to the introduction, five section titles, a table of contents for each section, a map for each section, and following each map a set of dated and italicized summaries that re-inscribe the text within the section as 'journal'. "June 22,

*Ilfracombe, Combe Martin where i stayed as a child—bits of intact memory but the overall terrain is different . . .*" (42). Within the narrative texts there is further foregrounding. The first text "departure" ends with a question—"without narrative how can we see where we're going?" (15)—that is repeated both overtly, "narrative is a strategy for survival" (75), and covertly, as a need for story, for script, for being able to script, throughout the book. The opening text introduces the concept of an imprisoning imposed narrative: the narrator's airplane journey that is "plot we're in, wrapped up like knife fork & spoon" (15). It introduces in the Agatha Christie movie that is shown aboard the plane the notion that inside the imposed plot there is always an "enraged mother at the heart of it: lost" (15). It begins an association of the narrator's son (whose first words are "i LOVE to go into that lab'rat'ory") with positivistic science, with the "23,000 gallons of fossil fuel" (15) that drive their airplane, and with masculine preoccupations with measurement and control.

ground still rushes away from me though my step-brother has named every flower in all four directions contained by a brick wall. my host. reading the light of Reading read in pink petals overblown. overgrown. i am the child with chocolate smeared across her face. three frocks in a green wheelbarrow merely photographic the way he hauls us up in thirty years. i am the one who pushed. & she to whom we were hostage then, hostess & mother (his): o they are all right really. (17)

There is a sharp contrast in *How Hug a Stone* between the syntactic density and opacity of the text and the simplicity and visibility of its structural elements. Sentence by sentence the text is complex and plurisignative, marked as above by the co- presence of multiple narratives and a narrative frame and by a narrative focalization that can encompass a variety of perspectives and times. In the above passage that focalization includes the narrator's present confusion ("ground still rushes away"), the step-brother's contrasting Adamic certainty ("has named every flower in four directions"), his reliance on categorization and containment ("contained by a brick wall") and his control over her (hauling her up in a wheelbarrow when she was young and hauling her out through childhood photographs in the present); this focalization moves also from the present ("my host") to 30 years earlier ("i am the child with chocolate smeared across her face"), and expresses itself in double significations such as the red/read of "reading the light of Reading read in pink petals." At the sentence level *How Hug a Stone* suggests the complexity and ambiguity of the meanings of experience, employing its own textuality to subvert and contradict the positivism of the step-brother who can dare to name "every flower in four directions."

On the structural level, however, *How Hug a Stone* offers meanings that are heavily systematized and through repeated foregrounding overdetermined. The outline of this structure is also visible above: a

male-female dichotomy in which the male is active and positivist, naming, categorizing, hauling, and the female passive, being hauled, "merely photographic," subject to male gaze and activity.

under the moon a grown man now lures *moththe, math-*, worm. with a white sheet spread on the lawn, with a bedroom lamp he lures their bodies, heavy, beating against the walls. he wants to fix them in their families, he wants them wing-pulled-open, pinned on a piece of cotton, mortified. as then, i protest this play as death—despite his barrage of scientific names, his calling to my son, you game? as if he held the script everyone wants to be in, except the moths. (17)

Here the step-brother's interest in moth-collecting becomes, through the phonological similarity of *moth* and *mother*, a male attempt to collect the woman. His procedures are marked with domestic imagery ("white sheet," "bedroom lamp") as ones that are implicated in the institutionalization of male-female relationships; the text constructs him as wanting the moth/woman sexually available ("wing-pulled-open"), humiliated ("mortified") and institutionally defined ("fix them in their families"). It links this view of women with empiricism ("his barrage of scientific names") and chauvinism ("as if he held the script everyone wants to be in"), and suggests that it be passed on from older men to younger ones ("his calling to my son, you game?").

The sharp contrast between a duplicitous, ambiguous and apparently plurisignative immediate text and a systematic heavily determined overtext invites a reading that 'solves' the former and 'discovers' the latter, and that comes to rest in that discovery. The kind of heavily foregrounded thematic content that many didactic texts carry in the immediate text is, in *How Hug a Stone*, deferred to the overtext. The interpretation the reader is likely to 'discover' is one in which a patriarchal system of empiricism, reason and mastery attempts to write woman into its script as a minor and exploited element. The patriarchal system enters the text in the son's interest in the "lab'ratoy," is given detail in the portrait of the step-brother, of the uncle who is a doctor, "furious, driven" (33), of the rescuing grandfather (47), and of the similarly rescuing "blacksuited" British Rail official who efficiently drives the narrator back to the appropriate rail station when she misses her stop (62). It has its fullest depiction in the narrator's young son who is as avid in his determination to identify himself with Hero, Man and Father as his mother is in hers to perceive and acknowledge her "lost" mother. In a passage that echoes the step-brother hunting moths, the son attempts to construct himself as "Adventurous Marlatt" "in the jungle to stalk & capture some wild animals" (36); he is said to be "happiest in the Lucky Penny counting hits or testing quickness of eye against sci fi enemy bombers" (48), to have an eye "impressed with target accuracy" (51). In a passage that precedes his mother's missing their station and having to be rescued by the Rail official, he recounts a long dream of

leadership and confidence in which, when his home is invaded and threatened by belligerent teenagers because he has helped a few "homeless" children, he successfully and righteously confronts and defeats them (61). His dream, in which he gives himself a "big giant house" (59) and the power to help the weak (ostensibly in compensation for a feeling that he is weak and "homeless" himself) and defeat the sadistic, contrasts with his mother's recurrent insecurities and inability to look after him or herself on a train journey.

The exploited woman is depicted mainly in the narrator's mother and in the other family women who are presented as having become conditioned into being agents of their own repression. The narrator's maternal grandmother insisted on dressing her daughter as the glamorous debutante and, in recalling how she looked, exclaims "she looked like a *dream*." The narrator angrily comments,

*her* dream, the one my mother inherited, *her* dress, my mother lending her body to it, as i refused, on a new continent suffocated in changing rooms thick with resentment: you don't understand, *everybody* wears jeans here & i *want* a job. refusing the dream its continuity in what i thought was no man's land . . . (29)

The narrator recalls herself rejecting clothing that would have coded her as a marriageable woman, and as seeking economic independence, and then learns from her amused grandmother that her mother too had made similar arguments just before surrendering to marriage:

"We went to Penang and she said, "Mother, I'm so *tired* of this life, of just wasting my time going out dancing every night, getting engaged to play tennis, somebody ringing up and wanting to take me out to golf. It seems so futile. I want to learn dress designing and dressmaking. I've seen advertisements and I've written off to England. I won't be coming back with you when we go on leave." This was when we were in the hotel in Penang sitting on the grounds facing the sea just where her wedding photograph was taken a few months later. Isn't it extraordinary? (29)

Although the grandmother is oblivious to the semiotics of what she is reporting, it is fairly clear in the text that her daughter had asked to be the one who made the dress rather than the one who wore it, to be the one who did things in life rather than the one who waited passively to be danced with, telephoned, golfed with or married. Her surrender to her mother's "dream" script of dress and wedding picture led her to becoming the disabled person the narrator once despised, "furiouly unable to budge," who cried for her father when her children's game-playing threatened to crush the younger ones under a heavy dresser (47), who felt "irresponsible, incapable" when she allowed her children to get trapped on the beach by the incoming tide (55), and who alone with her children



in Bombay became paranoid with fear, "every cab . . . a possible abduction" (78).

The narrator's various re-enactments of her mother's incompetence—missing the rail station, or not knowing how to deal with the allergy attacks her son experiences intermittently during their time in England—suggests that she too may have followed her mother into a male script in which men are authorities and managers and women are decorative, child-bearing and incompetent accessories to male power. The escape she constructs for herself out of this "little-mother" (66) script is both to complete her visit to England safely and to recover as much of the occulted history of her mother as she can for the somewhat more 'public' discourse of the autobiography she is writing. Within the male script, her mother is merely another failure, unsurprising in a woman, "the gull, unsettled, sad" (45), the one who "seemed to enjoy setting people against her" (66), the one paralyzed by "brooding silence" and a "sense of fatality" (76). Recovered by her daughter she becomes the one who would "wrestle with the angel authority of father, teacher, doctor, dentist, priest," the one "hated" for her "imagination, that mad boarder in the house of the mind, which alone can prevent a house from being built on safe, practical & boring foundations (Sagan). that winged thing that flies off the handle, leaps out the window . . ." (67).

In addition, and somewhat more problematically, the narrator's way out of the male script involves increasing attention to the landscape of southern England, a landscape that is slowly identified, through its lushness and dampness and association with Bronze Age matriarchal culture, with female sexuality and para-rationality. At the barrow and stone circles of Avebury she imagines herself in contact with a different narrative, an "old story" (73)—a narrative of the primal feminine, "her tomb-body . . . built to contain that primary chaos."

this kiel, to ku-, to a hollow space or place, enclosing object, round object, a lump, mound in the surrounding sea of grass. ku-, kunte, to, wave-breaking womb: Bride who comes unsung in the muse-ship shared with Mary Gypsy, Mary of Egypt, Miriam, Marianne suppressed, become/ Mary of the Blue Veil, Sea Lamb sifting sand & dust, dust & bone, whose Son . . . (72)

although there are stories about her, versions of history that are versions of her, & though she comes in many guises she is not a person, she is what we come through to & what we come out of, ground and source. the space after the colon, the pause (between the words) of all possible relation. (73)

This woman is located in silence, "between the words" that elsewhere the scripting authorities of "father, teacher, doctor, dentist, priest" control. She is "source" (69), the one who writes "in monumental stones," "longstanding matter in the grass, settled hunks of mother crust," the "stone (mother)," "the old slow pulse beyond word" (75).

The text thus places, against the categorizing and collecting masculine, an essential feminine inside which the narrator can "stand in my sandals & jeans unveiled, . . . dance out names at the heart of where we are lost, hers first of all, wild mother dancing upon the waves" (78-79). This is the "maere" mother, the sea mother and moor mother, associated with blood, dance, "wild beating," the dinosaur-descended bird, "wide-wandering dove" (79). The "ruined" circle of Avebury is posited as the repressed female story, as exemplifying in its "lithic" silence and fragmentary structure the existence of woman's story in the gaps, contradictions and fractures in masculine discourse. The "lost" daughter finds her own story in the 'lostness' of both her mother and the wild dancer of the stone circle.

These concluding assertions of the text are problematical in a number of ways. For one, the text remains one made of words. The narrator who from the beginning has associated word and text with masculine power continues to effect what power she has through words, despite her assertion that the female speaks in a "mutter of stone" (75), in "old words," in "the pause (between the words) of all possible relation" (73). For another, the stone mother, despite the various etymological (ku-, kunte) attempts to imply its originality, or to associate it with some primal "M" ("matter," "matrix," "moth," "moor," "maere," "material," "mother," "mutter," "Mary Gypsy, Mary of Egypt, Miriam, Marianne suppressed, Mary of the Blue Veil"), remains a rhetorical and social construction. Alliteration remains a linguistic device which can signify belief but a dubious means for transforming Bronze Age religious and funerary practice into archetypal principle. The reader remains in language rather than with some "first love that teaches a possible world."

A third difficulty here is the narrator's son, whom the text claims expresses a "jubilant ego" (74) at Avebury and loses his allergy at the moment his mother makes contact with the "stone (mother)" of Avebury (75). But other elements in the text suggest something different. At Avebury, in fact, the son is portrayed as continuing in his phallic love of "target accuracy": "& small, toy pistol in one hand, cupped, & sheltered by the pelvic thrust of rock, jumps, gotcha mom!" (74). How this phallic inscription of his mother into his war game differs from his grandmother's inscription by a phallic society into marriage and motherhood is difficult to perceive. At the end of the text, when the narrator is entering even more jubilantly into the "wild beating" she believes she has discovered in the lithic mother, the son complains "I want to go home . . . where it's nice & boring" (78). The implication here is that the son is doomed by his sex to a sterile world of positivism, despite his mother's belief that she has recovered the primal female story.

