

line

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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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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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.]

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.]

[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*.]

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.]

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 wareiness (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.

[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.]

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. [...]

[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.]

[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."]

[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 beliefs, 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.]

[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

[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.]

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.]

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.

[...]

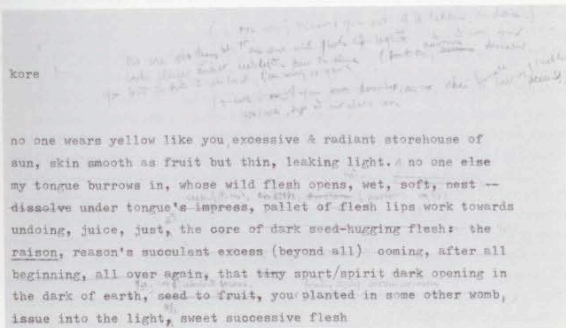
Friday

[...] 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*.]

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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.

JANICE WILLIAMSON

Sounding a Difference: An Interview with Daphne Marlatt*

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, ^{white} ~~crushed~~ ^{crushed} ~~would be the other half as surely as she feels the~~ ^{intensity?}

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?~~ ^{night}. 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~~ ^{to} the far end. ~~Moans~~, ~~Heaps~~. Urgent now, was she going to jump?) ^{Moan} ^{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~~ ^{chair}. 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~~ ^{backed} up out of the dead end street, into highway, throughway, 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~~ ^{rocking} (chair? ~~beams?~~) eyes, Good idea? ~~backed~~ ^{flurried} 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."¹ 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”² 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,³ 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,⁴ 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,⁵ 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).⁶ 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 ruse 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
trill call while the con-
strives to insist -
its each its
particular

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

bird's song

particularity

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

Song/bird

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

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birds/

in place ^{the} song. the RES publican stays
layered
only the cutting edge of
trill call, while the con-
strives to insist, its each its
particular
multichordality
piece is.

multichordality, song
for the tree
as flame, as feathered brood
of the forest, as
particularity, as
multichordality.

seen
this rain
this flame this
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 Marlatt'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 Marlatt 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, verb-ing, 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 Marlatt 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 Marlatt 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.

Marlatt 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)

Marlatt, 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, Marlatt'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 Marlatt 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.

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 Historie*: "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 Historie*, 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 ^{up} ^{the} ^{blackness} (Water Street?), silent
boats I want to see, in silence that is ^{the} ^{blackness} with moonlight, soon
a shade off full tonight, a way in, past ^{the} ^{blackness} of the
so quiet you can hear a dog bark at the next wharf ^{the} ^{blackness}
the Esso barge whose glare you stare down on thru curtains onto the
form of a man sleeping in ^{the} ^{blackness} light
boats, intelligence lapsing under those static decks, unweaving, shifting
even the river's breath imperceptible under ^{the} ^{blackness} tide turn, hanging fire
size (cold moonlight ^{the} ^{blackness} no lamp
It's all dead, 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," ^{the} ^{blackness} the lingering smell of 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 ^{the} ^{blackness} vision
(black & white) ^{the} ^{blackness} this multiple wrinkled & much lived-on skin
bank? ^{the} ^{blackness}

What is "Look, a seiner!" fishing right here in front of the
cannery as in the old days ^{the} ^{blackness} fish, 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 ^{the} ^{blackness}
a wide circle, 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, hissing. Oh, that's two boats, no seiner, the soarded
boats the so-called "hippies" 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 ^{the} ^{blackness} it different. Come here, look into the open
hatch of some tug meant for cannery business, well-fitted. There,
thru the open focal, the flickering screen of someone's portable tv-
gray light, grass, ramp of the railroad track so 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
light, foot of streets, boat ("Water Street?"), silent
boats I want to see, in silence radiant with moonlight, soon
a shade off full tonight, a way in, past the blackness of this
present shed
crowding tide at ebb/a
so quiet you can hear a dog bark silly from the next wharf
metallic hum in neon of
the Esso barge whose glare we stare down on thru curtains to the
form of a man sleeping in closed light
the shadow other berth of
boats, messages received, lapsing under those static decks, shifting
even the river's breath imperceptible tide turn, hanging fire
(cold moonlight's no lamp