*How Hug a Stone* confronts the exploitation of woman in western culture, her exclusion from meaningful labour and the construction of social narrative, and her being named as beauty, wife and mother, and counters this with an affirmation of female difference. It groups men

under the sign of the phallus—the inscribing pen, the targeting gun, the assertion of single meaning—and women under that of the “wave-breaking womb”—sensuous, dancing, imagining, between the words of men. Like the narrative of God the Father that supports patriarchy, this counter-narrative of a primal feminine is a metaphysical one which locates the human outside of social action in an archetypal predetermination. “free we want to be where live things are” announces the text in its final words, but this “where live things are” has already been defined as “unveiled” and thus as in oxymoronic relationship to the “free” (79). Rather than contesting the use of gender as a basis for structuring society, or arguing that this use has been a social choice rather than a biological inevitability, *How Hug a Stone* accepts what Mary Ellman has called the “gender analogy”—to the point that mother and son at the text’s end appear sexually doomed to separation. “i want to go home, he says.” “i can do nothing,” she replies (78).

Yet the possibility that such destiny is a social choice seems nevertheless inscribed in Marlatt’s text. Its overdetermination of the male-female dichotomy, marking the male exclusively with guns, the electronic war games played by her son, the step-brother’s moth collecting and with the roles of “teacher, doctor, dentist, priest,” while marking the female equally exclusively with “imagination,” “dancing” and the “wild” suggests a culture/nature distinction as rigidly constructed as the positivism of train schedules or “big business” (64). Although the combining of a plurisignative difficult-to-interpret immediate text with a highly directive unambiguous overt text gives a reader the illusion that the latter’s single meaning has been immanent in the former, the overt text itself remains a construction signed by “Daphne Marlatt” and qualified by that signature. The possibility of more than two constructions of a mother named as “Edrys who was also Tino” (7) is—despite the concluding rapture of “wild beating, blood for the climb, glide, rest, on air current” (79)—not foreclosed.

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JANICE WILLIAMSON

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Sounding a Difference: An Interview with Daphne Marlatt\*

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Janice Williamson: I want to begin by asking you about your current work. Your project called “Salvage” is a rereading or revising of earlier writing in the light of your developing feminist consciousness. Is this a critical consciousness that recalls the feminism implicit in your early writing, or is it a consciousness which looks back and recognizes gaps?

Daphne Marlatt: It’s more looking back and recognizing not so much gaps, but places where I was blocked and I couldn’t see my way out because I didn’t have the theory that would have helped me to do that. So now with the benefit of some of that theory and having done a lot more writing of a different kind, I can go back and read my way through those earlier texts for the hidden dynamic that’s operating. For instance, a piece which Penny Kemp published in the women’s issue of *IS* [14 (1973)] in the early seventies, “Steveston. Support. Fish,” has become “Litter. wreckage. salvage,” and I discovered it took a veer from Steveston to Skid Row in the original because it’s really about how difficult it is for women to be on the street and how they don’t occupy the street in the way men do because it’s a public space that is basically male. I realized that the buried image for this was agoraphobia, quite literally “fear of the marketplace.” We’ve had this long tradition of women on the street being seen as available somehow—they get whistled at, stared at, yelled at by men, because women on the street have been seen as being there for men, to service men, they’re on the sexual market in some way.

JW: You talk about the rapport between your writing as a feminist and your reading of feminist theory. What feminist theories have influenced you?

DM: There’s so much, it’s hard to say. I became very interested in the kind of theory that Nicole Brossard was writing, which I first encountered in the issue of *Ellipse* [23-24 (1979)] that was devoted to *La Nouvelle barre du jour* and *Open Letter*, and I loved the piece—it wasn’t even the full piece, it was just excerpts from “E muet mutant,” the silent feminine *e*. I began to get very interested in the possibility of writing carrying the

\*Excerpted from an interview which took place in Edmonton, in April 1988. My thanks to Linda Pasmore for her transcription.



feminine, so that led me to French feminist theory, and I started reading Cixous and Irigaray and Kristeva—Duras before that, but not so much for theory. The thing that drew me to what Nicole was doing was her writing always as a woman *writing*. I'd been reading Anglo-American theory before that, I mean in the seventies, women like Greer and Friedan, some of Juliet Mitchell, Elizabeth Gould Davis, and that spoke to me too, in the same way that when I read Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in the sixties I just felt devastated, because there was so much that she was naming that I recognized. Always that's the excitement in reading feminist theory—having names and articulations put to what you've been aware of but you haven't been able to articulate in any clear way. But it was an even greater excitement reading Nicole because she was talking about an approach to writing as a woman. It was the same kind of excitement reading Mary Daly's work with language. So then I got into reading Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*—I seem to have approached Freudian theory first through the Americans, through Chodorow and, more recently, Dinnerstein. And as I've been circling around the subject of mother for a long time in my own writing, I find the writing these women are doing, talking about what Freud didn't manage to talk about, that pre-Oedipal stage and its extreme influence on us, I find how that links up with Kristeva's sense of the semiotic in language very illuminating.

JW: Traces of this fascination appear in your *Ana Historic*. The rapport Annie has with her mother is very powerful and complex. As a woman reader I recognize the compelling ambivalence of, on the one hand, being nurtured *by* and identifying *with* the mother, and, on the other hand, feeling overwhelmed and repulsed by her.

DM: That's right, a lot of the feminists who have worked out of Freud's theory talk about this, about how difficult that bond is between the mother and the daughter, because the mother herself is ambivalent towards her daughter; she wants to be nurturing, she wants her daughter to have everything she didn't have, but at the same time she's raising her daughter to accept the limitations of being a woman in a patriarchal society, and so she's always setting limits to her nurturing.

JW: How much does the writing free you from ambivalence? I'm thinking of feminist theories of individuation as well as of my own experience as writer and critic. Acknowledging my own ambivalent relationship with my mother and working through to a deeper understanding of her helped empower me to write.

DM: Oh, I think that's the key: it *is* empowering, and it's such a mishmash of very primal emotion that, well, working with it probably occupies a lifetime. I'm not finished working with it. I had a very close bond with my mother, I realize now looking back to when I was little, and I can actually see in my relationship to her such an appreciation of her

femininity that it almost supports Freud's notion (although I dislike this notion because he couldn't recognize a female libido as female; it always has to be modeled on the male libido) of the little girl as the little man courting the mother. I can recognize that behavior when I look back. But then we went through such a difficult time together during my adolescence when she had such a bad time with herself, and immigrating to Canada was the last psychic straw for her. We ricocheted away from each other, and she denied me and I denied her, and we never really got back to any kind of *rapprochement* before she died, so writing about her is my way of doing that, of getting to a place where I can feel some of that affection and empathy and understanding. It's a really different bond from the little girl's bond, because my understanding comes from empathizing with her experience as a mother, having had my own experience as a mother. And recognizing in myself the difficulties I had as an immigrant, and seeing how those were magnified for her. I can only realize what we had in common by also expressing where I felt she betrayed me as a mother, because she was in such deep psychological trouble herself that she couldn't go on mothering.

JW: You write about memory as overlap. Louky Bersianik writes about "rites of memory, *memoir*, that is a *portemanteau* word, sometimes mother, mine? and sometimes me, condensed word." Is there a memory-mine-me-mother in your work?

DM: I was amazed when I read that passage in Louky, because it reminded me so much of the memory poem "abandoned," in "The Month of Hungry Ghosts," about the experience of being back there in Penang so many years later and remembering, and yet not consciously remembering, having a memory that was in the body somehow, but wasn't consciously accessible until I got there. I couldn't have said how to get from A to B, but at a certain point, rounding a corner, I got an immediate flash of what I would see when I got around that corner, and I could not have foretold it until I was in that actual movement around that particular spot. And memory seems to operate like this, like a murmur in the flesh one suddenly hears years later. There is in memory a very deep subliminal connection with the mother because what we first of all remember is this huge body, which is our first landscape and which we first of all remember bodily. We can't consciously remember it, but it's there in our unconscious, it's there in all the repressed babble, the language that just ripples and flows—and it isn't concerned with making sense. It's concerned with the feel: the "feel" of words has something to do with the feel of that body, of the contours of early memory. The wholeness of memory, these early memories that suddenly flash upon you, probably has something to do with the earliest sense of a whole body image, and later, much later, a whole landscape. Anyhow, it's only later that we separate ourselves and everything else into subject and object.

JW: There's a moment early on in *Ana Historic* where the mother says something like, "I am not your mother," and the daughter cries.

DM: She says, "Your mother's gone." Yes, I think that's a very primal experience to have the mother turn into this person who denies that she is the mother figure, that she is the one who is always there, always nurturing, always patient, that figure the child counts on as some kind of basis for existence. It's a very early lesson in language, because she is saying what the child feels has to be impossible, and yet, because she is saying it, language makes it real and her absence is suddenly there as a frightening possibility.

JW: Toni Cade Bambara talks about how she's trying to break language open and get to the bone. She's trying to find out not only how a word gains its meaning, but how it gains its power.

DM: I wouldn't call that the bone.

JW: No. What would you call it?

DM: Well, in *How Hug a Stone*, that concept of trying to get back to the bone as the seed of the language, the germ of the word, using that neolithic concept of the bones being planted back into the earth in order to bring forth new life. I saw that seed or germ in the old Anglo-Saxon root of the word. But in terms of how the word gains powers through usage, through time—that's something else entirely for me. It's really a history of political usage. Mary Daly did a primary job of taking back words for women and showing how they were turned from their original usage which didn't involve a negative value, as the oppression of women increased.

JW: Thinking about this question of language and power: I was teaching Adrienne Rich's lesbian love poems and my students were embarrassed about naming the female body and female desire. The power embedded in the classroom made it impossible for them to identify what they have been socialized to ignore and they simply could not find words.

DM: Woman's body is never present in its own desire, so if you start writing about it, you have to combat a kind of fear that you feel because you know you're breaking a taboo. Di Brandt has talked about this and it's something that I recognize very strongly in her work where, in order to make it present, she has to write so-called scandalous and heathen things, I mean, heathen from a conventional Christian point of view. The only way you can bring the significance of our sexual being into the language is by making it so present that you can't get around it, you can't deny it, you can't euphemize it.

JW: It's interesting to me how in some lesbian writing the body is absent, as in Phyllis Webb's *Naked Poems* where the female body's being is its absence; the furniture is rearranged around a poetics of loss and longing.

DM: That's true, and the lover's body is also evoked through absence so poignantly by her blouse, those little details. It's like drawing everything around it, and the thing itself becomes simply the white face of the page, its contour outlined by everything around it.

JW: There's something different in your lesbian love poems than that absent presence. Your lesbian body is excessively present.

DM: Yes, yes, yes, oh, yes, okay. Why? It has to do with my attitude to language, I think. I feel language is incredibly sensual. The more musically we move in language, the more sensual it is, I suppose, because, as Kristeva would say, it's the closest that we get to that early sensual experience of fusion with the mother's body. And lesbian eroticism involves this incredible fusion, this merging of boundaries, because our bodies are so similar in their way of touching, of sensing each other, so I'm always wanting my language to somehow bring that into itself, that opulence of two incredibly sensual bodies moving together. I want that movement there in the way the words move.

JW: I don't know what I'm going to say after that except to recall a different sensuality: Toni Cade Bambara's "touch talking."