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 simplified river that
empties its black water under the moon's abstract vision (black & white).
sees thru this multiple of gray to the single frame: is this man & woman
roving to wash their catch by moonlight, 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", short tents, interment camp. & how these ghosts
recur, "Look a seiner!" fishing right here in front of the cannery as in
the old days, invisible & fish, a "big run" (1877). They blasted the
railroad, the searop slides down (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 examines, still right,
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, unmanicured, & sloughs, 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 ~~save~~ save 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 list horizontally, 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 wail, 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."

Marlatt's act of reframing is a double gesture: it breaks the time frames that freeze her subjectivity in the moment of the earlier writing and, at the same time, collapses the genre frames that lock female subjectivity out of the long poem. As well as calling the authority of her own voice into question, she calls the authority of the long poem tradition into question.¹ For example, Marlatt's *Steveston* has affinities both with William Carlos Williams' *Paterston* (explored by Chris Hall) and, as she acknowledges, with Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* (TT 31), as well as his projectivist poetics. However, *Steveston* also has links with the emerging feminist long poem counter-tradition signalled by a work such as H.D.'s *Trilogy*, which Marlatt reviewed for *Open Letter* and explored in her 1975 correspondence with Penny Kemp. At a reading at the Canadian Women Writing Conference at York University, 1987, Marlatt suggested that because *Steveston* was written about a cannery town, most of it is about men and men's work. But even some of her earliest *Steveston* pieces depart from the practice of her male predecessors by including a multiple female voice speaking for herself. The woman's long poem, then, in the act of breaking open the traditional long poem frames, reveals the cultural specificity of the female subject position that cannot be adequately represented by a male voice speaking or fantasizing her subjectivity. In this way, Marlatt's *Steveston* spiral enacts the process of birthing the woman's long poem. With each re-vision, the female voice and presence become stronger until, in *Salvage*, it is the only voice. Following the principle of the salmon returning to their source that Marlatt so values in *Steveston*, the new poems swim up the time-stream, "sometime creatures of / motive that swim, against the source, but always continuing to return, always these lovely & perilous bodies drifting in spawn, swarm on out to sea" (S 86). The subversive salmon text.

Gleaning a theory of reading from Marlatt's revisionist writing practice in *Salvage*, my feminist reframing of her *Steveston* net will follow the strategy of her life/long writing in process. Extending her praxis, it will perform the narrative of how her new pieces, marked by her lesbian-feminist orientation, speak back to and seek out those lines of connection between her current woman-identified vision and her earlier work. I will follow the chronological spiral of this narrative forward in time by first engaging the feminist impulse of the earlier *Steveston* works before I turn to the new pieces that recall the earlier poems.

Marlatt's *Steveston* privileges a multiplicity of culturally devalued native, minority, and female voices; it also engages in a multi-layered critique of oppressive social and economic systems affiliated with capitalism, classism, racism, and sexism. While Marlatt is concerned with transmitting the whole interconnected web of lives, livelihood, and local ground that she experiences *Steveston* as, she is most frequently drawn to *Steveston* women, engaging both in empathetic critique of their experience of gender oppression from the dominant and minority cultures, and in celebration of their strengths.

Reframing *Steveston* with the woman-centered vision of *Salvage* reveals that the feminist impulse is more than subtext in the earlier

work. While *Steveston* does treat the lives of all the members of the *Steveston* community, only two poems feature specific men; seven poems focus on specific women. As well, two poems are devoted to Marlatt's experience of gender oppression in the fishermen's territory, and three poems to the river, another female presence in the poem. More than half of the twenty-two poems weave the connections between the women of *Steveston* and their experience of place. This is an impressive figure considering that only two out of ten people interviewed for the *Steveston* aural history were women. Marlatt acknowledged the woman-centered orientation of her work as early as 1974: "There's more poignancy in the dissatisfaction of the women's lives for me . . ." (GTB 73).