DM: That's it. That's a lovely metaphor for it. There's a kind of push and pull in *Touch to My Tongue* which has to do with touching in that the book was written against the lover's absence. Most of the poems were written on my way to, and while I was in, Winnipeg—and later in Vancouver when she was sick. They're written with longing, and I suppose longing always does have an aim. Desire as moving towards, and specifically moving towards that arrival point of being together. The poem "down the season's avenue" is the epitome of that, driving down a street here imagining her there. There's always this longing to go where she is, but also there is this conjuring of the actual lovemaking which is a presence that is triumphant because it combats the absence the yearning is trying to do away with, trying to elide, trying to collapse into the moment when I'm together with her and all there is of our *being* together.

JW: I'm wondering, too, if this writing of lesbian desire isn't simply a representation of a transgression in a heterosexist culture.

DM: It's not "simply a representation of transgression" because that overlooks desire which is ongoing in this movement toward the other woman's body—it fails to be erased finally when that movement is concluded, it's never concluded, that's the point with desire, especially women's desire. I had that problem with *Ana Historic*. Once I had



located Annie as a very sexual woman, the writing kept moving towards her actually making love with Zoe, and yet that could only come at the very end of the book, because she had to go through all these shifts of identity and coming to consciousness of what the latent desire really was. Yet I didn't want that final scene to be the end of the story, because it's never the end, it's always the beginning of new stories, so how could I honour that? The only way I could honour that was by moving back into the writing and the reading, using the metaphor of the continual turning of the page as the working of desire. There is always the next page, the next page, even if it's not yet written, it's imminent there. I suppose this has to do with where I place myself against Christianity, which has taught us to defer bliss to life after death. But language itself, especially writing, is another kind of deferral. In the humanist tradition it was thought to be a vehicle pointing to what was real beyond the writing. And we've now come to think of it very differently as a signifying process present to itself. To speak of what has been excluded from the world of literature, which is women's desire, and to make that present in a language of presence is a big challenge.

JW: *Ana Historic* interrogates notions of history as a story of dominance, mastery. In Mrs. Richards' journal there's slippage between fiction and historical document. In the novel you write: "What is a fact, (fact)? the (f) stop of act, a still photo in the ongoing cinerama." What is the relation between language and women's history?

DM: If history is a construction and language is also a construction, as we know—in fact, it actually constructs the reality we live and act in—then we can change it. We're not stuck in some authoritative version of the real, and for women that's extremely important, because we always were—the patriarchal version was always *the* version, and now we know that's not true. We can throw out that powerful little article. When we change language we change the building blocks by which we construct our reality or even our past "reality," history.

JW: I'm interested in Annie as the hysteric Anna O, the German feminist Bertha Pappenheim treated by Josef Breuer between 1880 and 1882 who called the psychoanalytic cure "the talking cure." Juliet Mitchell writes about women's novels as hysterical, as woman's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of patriarchal capitalism. When I first read the excerpts of your novel published in *Writing*, I was in the middle of my own analysis with a feminist psychoanalyst and reading feminist revisions of Freud's work. I was excited by your "hysterical" narrator, your dreaming voice which opens an interpellation to the reader—"Who's there?" As a reader, I'm called by Annie. I'm the intruder into your writing asking myself, how did I get here? how do I enter this text? who am I? As a woman reader I can feel threads of my being pulled through the narrative.

DM: This brings up the whole notion of audience: who do you write for, and how does that actually shape the writing. I began to feel that as a very important element of what I identify as feminist writing, and I don't want to say it's the only element or that all feminist writing has to have this, but, as a reader, when I feel that pull, when I feel that I'm being directly spoken to and drawn into what I'm reading, that I'm answerable in some way, that I create some kind of response to this writing that speaks to my own experience as a woman, when that happens, as a reader I am so compelled, I underline these books, I make notes in them. They make me think of my own writing, they give me ideas. I want to open similar spaces for this kind of conversation with readers of my own writing. It makes for a different sense of writing. I first began to feel it maybe in *How Hug a Stone*, because I knew I was working in the mother area, the mother's so strong, and we all had this in common, we all have these ambivalent relationships to our mothers. It has increased with *Touch* and now with *Ana*, and the experience of reading to that audience last night was a delightful experience for me, because in that laughter I could hear so much recognition, and it wasn't the men's laughter I was listening to, it was the women's: it's almost a painful kind of laughter, and it's releasing when you can laugh like that and it's named collectively, then the pain of it begins to dissipate.

JW: Not everything touches you with unconflicted identification. Yesterday we heard Claire Harris read "Where the Sky is a Pitiful Tent." Afterwards Claire talked about her dialogue with Guatemalan revolutionary Rigoberto Manchu's oral testimony and the complex thoughts she had about repeating another woman's story—how as a Canadian black woman with Caribbean roots, she related to a Latin American Indian woman's words in terms of both her difference and her identification.

DM: Right, and whether she's exploiting it.

JW: Whether she's exploiting the other woman's experience and appropriating her world of daily political oppression.

DM: Perhaps anyone who has felt any oppression at all can use that anger to help her understanding of much worse oppression. You know that you may not have felt anywhere close to the intensity of oppression in Guatemala, but you know as a lesbian what it feels like to live in a patriarchy, and Claire knows as a woman of colour what it feels like to be erased by racism. So you're never entirely an outsider. You can certainly question how you're using that material because we have so much more privilege, and here my "we" is a very doubtful we, because as a white woman I have even more privilege than a woman of colour living in Canada, but both of us, as women living in Canada where freedom of speech and the freedom to act is so much larger than in Guatemala, we have this privilege, and yet we also have some consciousness and we

know we can build from our own experiences of oppression, we can imagine ourselves into a little bit of that life, and it's very important to do that imagining. Exploitation happens when you as the writer remain on the outside of the experience, but if you can move even a few steps toward the inside—and I don't mean take over, appropriate someone else's experience, I mean evoke the grief and rage and pain it brings to you as a witness and make that real to others—Claire's poem did that for us.

JW: I'm having flashes about the reader and the therapeutic power of writing. Writing as homeopathic, as an inoculation and healing process, a recognition in difference and identity, and as catharsis.

DM: And that is political.

JW: Ah, is that one of the connections between feminist writing and feminist political action?

DM: I don't think you can have action without consciousness first. Consciousness precedes action, because if you don't act with consciousness you act irresponsibly and you may end up supporting exactly the thing that you're trying to undermine. So you have to have consciousness, and consciousness is constituted by language, so you have to look at the language first of all. It's a very complicated interaction. Changing consciousness by itself isn't enough; you can change the consciousness of individuals but if they don't get together and act collectively, nothing in the social world changes. So the two have to happen together.

JW: You've written poems which are explorations of your own experience in a colonial culture, Malaysia; as a young child you lived in a very privileged class position. "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" explores that experience of trying to find a structure of language to "carry this being here." What conflicts do you feel as a writer about an experience which appears intrinsically contradictory?

DM: I haven't finished exploring this yet, in fact in some ways I feel as if I've only just begun, and I don't think very clearly on it all. It's difficult to write of my childhood experience or my parents' experience without sounding like an apologist for colonialism, which is definitely not what I want to do. But the issues of racism and classism are so subtly bound into that experience, even though, as a child, I wasn't aware of them—or maybe especially so. The patriarchal oppression of women and colonialism are two different faces of the same coin, and I can see that in my mother who knew nothing about feminism but was in some ways an instinctive feminist, even in that colonial situation—and despite the really deep impulse to classism she also had. I don't think the conflicts of thinking women in a colonial situation have been adequately explored. My mother could identify with the women who were her servants to the extent of, on one occasion, standing up to the whole Catholic church in the

form of the local priest who was visiting to rail against one of her servants, a Tamil woman who was a Catholic and, according to the priest, living in sin because she wasn't married to the man she was living with although she was going to have a child by him. My mother was furious and threw him out of the house and was herself aware, not only of supporting this woman's desire and this woman's lived reality, but also aware of the social system under which Tamil men often left their legitimate lives in India and came to Malaysia to work, sending money back home to support their families. This might begin as a temporary situation but didn't end up being one because there was no work for them in India and so gradually, because they were lonely, they would take a woman in Malaysia and have another family. There were also the kinds of conflicts my mother felt being a woman and being limited in the ways a woman is limited in that society to the domestic realm. The resentments that she felt about having a life that had no meaning, that wasn't valued as productive—that was all there. But there was also this, that although my father might be out with wealthy business colleagues who were Chinese, my mother was in the home where she was in close touch with the domestic necessities of the women who were working for her and also living with us. For instance, we had a gardener who would get drunk and systematically beat up his wife, and my mother was always trying to figure out how she could intervene in this, respecting the fact that it was, after all, their marriage and their relationship, and yet trying to stop the beatings. In some senses the colonial women were brought in closer touch with the realities of the lives of colonized people than the colonial men were, and I think felt the conflicts more deeply and saw the effects of colonialism on a day to day level more clearly than the men did. On the other hand, I don't know what our servants really felt about my mother—I mean, on the surface, there was this feeling of loyalty and this feeling that she was a good "Mem," but what did they really think underneath that? I think she used to worry about that too. She wasn't really committed to that system as a way of life and in fact gave it up quite readily, and I think this was because as a woman she had a political awareness my father didn't have—or maybe I should say a disinterest, a political disinterest in upholding the Empire, and I mean "political" in the broadest sense of power relations.

JW: One of the things that comes up when you talk about this colonial setting is the material world. The contradiction you're trying to locate in your mother in this colonial setting is between gender and class. The material conditions of class and race are central to your early work, including *Steveston*. Later gender as an issue becomes predominant. Can we talk about this shift?

DM: Yes. I suppose what feminism forced me into was an examination of the creation of my female psyche—it was a very inward thing. It forced me to look at childhood, it forced me to take Freud seriously. It forced me to look at the origins of consciousness and how deeply in conflict we are at



that level. So in that sense it's a retreat from an analysis of class and race, which are large problems that feminists have to address, and, in fact, the feminist movement has seen that that is number one on the feminist agenda right now. I guess I don't want to be forced into an overgeneralized position, one that would say that women's psyches have all been formed in the same way, because clearly they haven't—the historical and class and racial conditions all have a different part to play in shaping us. But maybe this shift has something to do with coming to terms with the actual material of my existence as a writer: language. I had come to terms with the oldest layer of my language, the language I inherited from my mother which was generated within certain national class and period mores. Victorian stifling of female sexuality is something that comes under severe attack in *Anna*. I had to come to terms with this before I could do anything else, and I don't really know where I'll go from here.

What? What's a good idea? In the midst of dates of what would you say anti-intellect of class or someone's houseplate. Carried with the current down set, into a trunk (head aches), locked to be, slipped to some dead...

in the doorway for whatever reason (words) she, shot him down. Found, guilty of manslaughter.

Is that all now? Halfopen screen door, white face, <sup>white</sup> ~~crushed~~ <sup>crushed</sup> ~~would be the other half as surely as she feels the~~ <sup>intensity?</sup>

Or, like any good waitress, discreet. Yes. Red pencil, advancing, hauls up from a pocket adds, ~~stms~~, slips flat by A's plate. Freckles (thank you), no smile or, freckles plainly relics of the day, or what, things ~~evened?~~ <sup>night</sup>. Moon or lamplight. Hurried steps outside the shutters only 2 feet away. Heels. Click click. Angry. Click, or flurried. (Don't know what to think.)

Oh come on. Firmer footsteps after, hurried. ~~Mary~~ Don't you touch me. (Intensity whispered disgust almost jumps out of her skin.)

Let's go. (Let go. Spun, on her feet in tightening coil ~~bursts~~ <sup>to</sup> the far end. ~~Moans~~, ~~Heaps~~. Urgent now, was she going to jump?)

There is this silence prior to, as silence maintained in the museum after, space, for words to contract in. ~~silence~~, & up the stairs? You missed the bloody scene? What? Coming so late. What scene? She didn't jump? ~~Blind anger to~~ <sup>chair</sup>. As I could. You shoot me & I'll shoot you first. (Was it a wrong move?) For his gun. Or for arms, ~~his arms~~. To surround.

Back in the car, luggage stowed, ~~backed~~ <sup>backed</sup> up out of the dead end street, into highway, through, sun streams in the pines, ~~backers~~ ~~breases~~, hair tied -- D with his arm round C who eyes what stresses by in the splash of window frame ~~to~~ <sup>rocking</sup> (chair? ~~beams?~~) says, Good idea? ~~backed~~ <sup>flashed</sup> firewood in that trunk, did you see it? See? Arm of pine, on a hot day ~~crack~~, out.

Daphne Macklet

Draft of "Mokulumne Hill" [in *What Matters*]. Literary Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Canada.

Daphne Marlatt's "Ecology of Language"

earth flicker its own circuits we, transparent, burn within.  
 (torn knots nets are, shadows only. (S 72, 69)

"Like a stone" begins *Rings*. Yeats echoes: a stone "To trouble the living stream."<sup>1</sup> Stone becomes son becomes sun, "first cause":

this morning sun i saw rise  
 silent over the empty house  
 my love two lives now  
 cheerios in hand, smiles

beatific  
 morning  
 son

not mythic, just  
 begotten one (WM 165)

Sequel to "ardour's," "first cause" inscribes light after ashes, the light of a different fire from that of the "dying ash / poor ash & us // the poorer" (WM 164) preface to "goodbye" which concludes *What Matters*:

i am here, feel  
 my weight on the wet  
 ground (168)

To be: to feel: to (be) here: to feel (*here* as though a verb, an imperative commanding connection, attention); to choose first (but not capitalized) person: to speak (out of) one's own presence—not at all in Derrida's sense—in a grounded here, weight on wet, wetness of ground, ground of feeling and being, the weight of *here* which must be chosen, found, invented, remembered, made real through articulation which is a calling (back) to focus.

The movement is healing, leaving behind the jagged silences and angular interiors of *Rings* with its shifting tides of disembodied voices, framed by windows, doors, rooms which are too large or too small. So Kit becomes sun becomes Columbus, figure of a world which "you go around . . . (not off the edge) & the outer limits (ends) connect, no edge" (WM 126). A

world of rings, not frames, where ringing changes become chances and (as) touch is possible.

. . . you  
 run downstream to meet  
 my leaf, life

we also

touch (WM 147-148)

But celebration and resistance are twinned in Marlatt and the matter of life, the matter which is life, brings both the joyous touch of mothering and the uneasy touch of those who presume ownership. "Listen" literalizes the grating inconsistencies between these modes as "he" reads to her in the kitchen while "she" makes salad for supper.

Lost, how dancing had lost touch with the ring dance which was a collective celebration—she was standing with the grater in one hand, carrot in the other, wondering if the grating sound would disturb him. . . . hand in hand, he was saying, a great circle like the circle of the seasons . . . . The whole carrot was shrinking into a thousand orange flakes heaped & scattered at once, the whole carrot with its almost transparent sides shining in the light, had ground down to a stump her fingers clutched close to the jagged edges of tin, she saw her fingers grating, saw blood flying like carrot flakes, wondered why she imagined blood as part of the salad . . . (NW 139-140)

"Listen," he says and reads about "imprisonment in marriage . . . [and] about the ring dance, about the participation of couples in the one great celebration, the 'amorous feast that joins them to all living things'. He means fertility, she said, thinking, oh no, oh back to that, woman's one true function," and as he reads about "sexual capitalism," she sees another version of the dance in the placing of carrot on lettuce in the salad bowl. "Listen, she said," setting the bowl on the table. Silence.

Returning near the end of *How Hug a Stone* as an emblem of woman's primordial history, the ring dances at Avebury and Stonehenge celebrated "not a person . . . [but] what we come through to & what we come out of, ground & source. the space after the colon, the pause (between the words) of all possible relation" (HHS 73). Layered in the barrows at the heart of these stone circles, the poet is layered also in language, the principle of matter "issuing thru the ring of the invisible to ground—or hearing: as the vowel carries breath to make a sound." She is "sounding, thru the ring of surrounding phonemes, it changes—hearing change the very matter of" (WM 127). Heard differently in *How Hug a Stone*, she is the echo at the end of one of the many journeys "home" in Marlatt's work, home in this case as "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" to find the meaning



of Edrys, her dead mother, surviving in her context—to discover, study, understand, realize Poltimore, “Englishness,” Penang, a dialect once spoken, echoing in memory.

“communication: the central problem of Rings” (WM 117)—not only Rings as birth narrative (both Kit and the narrator) but as structure of communication, sound arcs and loops, history as “the shell we exude for a place to live in” (HHS 51). Exuded in layers spiralling one upon the other, history forms words as a conch-shell winds sound around itself, as a ring fort winds the sun’s rays at solstice over its heel stone. So the pattern of Marlatt’s work is that of an epic journey through the underworld, accompanied—sometimes led—by Kit as “first cause,” along the way meeting such familiar obstacles as mother, childhood homes and fears, first love, and death—an “artist parable”<sup>2</sup> which, like Mozart’s *Magic Flute*, proclaims that truth toward which it has been heading from the beginning. As the epigraph from Gertrude Stein used for “In The Month of Hungry Ghosts” puts it, “We cannot retrace our steps, going forward may be the same as going backwards” (MHG 45). Which is to say “reality is synchronic” (WM 71); the generic pattern of a life recurs but, lived, each layer—diachronic, over time—builds up the shell of history which we, mollusc-like, inhabit, the digestive product of our interaction with the earth. Hermits unless we wrap the earth about ourselves, we grow layers of other lives, sedimenting ourselves into the earth as, in *Steveston*, the shadowy river moves always under the surface of the street. “It rings us / where we are . . . elide[s] the code / we’ve managed to forget!”—

as if the earth were dead

& we within it ash, eating ash, drinking the lead fire of our own consumption, “Here’s to us!”

As if, “outside,” a white fire *doesn’t* ring us, earth flicker its own circuits we, transparent, burn within. (S 72)

“Imagine: a town” *Steveston* begins: imperative, exclamation. Imagine and invent for it’s the process of invention that gets you *here*, heals lossness, resuscitates memory which is imagination. “Imagine”: an urgent injunction, carrying the urgency of death and dissolution and of the circle whose motion can be slowed only for the moment of speaking the poem, the moment of its recycling following the circular motion of rings which “break the notion of forward progression—progress in the name of which DDT, atom bomb, nuclear power” (WM 123). Not the product of our invention, earth is matter, place is sheer “physical matter,” is “what matters.” “It rings us / where we are,” its fires and currents ours for we are of the same substance and matter in the same ways, earth’s processes of generation ours in generations, “Steveston, / at the heart: our death is gathering (salmon) just offshore, as, / back there in this ghostly place we have (somehow) entered (where?) / you turn & rise, gently, into me” (S 74).

Part of earth, humans are moved as are the river and the fish. Destroying the river, humans destroy not only salmon habitat but the human life-world,<sup>3</sup> the ecosystem which sustains all, equally. So the blighted lives of cannery workers are the corollary of the “death that must be kept cool, fresh” (S 24)—salmon death, human death: “supper, bed. ‘my life,’ etc.” (S 24); the same shadow passes over and through the same world. “Men sleeping, lives, or lives sleeping, doors” (S 28)—a chiasmus of things and perceivers and their interrelations which becomes for the poet “the obligation to voice them [things], in their terms, . . . they exist without us. they don’t need us, we need them. just as we need to voice them . . .” (WM 45).

Our extension into the world of things, language is also a mark of our dependence on them for “things flame in us as words” (WM 45) and writing is a net cast out over the wordless environment,<sup>4</sup> seeking not possession but a moment, a “complex in time where imagination/memory click with environment” and we are, briefly, not lost, not homeless, but fully participant as members of a world which we speak and read and which reads us. “KWAKIUTL: we live by the world = according as / the world gives” (WM 153). The relation is reciprocal. Our part, “To take / no more than the requisite, *required* to grow, spawn, / catch, die: required to eat” (S 66). To take language, the gift of words from things, in just measure, “each word what those around it relate of it as it relates (to) them”: this is the “ecology of language” in which the world is con/text “(text, the weave, the net)” (WM 153), source of the poet’s obligation to speak the world and, since writing is how humans realize the world,<sup>5</sup> to save it from ourselves, from the drive toward usurpation which comes of our dependence upon things sufficient unto themselves. Writing models our human, problematic relation to the world.

Only, always to dream of erotic ghosts of the flowering earth; to return to a decomposed ground choked by refuse, profit, & the concrete of private property; to find yourself disinherited from your claim to the earth. (S 76)

If dreams are narratives made of those words which arise from the flaming of things within us, their opposite is the poisoned world of the “exploited earth,” the “burial of burial ground by corporate / property” (S 75-76), the residue of pain, dug into the land” (S 59), the blade of the cannery’s “iron chink” with its “teeth marked: / for marriage, for birth, for death” (S 15-16). Rings.

Until in the end the fate of salmon and people is the same, hooked, torn, netted, pursued by “enigmatic chance” (S 13) whose shadowy course mimes that of the spawning salmon as

the stainless

steel lines going down in the Gulf echo other trollings, catch in the mesh of a net we refuse to see, the accretion of all our actions, how they interact, how the inter/read (intelligence),

receive, the reading the sea, a vanishing marsh, a dying river, the mesh we are netted in, makes of us. (S 70)

Reading the marsh, the river, the nets, the sea reads our lives, is a reading of us as, reading our world, we act upon it, are acted upon—inter/read, inter/act—receive earth's reading of us, are netted in a context which we mime, which we are as, netting ourselves, we encounter death. "(torn knot nets are, shadows only" (S 69). Fish, we are caught, "light on / full, suddenly blinded in its extent" (S 69). Thus the silence after the colon, the torn knots of nets which are our context; only "chance flicks his tail & swims, thru" (S 14).

"reading the light of Reading read . . ." oneself through new things, "first cause" at hand as avatar, guardian and, in the case of *How Hug a Stone*, guide whose allergy to "home" is very much a reaction of (what) matter(s) (HHS 17). "THAT THE OTHER EXISTS" *Rings* asserts as a principle of community, the choosing of community being parallel to the voicing of things. Both are obligations of the poet, acts which must be "out in the open" (WM 125, 23). Parallel to the obligation to voice things in their terms is the obligation to voice the life of a community for "maybe genuine singing occurs when a large experience (of a people) is forced through a small exit, the individual's throat, 'tongue,' way of speaking" (WM 149).

The condition of imagining a community, of wording its context, is the condition of finding its own words, its history, and respecting that manifold reading of a people in their own terms which is "dream," the reading of Reading. As words mediate things to which we are joined in substance, so words mediating a people's dream encounter the things of their lives, words being possible medium of ex/change. Not things, words are the currency of our meaning, meaningless in themselves except insofar as they contain embedded in their syllables morsels of their history. They are the shell-stuff of our history. They are what is left in the absence of the things and people they once mediated, the memory of their flaming out in us. Encysted intertexts, they are fossils, not property. Or, they are "widening rings (water) that disappear on the outer edge into the city," into urban things, occasions of their generation (WM 151). Their utterance is the poet's "right to / speak" (WM 121), her entry into the verbal ecosystem.

"to understand the interrelating of bodies / words" (WM 153) through the mediating power of language is to understand the relation of touch (the body in its thing/world, its sheer physicality, extending to another surface in the world) to tongue (instrument of speaking, the tip of the tongue touching, forming, the sounds of words flaming out within us, sounding in a lifeworld shared by others).<sup>6</sup> So language makes us things to each other, puts us in the same relation to other humans as we are to things and, on those rare occasions when a response comes which is not silence but the discovery of *place* in an/other, makes possible community which is con/text. Relating words to each other as we do things in the

world, taking "no more than the requisite, required to grow, spawn, / catch, die" (S 66), we create a possible world through an act of love, a giving and taking of nourishment, a discovery of the body of the beloved as map which, in the reading, flames out and, for a time, seeing the net, still flickers through.