As well as privileging female voices and subjective experience, Marlatt feminizes her long poem in a variety of other important ways. Throughout *Steveston* she explores oppositions between nature and culture, between flux and fixity, between the marginal and the dominant. Significantly, Marlatt connects the androcentric cultural obsession with ownership, fixity, and progress with the exploitation of nature and the related marginalization of women:

that's what progress destroys—the play, the give & take of our elemental surroundings, . . . our world becomes a man-made (-willed) world, nature outlawed outside city limits (woman skulking in the ditch—crier in graveyard (indian)—in those deep ditches, watery woman). (S)

Marlatt's ensuing question, "what are the characteristics of this outlawed (forbidden) woman/nature?" haunts her text and impels it forward in quest of the answer. A variation of this question appears both in "Moon," where the poet asks, "White as the moon, who was she?" (S 21) and in "Or there is love" where she asks, "where do you / find her, out?" (S 81). The quest for the outlawed woman, the elusive female subject, spirals through the text, beckoning the woman writer and reader alike.

Marlatt ultimately casts the conflict between "woman/nature" and culture as a confrontation between the eroticism of place and the capitalist exploitation of place: "the geography is erotic—industry & capitalist society exploits it and loses all sense of its eroticism" (S). Although she sees the whole fishing community as being on the side of natural eroticism because the fishermen depend for their livelihood on understanding and respecting the rhythms and cycles of nature, in *Steveston* she also criticizes the fishermen for biting the hook of the North American dream, for accepting the seduction of white ideology: "Dream of seizing silver wealth that swims, & fixing it in solid ground, land, home. A mis-reading of the river's push" (S 42). Marlatt reads the "gap" or "discontinuity" between the river and the impulse to security that seeks to pin down the wealth of the river as analogous to the "gap" between *Steveston*'s main street, the "straight line" which resists the river, and the river's curve (43). She explores this conflict between the

eroticism of place and cultural values further in "Ghost," described by her as "the crucial poem in the book," for Henry Kokubo. Here she writes on "the double alienation of himself as Japanese" (GTB 74), double because of his cultural marginalization during the war and his adoption of dominant cultural values after the war. She makes clear that one strand of this ideology is sexism. Some of the ghosts in this poem are the ghosts of women he has eyed as objects:

All their faces

lucent and warmlit shining before your eyes: teachers, cabaret girls, longlegged American army wives you chauffered, cared for, daughters, friends of your daughters, down thru the water smiles of easy girls, caught, kore, in the black hole of your eye . . . (S 76)

Like Kore trapped underground by Hades, these women collectively are pinned by Kokubo's gaze. In "Work" and "End of Cannery Channel," Marlatt records her own experience of being Kore trapped by the male gaze. "I'm clearly a woman on their float . . . He eyes me / across the rift of language, race, and sex" (38). Throughout *Steveston* Marlatt exposes the links between a consumer society and women as another kind of "private property," objects of exchange in a male economy of desire. She also explicitly points out the inter-relationship between exploitation of the environment and of women: "And still, at sea, boundaries give way: / white women, white bellies of salmon thieved by powerful boats" (76).

The eroticism of the male inhabitants of *Steveston* is misshapen by the androcentric values they are seduced by. In counterpoint to this, Marlatt sees the eroticism of place as being inherently female. Her rough notes for the *Steveston* radio play are revealing: in one place she writes, "female - earth (sensuality)," and in another indicates her interest in the name of the island *Steveston* is located on—"Lulu (Island)," named after a flamboyant nineteenth-century actress who visited *Steveston*, and who made it into history by taking the fancy of Colonel Richard Moody who commanded his corporal to "put Lulu on your map as the name of that island" ("The Lady was a Lulu"). While Moody put Lulu on the map of history, for Marlatt she represents "the eroticism of place," an eroticism that is clearly gendered, not generic (RPR).