#### Notes

I am indebted to Susan Knutson and Sarah Harasym whose understandings of Marlatt and doctoral dissertations on her work have influenced this essay, and to Peter Quartermain for rare books and much conversation.

1. W.B. Yeats. "Easter 1916." *Collected Poems*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1950) 204.

2. Patricia Merivale's term and *Die Zauberpflöte* her model. See Merivale, "Neo-Modernism in the Canadian-Artist Parable: Hubert Aquin and Brian Moore," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 4 (Spring 1979):195-205.

3. *Umwelt* is Jakob von Uexküll's term. See "The Theory of Meaning," tr. Thure von Uexküll, *Semiotica* 42.1 (1982). Contrary to the belief of some critics, Marlatt's theory of communication is primarily semiotic, not phenomenological. Although in a Journal entry for 22 February 22, 1970 she experiments with Heidegger's distinction between earth and world (WM 125), she does not sustain the paradigm in her work. In the same Journal entry, in fact, she opposes the Heideggerian paradigm to the semiotic one of the "(bee/ecosystem: grassworld," perhaps thinking of Karl von Frisch's classic semiotic work on the language of bees. The extent to which things are separated out from human perception in Marlatt is precisely an index of the non-phenomenological nature of the work.

4. "each day of writing much like one cast of a net" (WM 153).

5. "to realize our life is the same as to write" (WM 124).

6. An equation which is easier in French: *langue* (tongue, language), a pun central to Nicole Brossard's *Picture Theory*. Brossard's image of the cor(text) parallels Marlatt's of con/text from 1968-70 Journal entries on in her work. Brossard's and Marlatt's recent collaborations represent a conjunction of two systems long in the making without mutual influence. However, to argue as some critics do that this is an exchange made possible by Marlatt's development of a lesbian poetics in *Touch to My Tongue* is to trivialize two decades of her production, a time during which her feminist ecological poetics gradually came together. The revolutionary energy of such recent texts as *Touch to My Tongue* and *Ana Historic* is no greater than that of *Steveston*; rather, it is part of a consistent pattern of critique and resistance reaching its logical outcome. To assume that pre-1984 Marlatt is "lyrical" and ideologically neutral is to subscribe to the colonizing hypothesis of those who have attempted to typecast Marlatt as a "phenomenologist," and to relegate her to the role of bright observer of man's world. That this rise has been persuasive is a measure of the work to be done on, e.g. *Steveston*, which stands with Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie* among the major texts of modern Canadian literature.



23/7/76  
Penang

Tree Publican

Song/bird

each his own  
how each does chant  
his tributary note  
to the great canopy  
under the rain trees'  
'choric-canopy' chirps

leads to the  
trining. zining. trining  
of the trisha bell his  
bare feet pedal into  
oblivion.

only the living  
bird-lyrics still descend  
not even traffic  
hacks

as seen do  
rush by, brush  
air, on their way to  
some other where

birds/ song

The RES publican stays  
in place meeti-  
layered

only the  
cutting edge of  
will call while the con-  
strives to insist -  
its each its  
particular

While this rain  
this flame this  
feathered brood -  
multichordality is.

bird/song

"... the world, like every in-between, releases & separates men at the same  
time" (p.52) Hannah Arendt

Song/bird

each his own  
how each does chant  
his tributary note  
to the great canopy  
under the rain trees'  
'choric-canopy' chirps

leads to the  
trining, zining, trining  
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strives to insist -  
its each its  
particular  
multichordality is.

multichordality is  
seen this rain  
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feathered brood  
multichordality is.

Recursions Excursions and Incursions:  
Daphne Marlatt Wrestles with the Angel Language

Imagine a town. Steveston. Imagine a poem, a book, the river swirls through and syntax eddies. Pages stretch across, speckled with commas. That effect of breathlessness, the comma rips in the surface, small spasms, rapids within a voice that arches on & on. Marlatt style.

Where she writes "somebody accidentally knocked the oil lamp over, off / the edge" (S 13). Rhythms of amplification and addition. A syntax of second thought (off the edge, come to think of it, to be more precise), of not knowing where the sentence will go till it gets there, "where / chance flicks his tail & swims, thru" (S 14). There is a suspension at that comma, stuck like a tack in the line, tacking. It suggests an arrival: ah, here is where I've come. So "chance flicks his tail & swims." That's what happens. A halt. And then that "thru," spliced on. The sequence simulates a passage, a moving through, mind through its thoughts. As elsewhere the syntax seems to bring us in its unfolding through a sequence of discovery:

& the cans, & the steam, & a cavern of men with rolled up sleeves  
& straw hats, & men in oilcloth slickers spattered with fish gut,  
beyond & across the corner of that dark stands  
another door, & the sail of a boat crossing the river, wind,  
wind . . . (16)

There is a boat moving and then, inexplicably, "wind, / wind." No explanation, no preparation, no concessions to discursive language—just the sudden eruption of that recognition and that acknowledgement. The words seem to appear at the very moment of experience, the way they do in "those open doors (two)" (16) where the adjective trails on its noun and reenacts the nature of experience in time. There's the first awareness, here: doors; then the second: ah, yes, two of them. Doors. Then their number. We don't get both at the same time, or the attribute before its source, which the construction 'two open doors' would indicate. Marlatt's come-to-think-of-it style, free to annex an afterthought, inserts second thoughts: "the / fencodup place he keeps his dog, back of the dock, this place (source) / he haunts, his bark, or its" (18). Marlatt likes that rhythm, sometimes makes the pause more emphatic, before the addition: "out to the open / seas / the open season, current, storm: & fish" (33). She likes, too, a self-adjusting style in which language can give way to its

own correction: "It's been raining, or it's wet" (23). She tries one possibility; then, as it occurs to her (as in speech), another.

We also get, in the "wind" passage, runs of ampersands. They speckle and splatter the page. Coordinates, they record a rapid series of impressions that escape hierarchies, that evade, certainly, a syntax of hierarchies. As a result the details are received within Marlatt's style in something like undifferentiated moments or unavoidable parts in the pour of life. Her stance, which is to say her syntax, respects the ordinary and pins it, its bits together. The patters of ampersands become emblems of continuity, too, of consonance in the universe—all these things appear on an equal footing, immune from a writing that would put them in their place or pretend to sort them out on some ratings chart: "In from the Outside, where the night lives, this spring, this / moon as every spring: freshet, & the salmon churning black waters, / darker depths" (22). The moon, the salmon, sky & water—all these tied together, tide together in the rivering Marlatt's writing is.

The syntax speaks, commonly, of "fish corpse piled on top of each other (residue/ time is . . .)" (13), "waiting for work, the wheel that time is" (15), "the dark where machines are" (16). The trajectories, leading (falling?) into verbs, would seem to be more come upon than arranged. The same goes for another pattern, typified in "her / body in its light dress wind blows thru" (15), whose prepositional ending embodies rhythms of engagement and immediacy. The construction also serves more as a sign of physical experiencing (the wind blows, you can feel it, on your skin) than pointed location. You can appreciate the effect by altering the words to read, correctly, 'her body in its light dress through which wind blows.' How stilted that structure, how studied, how unresponsive to the moment it seems. Compared at least to Marlatt's syntax it is, to her "natural" writing, replete with elisions (drastic elisions) and phrases that move up to prepositions: "in their barely salvaged houses where / rats skitter, night, eat at nets drying upstairs the hunger of / eleven people rests on" (55-6). A preposition we can't resist.

We can appreciate, too, that any number of these constructions, in *Steveston* at least, amble up to verbs that announce a state of being—is, is, are. Amble up to them and sniff them, ably. Time is, residue time is, machines are. In search of essence the clauses find their completions in states of being, resist (often: more often than we'd expect) verbs of action. It may be surprising, finding so many words like that to announce definitions and essences, but it shouldn't be. Marlatt is forever drawn to what she takes to be basic realities that are obscured from our knowing. Or by it, by our knowing, hidden by what we have learned.

Yet Marlatt, as we all know, is after the moment. The marks are everywhere: in the parentheses, the emphatic rhyming, the elisions, repetitions. They appear in the present indicative, the variable rhythms, the removal of many grammatical (and observing) subjects, the radical discontinuities. They are there in the unusual punctuation: commas nicked into phrases and clauses, inside them; colons giving way to



colons, the bases from which we go and to which we return—creating a slight effect of the incantatory.

There are, prominently, those long long sentences that spread like oil spills:

The

cavernous "fresh fish" shed filled with water, with wet bodies of dead fish,  
in thousands, wet aprons & gloves of warm bodies whose hands expertly trim,  
cut, fillet, pack these bodies reduced to non-bodies, nonsensate food  
*these*  
bodies ache from, feet in gumboots on wet cement, arms moving, hands, cold  
blowing in from open doors facing the river, whose ears dull from, the in-  
sensate noise of machinery, of forklifts, of grinding & washing, of conveyor  
belt. (23-4)

The style is addictive. Addictive? Ever adding, it takes on words, thirsty as old locomotives took on water. The sentence, here—it *is* a sentence—defies grammatical analysis, as everywhere Marllatt's sentences rush and run on until they become virtually indiscernible and collapse into or upon their own rhythm. Quite appropriately. They resist the proper sentence: "Such a sentence [proper, discursive sentence] begins as subject-predicate and grows by identification, determination, and causality" (Kristeva 70). The effect of such a sentence we feel when, speaking of the stasis and exploitation that despoil the lives Marllatt in *Steveston* admires, she brings her river of words suddenly to a halt: "They continue, as if, it wasn't so long ago / they changed direction, roads, leaving sea & moving inland, inroads to a / heart that changes. Monopoly" (28). That's it, there's the fluid muscle, verbs, verbing, supple bend of the lines, moving moving. Then that jolt, that one-word sentence, the one noun, fixing, chops into the music—"Monopoly."—halts it. It's: Monopoly, *period*.

We can identify a propensity for the Marllatt sentence—the cannery sentence for instance—to spread off adjective clauses and phrases. It is a rolling out into properties. But there are plenty of nouns (lists of them, even) and verbals too. We might say with some assurance the structure is right-branching, as it so graphically is in say the colons that pepper the Marllatt page (64). The style addends more and more material, slithers in deeper and deeper whirls. It verges on chant, pulses from a base: "of machinery, of forklifts, of . . . , of . . ." Above all, it eschews completion. Like the symbol that courses through the book, the Fraser, it rivers before us.

Marllatt resists the sentence because she suspects its orders (as she suspects capitalist orders, its sentences, its capitals) and wants to let loose another music. A "polylogue's fugue," the style brings a different

rhythm, one that will, if we let it, carry us away, says Julia Kristeva (178). They will, these lines, wall to wall words, welters of them, swell with rhymes, well with play if we let them, really hear them:

Pour, pour  
from its bank) this river is rivering urgency, roar (17)

These mountains now,  
New Denver, rise up round a slow lake windblown sometimes, seeming  
to  
go nowhere. (56)

a murky  
river roils, have torn, ripped, & otherwise scorned, sometimes from  
leadline to cork . . . (63)

Marllatt, married to rhyme, in all its shapings, erotic as all get out, their erotic gropings, groupings. Salt spray, over the sentence, crossing it in a network of sound. Rimming it. Across the sentence's dispersal, the incessant gathering, the recursions in sound and rhythm and reference.

Matter of fact, Marllatt's work is about as recursive as any we get. She puts the heat on language, squeezes out its rhymes, its folk etymologies, the learned cognates. Her syntax spaghetti on our laps, old shoelaces—infinitely accommodating, intimately enfolding. A syntax happy to fall upon its laces its finds run pleased look look at that into new unfoldings unexpected propositions so prepositional who could resist when she bumps into rocks that sit under the face of water.

In time bringing the words to us. Time and again, in "time's push" (18), she works in time, its melodic line pockets of sound swirl in. She seeks expressive rhythms of extension: "she'll take / all that river gives, willing only to stand her ground (rolling / with it, right under her feet, her life, rolling, out from under, / right on out to sea . . ." (65). Rhythms of arrest and rest, too, where for instance Marllatt spreads out an armful of nouns, slows them within periods to take stock of them, lets them and what they name register with her, with us. Here is a pokey rhythm of nouns, distinct within their periods:

trickle of broken hose. old netting, sacking, rope.  
paint everywhere. penboards on end & painted silver.  
[and then motion starting up, outboard in the water, the verbs  
coming, put put put, commas letting them go] poles with  
bells to be fitted, new springs & line, the sound of a boat  
rubbing against tire, whisper of rope, shift across rope as a  
boat lifts or falls. (33)

She can do that—that rhyme of silence, where the absence of words implies the mind's slide into readiness or openness. Or uncertainty?

Either way, there's no irritable rush to explain: "Standing inside the door (the river . . .)" (15). Yes, think of that, the river the silence.

Trying to get out from under the sentence, Marlatt often removes grammatical subjects, and sometimes their predicates. Look at that passage "These mountains now." No subject, no predicate, just the phenomena apparently. The style tends to elide distance and bring our noses to the window, to touch the world, naked before it. The grammatical omission is typical and shows a determination to reduce the "I" who commonly supervises texts, or of any observing subjects who might open a rationalizing gap between the text and the world. For it is Marlatt's purpose, always, to shrink that distance, even at times to pretend it is removed. That's why, as we've seen, she avoids the discursive signs of relative pronouns, particularly when they awkwardly would drag a preposition into the sentence. All those "to which's" and "from which's" that drag their broken wings through our prose. Take this example, with the missing words set in brackets: "swirling around & past those / pilings of the cannery wharf they are standing on, [under which there are] muddy & / pale grey teeming, invisible fish" (15). Marlatt's preference for excision informs even her markers of time and place. True, she uses an enormous number of deictics, dozens of them. Yet she gives few captions or explicit translations, still fewer names for speakers or occasions. She leaves us pretty much on our own as we try to keep up with rapid redirections in her text. So the language throws us onto the line of a mind's unfolding (one that is only modestly committed to leading us through its successions). The drastic shifts, like the squirming syntax and spike punctuation, further subvert any arc toward clarity.

Look at all those other entries that Marlatt inserts with parentheses. Here's one: "But the / Fraser gives of itself, incessantly, rich (so the dream goes), / & wooden houses" (16). Here, as often elsewhere, the parentheses disrupt the rhythm with quite another discourse, invest in quite other accents, and offer judgements. Here's the opening of *Steveston*: "Imagine: a town [big hole then, two lines, pause for the needle to fall & the music to begin, o.k. we begin, we imagine] "Imagine a town running / (smoothly?" (13). We open with some sort of invocation, an invitation into reverie, and all that the affirmation implies. The offer is all the more disarming because, though an invocation, it comes without naming any muse and seems therefore to travel a more direct (how Marlattian) route to source or inspiration. But no sooner do we think of entering, in good faith (well let's see about this town then), than the parentheses undermine the contract, call our trust into question. The incursion serves to interrogate the start to a point of annulling it.

The parentheses also serve to score a dialogue (word to word replying). The interplay allows Marlatt to insert little dissonance in the text: "he said it was dark (a hall? a shack" (13). They impede the forward direction, deny its single purpose, a known route. These envelopes which she time and again tucks into the text, mails to herself, contain flickers of a mind (inner) answerable to its own movement, not necessarily to public discourse (though clearly circumscribed by it—other texts,

known conventions). And yet, in one sense the parenthetical moments act more as simultaneous expressions than interruptions. If they were lateral, i.e. departures from some discernible main line, they could at least be set aside to serve in a subordinate way. But because the ruptures come so interactively and so frequently in mid-sentence (not at the end where they would be less disruptive) they speak more equally with and to the rest of the text: "the bodies of men & fish corpse piled on top of each other (residue / time is, the delta) rot, and endless waste" (13).

\* \* \*

Marlatt takes a terrible risk, observing this style. Answerable to itself, observant of its own processes, expressive though it may be, and much as it may mirror certain experiences, it puts special demands on readers and risks losing them. What about the effects, then, of reducing indices of direction, and heightening signs of immersion and immediacy? There is no easy answer, but there are times, I think, when Marlatt has turned her writing so much in on itself, so preferred reflexive to referential language, that her work loses power, erodes a certain kind of meaning, and reduces access to it. The challenge is: how do you write a poem that is true to its minute, convoluted coming into existence, *and that can snag on readers' bones?* Can fidelity to source ensure resonance to audience?

Yet she wants to write this way (in other texts she turns still more reflexive), and she chooses to do so for good reasons. The reasons are multiple. For years her work was based, still is based, on one version of postmodernism that crucially informs her books. Marlatt derives from a phenomenological and not particularly from a structuralist or poststructuralist base. That means that to a degree few have acknowledged she has worked in a continuance of a liberal-humanist tradition, one which assumes language resides in the individual in expression of herself. That begetting self is presumed to be intact and prior to language, and so to be some sort of stable entity which potentially can find full expression in language. The self may in this tradition be repressed or obscured and hence needing release, but she is there nonetheless. As other realities are there, similarly susceptible to misnaming and to recuperation. Hence Marlatt's trust in the rhythms of a consciousness coming—not into being: into *presence*. She speaks the self as she emerges into an adequately expressed self, typically by breaking through false language (false consciousness): fixed grammar, closed forms, misnamings, and (more recently in Marlatt) patriarchal structures. Whatever the difficulty and whatever the fault, this self is one that is expressed nevertheless—ex-pressed, presses outward, outered, uttered, spread from its source which is the self. That Marlatt has written always out of a distrust for authoritarianism and that her opposition has from the outset been—I use the word loosely—generically grounded in postmodernism ought not to be forgotten.

It shouldn't be forgotten, either, when we find the writing turned upon 'male' structures of power and mastery. When I say this of Marlatt I am thinking particularly of what happens in *Ana Historic*. It's clear



Marlatt is aware of positions (Benjamin Lee Whorf's) that see language as constituting us. She has said so on more than one occasion. But in her writing she is drawn even more, I think, to quite a different sense of language. She forever searches for origins, beginnings, sources—always for realities that are prior to language. Even though in "Musing with Mother-tongue" she speaks of "a history of verbal relations . . . that has preceded us and given us the world we live in" (TTMT 46) and of how "in a crucial sense we cannot see what we cannot verbalize" (TTMT 47), she nevertheless in that essay and elsewhere still affirms the hidden, the unsaid, the initial, the rooted.

And so, as in "Musing" she turns her version of postmodernism hospitably into a space for an emerging feminism, she seeks within its jurisdiction ways to counteract "what our patriarchally-loaded language bears (can bear) of our experience and the difference from it our experience bears out—how it misrepresents, even miscarries, and so leaves unsaid what we actually experience" (TTMT 47). That absence she comes increasingly to locate in the female body as "largely unverballed, presyntactic, postlexical" (TTMT 48) (in a sense of restoring words to their original meanings).

And so the fascination with etymology, increasingly (it has always been there) in Marlatt. The inclination brings together her interest in origins and in reflexive writing within a system. They announce further an engagement in a textual world, and not in any way direct or raw experience, the dictionary presiding over them.

In *Ana Historic*, published 14 years after *Steveston*, we find the roots. Two of them are particularly telling. In one of them we learn that "scribe is from the . . . root, *skeri*, to cut (the ties that bind us to something recognizable—the 'facts')" (A 81). The entry leads us two ways. It takes us into two major views of language and literature that inform this book. Throughout it Marlatt bounces between viewing language as acts of intervention and subject therefore to human invention and alteration, and viewing language as service (or disservice) to truth and subject therefore to tests of evidence. The latter prizes facts, the former imagination. The one initially raises questions of ethics, the other matters of freedom. Either way, Marlatt bases her book in linguistic terms and makes it enormously conscious of its means, as she considers versions of the self and in particular the female self.

Marlatt's growing sense of our world as text means this book is strikingly metalingual. Metafictional too. It, or more precisely the narrator, worries about how to end (150), especially when the usual ending is in place "(by definition)" and "already pre-ordained, prescribed" (147). The book concerns itself with "untelling" stories (141, 137), identifies "holes in the story you [Ina, the narrator's mother] had inherited" (26). The book frequently considers the roles characters are assigned in various texts, develops numerous references to theatre and to the roles one is asked to play or chooses to play (101, 139, 16, 144, 118, for instance). It interrogates the protagonist (104) and supposes that the narrator's mother has been swallowed as character in a novel (150), as it

supposes that she can exist only in story and sentence and brackets and asides (17). All metalingual or metafictional, these terms. There are important references to other texts—to romances (99, 24) and the "roman / ce" (67), to a cover story (60). And there are many mentions of what is legible or read (15), what is written or erased (100). In one of them we find that a Mrs. Springer is endangered:

if all the other selves she might be were erased—secret diarist, pioneer pianist, travelling companion to Birdie Stewart—unvalidated, unacceptable, in short. because they weren't the right words. try artist, try explorer—prefaced always by lady . . . (146)

Marlatt lays out a world in which others tell the stories and define the discourse. That means your head is "full of other people's words" and you are "nothing *without* quotation marks." That or you are, finally, "unreadable" (81).

Such a structure of knowing, an awareness that in a profound sense we write the world, informs the book's suspicion of the discourse we know as history. History—because it largely has been male history—is full of missing persons (134), unwritten people and unwritten stories (131, 109). History is full of "bracketed ladies" and "anonymous ladies" (83), women who get written out of things, written off.

the ships men ride into the pages of history. the winning names. the nameless women who are vessels of their destiny. the ship R.H., H.O. ride into history as stars on board the mute matter of being wife and mother—ahistoric, muddled in the mundane, incessantly repeating, their names 'writ in water.' (121)

In all that blankness, those blank records, blank pages, Marlatt with her narrator seeks something else, seeks to write other texts, different scripts, find names and invent names. To tell a different story. The struggle is not merely verified in language, it is based there. At least in certain passages it is. It is good, *Ana Historic* implies (I think), to make things up (55) and to tell stories (28), to be inventive. Even if you obscure "the truth" (55). In these diagnoses Marlatt comes close to another branch of postmodernism, one centered in poststructuralism and one that supposes the world is *always* scripted. Because it is written, it is subject always to readings, misreadings, to de-descriptions, in-scriptions. It is liable too to writing and rewriting. Righting.

So what's the story? Not history, we know that. History won't do. It's the wrong script. Or a lie. It's a lie when what's needed is truth. It's "something in you breaking free of fiction, the ideal, the false standard" (101). It's recognizing the malicious "intent" of a joke, it's "dodging truth with a Falsehood . . . that doubles back to admit itself. a game, a small indulgence . . . at her expense, insists on what it disavows." It's a "truth told in the guise of falsehood" (105). Truth? Falsehood? Fair enough but

not (this is *not* a judgement) the stuff of poststructuralism. On the contrary, these terms involve language in its capacity to refer to the world and to embody it. Even when Marlatt distrusts appeals to nature, she doesn't suppose that 'nature' is at fault, rather that men and women have different natures that need properly to be identified (150).

The main assumptions about language in *Ana Historic* don't by the way entirely abandon a sense of the textual world, for they identify the joke as a form of discourse (highly social) and they promote one term—Falsehood—in large case, just as Marlatt identifies male enterprises as occurring on the redoubtable R.H. & H.O. The device is effective, since the book establishes capitals or inflated letters as a mark of male power, all that flexing of muscle. A man, presuming his charm over a woman, displays his wit "in large script for all to read" (107); a modern office partly emerges in its obligations (to which evidently one is summoned by men) as "the Office Party"—as if in capital letters Marlatt tells us (58); a man seeks "Progress" and wants to be "Master of one's Destiny" (118); men try to affix women in their Proper place as capital-L "Ladies" (32); and the early city fathers of Hastings Mill speak of their shacktown in big proper nouns—"all these capital letters to convince themselves of its, of their, significance" (28). A bad case of arrogance.

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The stream of Time, irresistible, ever moving, carries off and bears away all things that come to birth and plunges them into utter darkness, both deeds of no account and deeds which are mighty and worthy of commemoration; as the playwright says, it 'brings to light that which was unseen and shrouds from us that which was manifest' [Sophocles]. Nevertheless, the science of History is a great bulwark against this stream of Time; in a way it checks this irresistible flood, it holds in a tight grasp whatever it can seize floating on the surface and will not allow it to slip away into the depths of Oblivion.

I, Anna, daughter of the Emperor Alexius and the Empress Irene, born and bred in the Purple, not without some acquaintance with literature—having devoted the most earnest study to the Greek language, in fact, and being not unpractised in Rhetoric and having read thoroughly the treatises of Aristotle and the dialogues of Plato, and having fortified my mind with the Quadrivium of sciences (these things must be divulged, and it is not self-advertisement to recall what Nature and my own zeal for knowledge have given me, nor what God has apportioned to me from above and what has been contributed by Opportunity); I, having realized the effects wrought by Time, desire now by means of my writings to give an account of . . . deeds, which do not deserve to be consigned to Forgetfulness nor to be swept away on the flood of Time into an ocean of Non-Remembrance. (Comnena 17)

Yet Marlatt turns to matters of truth and visibility and locates her purpose mainly in a struggle to name. To name accurately and fully. The problem is still linguistic, then, but it figures now in describing. One may be misrepresented or unrepresented, but one is susceptible to being presented or represented all the same. Again and again, we read that the narrator or the protagonist lacks words to speak of her experience or has been denied them: "you who cannot find the words to explain yourself, your sense of the real. you who literally cannot speak. though they speak about you, the men do, those others" (105). Words desert women, women lack names to designate their experience, no words can convey what they know, experience can lie (beneath, below, behind, under, underneath, before, within, inside, beyond) what one can tell. To be so prepositioned is a proposition Marlatt deconstructs. Prelinguistic too, sometimes (32), in a life beyond texts and even before them. That's what the book tells us, more than anything—"it was knowing where the real began, under the words that pretended something else" (77). The goal is to name the unspoken, the denied, the unwritten, the unacknowledged. Everywhere there is a female experience, hidden but emerging into full articulation. It's there even if its signs sometimes are erased (134), altered, reduced (to initials, 113), misapplied, unknown, replaced (with brand names, 52), supplanted by 'romantic' names like Teen Angel and Doll (82) or sugar and honey (81). There is a Siwash woman called "Ruth," but "that cannot be her real name" (69). That's the trouble with names, they are untrustworthy or unfair. There are names that signify what is marital and denying as when Mrs. Springer is denied a first name, when history writes her off and—self-denied—"her writing stops" (134). Under pressure of a limiting lexicon, young women reduce their names, diminish their identities, in "inking initials" on themselves, branding themselves (with other initials, owned?), rewrite their identities (their names) in lessened (lessened?) forms. Possessed and reduced, names become acronyms (151) or, worse, much worse—that terrible erasure of self: anonyms (83). Nobody. To be a nobody. Unnamed out of existence, kept from a name and denied a story. When all you want is to be called by name and seek your namesakes, sometimes in acronyms: Birdie, Bridie (108). You may not be offered even the protection anonymity guarantees the invisible editor who launches his hurtful—more texts, more discourse—squibs and jokes.

Or you may be a pronoun, not quite a noun. To be without noun is to have a self so unstable and so unnameable you are interchangeable with any number of other non-entities, "you who is you or me. she" (11); "a-historic / she who is you / or me / 'i' / address this to" (129). You me she i we—who is it? who exactly are these people? The pronoun is guaranteed to slide over its designates, oblivious to them. To be a pronoun is to be powerless before nouns, their assurance and certainty. Proper nouns provide still more confidence, ensure their subjects will hold power: proper nouns "sing out 'drop 'er there,' 'heave away,' 'let 'er go.' a pride of muscle, frame, handling all these female pronouns there in the theatre of history" (118). What women do at times becomes unspeakable in



anything but the ambiguities of pronoun: "something you almost meet in Birdie's brown. you had not imagined—this" (109).

And so the battle over names. Who gets to name? whose names prevail in a world where "rape was a word that was hidden from us" (19)? These are crucial questions. Who decides on the labels, the captions, the 'facts,' bannerheads? Who elects the taboo words? (These all are terms from the book.) Marlatt tells George Bowering, "The correct thing to do is what poetry does, which is to testify. To give evidence, to articulate, to voice what is going on" ("Keep Witnessing" 36). And so Marlatt seeks to seize the means of reproduction, pierce through to a truth that is obscured. But in *Ana Historic* a bar of unknowing and privilege separates the world of male power and its legitimized discourse from a world of female potential and repressed power from which, debarred and bared, women try to write themselves into existence.

covert inner deep essential subconscious recursive  
overt outer superficial inessential conscious teleological

The covert realm is fluid, fluent, circling, circuitous. Marlatt's style, from the outset. Needing only release, needing expression. It brings us to truths that eddy there, ready for reading.

A woman's style. She tells us. She tells us, Marlatt that is, says the narrator's husband, Atwoodian map-maker and surveyor, symbol of the male eye of power—that he disapproves: "this doesn't go anywhere, you're just circling around the same idea—and all these bits and pieces thrown in—that's not how to use quotations" (81). A woman's style then, resistant to plot. Postmodern too.\*

\*A demurral here. It doesn't do simply to designate one kind of writing—abstract, discursive, logical, grammatical (as in a standard and simple S.V.O. sentence) as a 'male' enterprise. It may not be altogether satisfactory to decide too quickly that certain kinds of writing are exclusively 'female' either. I use the terms myself here in honour of the texts I am reading, but we might more precisely when we speak of 'male' style identify a mode of writing which, even as it is practised by men, is one which is neither confined to them (you have only to look through this, I suspect, or any number of other collections of criticism to find otherwise), nor one to which men are themselves constrained. It's hard to think, say, of male postmodern poets, to name only one group, themselves criticized by linguistic standard bearers, as either enforcers or beneficiaries of this 'male' discourse. I know the point has been made before, but its repeating here perhaps is not so gratuitous nor so tiresome as it may seem. Unnecessary imprecision in anything is lamentable, much less in what feminists are up to when they show us how unfitting and therefore how unfair are the sweeping narratives and vocabulary to which they often have been consigned. While I'm about it: I find it hard to believe that working class men particularly gain advantage from this

prose; on the contrary, I've seen a lot of them humiliated by others (female as well as male) who sometimes wield it as a weapon. Ask me about my father who all his life was a worker—farmer, miner, truckdriver, for the last 20 years of his life a janitor. It may well be true, is true, that in certain respects he had some prerogatives as a male, but the argument about 'male' language, just as there is no single 'female' or Argentinianor, god forbid, poetic language. In a lot of ways a lot of people are colonized by a dominant discourse, and men themselves try out many different kinds of writing. If, allowing for what I've said, one were to argue that women are still more subject than are men to the coercions of a certain discourse, that's an important qualification.

But bodily, Marlatt would have it. Female. Against the misogyny whose vocabulary demeans the female body (62), bodily, it speaks and affirms. Marlatt is into lexical struggle, the effort to name aright. So she speaks of a woman in childbirth: "a rhythm in touch with her body its tides coming in not first nor last nor lost she circles back on herself repeats her breathing out and in two heartbeats here not winning or losing labouring into the manifest" (125). Tiding. That rhythm then, 'natural.' Natural? Nature! We're a long way from suspicions of what men say is 'only natural,' of appeals to nature that mask their cultural status, and of what in privileged positions is supposed to be 'there.'

But of the body, its female rhythms. Women "breast the unspoken" (116), wait among the "half born" (132) to speak and act. Women who in the stunning *Touch to My Tongue*, perhaps Marlatt's best book of poetry, certainly her most vivid and energized, women who find the "tongue our bodies utter, woman tongue, speaking in and of and for each other" (TTMT 27). All the weight, the lovely stress that falls on those prepositions, the relations they confirm. Women whose bodies and whose bodies' processes become alphabetized and written into language. In menstrual song:

the mark of myself, my inscription in blood. i'm here. scribbling again.

writing the period that arrives at no full stop. not the hand manipulating the pen. not the language of definition, of epoch and document, language explaining and justifying, but the words that flow out from within, running too quick to catch sometimes, at other times just an agonizingly slow trickle. the words of an interior history doesn't include . . . (A 90)

The river again, its ebb and flow. Music, Julia Kristeva tells us, "takes place where the body is gashed by the blows of biology and the shock of sexual, social, and historical contradiction, breaking through to the quick, piercing through the shield of the vocal and symbolic cover" (179). The rhythms of *Steveston*. "It is an old story;" (Marlatt writes) "mother as musical movement, intuition, art; father as knowledge, power,

science" (RW 98). We are in to the language of birthing, in this densely metalingual text. Everything lettered. Let her.

How dark it looked, an angry powerful o, stretched, stretched  
... This was Jeannie, this was something else not Jeannie, not  
anyone, this was a mouth working its own inarticulate urge,  
opening deep—

\*

[and Ana saw] a massive syllable of slippery flesh slide out the  
open mouth . . . .

\*

What words are there? If it could speak!—As indeed it did  
["This secret space between our limbs we keep so hidden": it  
spoke the babe . . . .

\*

mouth speaking flesh. (A 125-6)

Everywhere Marlatt seeks the essential self, unadulterated by the wrong structures of knowing. Her dream is Edenic. She dreams of return, imagines she will be restored. Consider this etymology in *Ana Historic*: "indigene. *ingenuus* (born in), native, natural, free(born)—at home from the beginning" (127). To be ingenuous, in place, first, primary, born to the language when word and world would be one, were one. When, presumably, the roots Marlatt rinses out under her stream of words and documentation, will restore words to authenticity and remove the detritus that time has deposited on them. Ana dreams of silent trees, silent women, wonders "if they could speak / an unconditioned language / what would they say?" (75). Nothing, I would say. They would say nothing. There is no unconditioned language. No matter, the wish is there in Marlatt, in each of us, for "the Grace of direct perception . . . untroubled by letters" (69). Marlatt's dream of origins. Annie's story:

anonymous territory where names faded to a tiny hubbub . . . the  
soughing, sighing of bodies, the cracks and chirps, odd rustles,  
something like breath escaping, something inhuman i slipped  
through, in communion with trees, following the migratory routes  
of bugs, the pathways of water, the warning sounds of birds, i was  
native, i was the child who grew up with wolves, original lost  
girl, elusive, vanished from the world of men . . . (18)

Edenic too in the wonderful description of a girl's life, the experience  
seemingly immediate, which is to say, unmediated in the clean clean  
words, Marlatt so skilled at:

what did it mean to leave behind that body aroused by the feel  
of hot wind, ecstatic with the smell of sage, so excited i could  
barely contain myself as we left pines and high-blue eagle sky,  
and broke into the arid insect country of the Okanagan with its

jumping butterflies, its smell, familiar as apricots, our mouths  
full of sweet pulp, bare legs sticky with it, hot and itchy against  
each other, against the pelt of the dog, his rank dogday smell as  
we rode the turns of the road down into summer, real summer on  
our skin—(51)

All those senses there bare, laid bare, and direct to us, or seemingly so, in this passage, in its sense of carrying to us the real world, no gap between sound and concept.

In *Ana Historic*, then, the task is to remove the bar between women and themselves, their world. They have been debarred far too long. It is to uncover and to break through false selves, damaging stories, discursive grammar. It is to tap the repressed world (fluid, fluent, circling, circuitous), bring it into the already constituted world and to reconstitute the world in accordance with its prime. Woman figures in this story as arrested potential, denied propensity, damned fluency. The formal and its rhetorical equivalents to this sense of life, I'm supposing, come in the intense recursions (as well as the increasing metalanguage) that characterize Marlatt's work.

That, in the name of contra-diction, Marlatt's own language, even as it disavows abstraction becomes in her later work more discursive, more involved in nomination and denomination, even as it turns less rhymed and less fluent, does not discredit her vision nor deny her strategy. What if her writing becomes more involved in assertion and definition, even as she decries such purpose, discredits it as "male"? That any number of men write with a fluency that resists discursive structures does not take away from what she has done. It certainly does not take away from the fluency of her writing, slippery with sound, wet with music. Marlatt writes, always, in a way that attends upon language in all its recursions and incursions. The versions, perversions, inversions she tries, alerts us to, aversions she feels. The crazy excursions it takes her on. She takes us on. Cursions on the woman!

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So the moon was shining, so what defence was there against his  
serriment? "You try so hard..." Moon-eyed, haunting the wharves at  
the foot of streets, raised <sup>at</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>water</sup> <sup>street</sup>?, silent  
boats I want to see, in silence that is <sup>the</sup> <sup>receding</sup> <sup>tide</sup> at ebb's  
a shade off full tonight, a way in, past <sup>the</sup> <sup>blackness</sup> of this  
present shed  
so quiet you can hear a dog bark at the next wharf  
the Esso barge whose glare you stare down on thru curtains onto the  
form of a man sleeping in <sup>the</sup> <sup>light</sup>  
boats, intelligence lapsing under those static decks, unweaving, shifting  
even the river's breath imperceptible under <sup>the</sup> <sup>tidal</sup> <sup>turn</sup>, hanging <sup>from</sup>  
size (cold moonlight <sup>that</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>seems</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>leap</sup>)  
It's all dead, hidden, the flame that seared  
this town: "The people are very excited." The "carousing," the  
"drunken quarrel," "the narrow summit of a dyke" that is Water Street,  
"the walking along, & the feat of passing people without tumbling off."  
"Some six thousand Indians, Japanese & Chinese." <sup>crowded</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>cramped</sup> <sup>conditions</sup>  
dried fish, rank odour of cans boiling, steam in the boiler room,  
women in white uniform & green kerchief drinking Now, after their shift,  
in the Steveston

How to get past this to the simplified river that  
empties its black water under the moon's <sup>stagnant</sup> <sup>static</sup> <sup>vision</sup>  
(black & white) <sup>that</sup> <sup>sees</sup> <sup>thru</sup> <sup>this</sup> <sup>multiple</sup> <sup>wrinkled</sup> <sup>&</sup> <sup>much</sup> <sup>lived-on</sup> <sup>skin</sup>  
bank? <sup>to</sup> <sup>see</sup> <sup>thru</sup> <sup>this</sup> <sup>multiple</sup> <sup>wrinkled</sup> <sup>&</sup> <sup>much</sup> <sup>lived-on</sup> <sup>skin</sup>

What is "Look, a seiner!" fishing right here in front of the  
cannery as in the old days <sup>the</sup> <sup>invisible</sup> <sup>fish</sup>, a "big run" (1877),  
size wealth. I thought you had to go out beyond the mouth. Yes I know  
I thought it was scarce. Watch the dory setting its net <sup>casting</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>wide</sup> <sup>circle</sup>,  
hard to see, in this moon-track otherwise black water.  
the boat (boats) mast & lights. Running lights? No.  
It has broken the circle, pulling in now clearly towards the government  
wharf. Howboat, hispies. Oh, that's two boats, no seiner, the soarded  
boats the so-called "hispies" live on, across the channel, coming,  
friends of the man who's raised two masts & canvas on the salvaged  
hulk of tug proportions, crooked, relic, of all that's left floating  
under the night sky  
"Sein or?" His serriment. "You kill so,  
trying so hard to <sup>see</sup> <sup>it</sup> <sup>different</sup>. Come here, look into the open  
hatch of some tug meant for cannery business, well-fitted. There,  
thru the open hatch, the flickering screen of someone's portable tv-  
gray light, grass, ramp of the railroad track as cross going back,  
finally here.

Draft of Steveston material. Literary Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Canada. Redrafted as "Reading it" and published in "From Salvage," Line 11 (1988).

So the moon was shining. So what defence was there against your  
serriment? "You try so hard..." Moon-eyed, haunting the wharves at  
the foot of streets, <sup>at</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>water</sup> <sup>street</sup>?, silent  
boats I want to see, in silence radiant with moonlight, moon  
a shade off full tonight, a way in, past the blackness of this  
present shed  
so quiet you can hear a dog bark silly from the next wharf  
the Esso barge whose glare we stare down on thru curtains to the  
form of a man sleeping in <sup>the</sup> <sup>light</sup>  
boats, intelligence received, lapsing under those static decks, shifting  
even the river's breath imperceptible under <sup>the</sup> <sup>tidal</sup> <sup>turn</sup>, hanging <sup>from</sup>  
size (cold moonlight's no leap  
hidden, the fire that seared this town:  
"the people are very excited." The "carousing" the "drunken quarrel,"  
"the narrow summit of a dyke" that is Water Street, "the walking along,  
& the feat of passing people without tumbling off." "Some six thousand  
Indians, Japanese & Chinese" crowded together in cramped living conditions.  
The lingering smell of dried fish, rank odour of cans boiling, steam  
in the boiler room, women in white uniforms  
drinking now after their shift,  
in the Steveston

How to get past this to the <sup>to</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>simplified</sup> <sup>river</sup> that  
empties its black water under the moon's <sup>abstract</sup> <sup>vision</sup>  
(black & white) <sup>that</sup> <sup>sees</sup> <sup>thru</sup> <sup>this</sup> <sup>multiple</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>gray</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>single</sup> <sup>frame</sup>: <sup>is</sup> <sup>this</sup> <sup>man</sup> <sup>&</sup> <sup>woman</sup>  
roving to <sup>wait</sup> <sup>their</sup> <sup>catch</sup> <sup>by</sup> <sup>moonlight</sup>, knowing what they do & how  
survive, a man, a woman sending net "she is thinking of salmon, not  
sabotage", they came, "the Mounties came & took me away" For being  
ignorant, this man, ends up in road camp, these women & children housed  
in "dready rows", <sup>ghost</sup> <sup>towns</sup>, <sup>interment</sup> <sup>camps</sup>. & how these ghosts  
recur, "Look a seiner!" fishing right here in front of the cannery as in  
the old days, <sup>invisible</sup> <sup>fish</sup>, a "big run" (1877). They blasted the  
railroad, <sup>the</sup> <sup>seiner</sup> <sup>blides</sup> <sup>down</sup> (1924). I thought you had to go out  
beyond the mouth. Yes, I know. I thought it was scarce. Watch the dory  
set its net in a wide circle, hard to see, in this moon-track otherwise  
black water. & the dim outline of island, a little wind, the vague & confused  
hulk of boats, mast & lights. "Seiner?" "Seiner," his serriment, "You  
kill me, trying so hard to see it different. Look." Into the open hatch  
of some tug meant for cannery business, well-fitted. The flickering screen  
of someone's portable tv-gray light.

Luminous, yes, but it is that radiography  
the past waits, ghost lights, X-ray, cuts thru the multiple years this present  
town exists in—the concrete flesh only the radius of moon waxwaxina, still rigid,  
mid-season

Draft of Steveston material. Literary Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Canada. Redrafted as "Reading it" and published in "From Salvage," Line 11 (1988).

Here the sea unbinds & releases at tidal hours those unaged boats like her  
 afloat, such, the refuse of our lives. They list into our day like starchy  
 skeletons of ourselves. The sea so unnoted, drift, into demerol, this  
 As if that were the explanation for those cracks, any more than accident  
 explains the leavelling here, this plain of watery soil the river's refuse/d  
 finding its way between them now. A loose, common, passage, & a slough, or  
 reach, sea reach sending fingers up thru strands feeding to the pulsing of  
 its house...

There are words, there is a language for this reciprocal motion  
 boats make displacing water, dispelling the quiet of the hour these singling  
 & reciprocal waters exchange space, a countenance, scale, & defining time again  
 in broad strokes along the hull. Only water within, this year, as every  
 year, yellow cedar top part of hull. "Just never stay but raised, by the surrounding  
 weather again, spring, & the recurrence, out of winter harbours, scraping &  
 crawling the...

Explains out of, out of river mouth (here it detaches), out of  
 winter storage, out of death (this quiet town): there is an end, no way out, going  
 out to sea is into, like the nets, those black nets atom-grayed with tar  
 descending into sea dark, the most the better to ~~close~~ close our eyes can't see, only  
 the stinging raw explains, descent & when it's being there, black waters, ~~and~~  
 stirred up all stars, the dark spring inability where the nets go down, crawling  
 with the lead weight, and ~~the~~ the bottom, where these small translucent  
 bodies crawl, feathery legs (drowned) feathery heads light barely touch, once  
 a way out of, this sphere & creeping all, ~~the~~ black net leaning forward with the  
 V holes stir up change those paralytic creatures grasp their way thru to fall,  
 into the black mouth of it... small world in [there's no way out - not seaward]...  
 to be back. Where...

The spray blows & birds wheel, crying, giving voice & diving down for what their  
 Inwards tell them comes up, turned inside out on deck...the depth, to surface...

## Re-casting the Steveston Net: Recalling the Invisible Women from the Margins

## I

what we can't name we still call into being, by round-about means,  
 from the far edges of the already-written—this is writing in  
 order to be (WOB)

Let there be women who rise out of the river mouth where all  
 things run, who refuse to be harvested, but meet the hook head on,  
 with a will or their own, biting their own way home (SSF)

Daphne Marlatt's Steveston project, a network of texts that circulates  
 among genres and time frames, enacts the feminine economy of  
 sexual/textual excess celebrated by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray in its  
 refusal to be contained in one tidy volume, in its refusal to be the last  
 word. This project demonstrates Marlatt's ongoing commitment to her life-  
 writing in process, extending as it does over fourteen years. It evolves from  
 the uncollected little magazine poem sequence, "Steveston. Support?  
 Fish." (1973) to the first edition of her well-known long  
 poem/photography collaboration with Robert Minden (*Steveston* 1974),  
 to the aural history documentary radio play commissioned by and aired on  
 the CBC (*One Life, Steveston* 1976), to the inclusion of the text without  
 photographs in Michael Ondaatje's *The Long Poem Anthology* (1979), to  
 the revised edition of the Minden collaboration (1984).

Most recently, Marlatt has written a number of new Steveston pieces  
 to be collected in a volume entitled *Salvage*. These poems radically  
 reframe the project, fishing further the currents of those subjectivities she  
 admits being most drawn to, even in the early seventies—the women of  
 Steveston. In the new pieces, some of which were recently published in  
*Line*, Marlatt recasts her net by salvaging two uncollected poems—  
 "Steveston. Support? Fish." and "These Nets"—from the margins of the  
 collected poems, and rewriting them from her current feminist  
 perspective. She had intended to include (in *Salvage*) the uncollected  
 poems as they had originally appeared, but felt compelled to rewrite the  
 poems instead because, as she said at the "Translating Each Other"  
 dialogue with Nicole Brossard at the ACQL meeting in Windsor, May  
 1988, "I am not the person I was when I wrote." She further described the  
 ensuing process as one of "extensive argumentation with myself" and  
 "self-translation."