Connected to her sense that the women linked with *Steveston* embody the eroticism of place is Marlatt's feminization of the river, which stands in metonymically for place and is the most significant recurring image in the poem. In "Pour, pour" the river is gendered female, a force both polluted by the human exploitation indifferent to her resources and transcending it:

This river is

alive', he says, crippled fisherman on the radio watching water swollen with filth, with sewage, milldirt, strain at the sandbag dyke, at its container, uncontainable, irrational (hence renewable)

creature, swelling up & birthing, huge, past all their plans & plants . . . (S 17)

The pregnant river flows in excess of the cultural containers, defying cultural boundaries. This river has nothing of the virgin mother about her. There are overtones of eroticism in this huge, surging act of birth, perhaps even multiple births.

In "Life Cycle," Marlatt directly links the principle of return, based on the salmon life cycle, to the river. She confronts the man-made attempts to lock nature (and woman) outside of culture:

After the flood

'it's been a hard pull, but I think it's safe now with more piling'.

Safe against that river cresting at over 20 feet.

Safe again, forgetting she's a way in, to return, in time, the stream. Against all odds they home in, to the source that's marked their scales first birth place: environing: (S 71)

Marlatt suggests that the reading of the river as "other," dangerous and unpredictable, a force to be controlled by dikes and pilings, alienates us from our roots. We, like the salmon, need to return to the river (mouth), to reconnect with the natural rhythms that hold birth and death in a continuum.

The recurring image of the river mouth is drawn from Marlatt's fascination with Kwakiutl cosmology, which envisions the sea as a river running north toward the world's end, imaged as a huge hole or mouth which the river dives into (GTB 49). As Frank Davey has noted, Marlatt's use of the Kwakiutl Winter Ceremonial as subtext in the poem is a way of reprivileging the culturally devalued native voice (186). She also, however, recasts the Kwakiutl myths of the river mouth by making it the place of origin and birth, as well as the natural place of death, in "Pour, pour": "from its bank) this river is rivering urgency, roar (goku, goku) thru any hole . . . as, / the possible entry of this channel for . . . / the fish reenter time, . . . / past any tidal reach (renew) fish / seek their source, which is, their proper place to die . . . (S 17).

Through her rewriting of Kwakiutl mythology in the feminine, Marlatt urges a return to our rooted relationship with nature as a remedy for the obsession with death which underlies the capitalist impulse to fixity, permanence, ownership, and progress.

Not only is the principle of return intrinsic to the philosophical argument of *Steveston* and the recurring images that spiral through it, but it also informs the structure. In "Long as in Time? *Steveston*," Marlatt writes, "I think of *Steveston* as actually a movement around, based on return. A cycle of poems, it moves around & keeps returning to the central interface of human lives with the river . . ." (317). She sees her poem

cycle as being like the river and the salmon cycle, in opposition to the affinities of linear narrative with the linear consciousness that imposes progress and development on local ground. Elsewhere, Marlatt connects her poem cycle in process with the flow of the river to birth. She suggests that there is no monolithic point to her book because "[i]t's an act. It's a process. It's coming thru. It's moving out into the mouth of the river & out into the sea" (*GTB* 77). She conflates the mouth of the river and mouth of the speaker (herself inflected here), suggesting that the coming/birthing words she speaks are merged with the female river voice. Writing of her poetic technique, Marlatt points to her poetic technique as "In its associations spilling over linebreaks . . . the sentence (and the reader-listener following the sentence) spills out of separateness as one sentence spills into the next and a river spills into the sea." The reader-listener births the rivering text: "the erotic flow of issuance, arrival in the connected here-and-now, is re-enacted in each reading" (*DI* 94).

In her notes to the radio play, Marlatt made the link between her own voice and the river explicit. She writes to John Reeves that she sees the poem as a dialogue between the documentary voices of Steveston fishermen transcribed from the interviews for the aural history and "my voice in *Steveston*, which moves largely as a river/sea voice (rhythms of tides and current)" (*LJR* 1 May 1975). She also instructs Reeves that "the Voice should be female, should be able to handle a long breath line . . . The Voice flows like the river, as the syntax indicates" (*LJR* 21 July 1975). Marlatt's inclusion of a female river voice ensures that, although the radio play features the Japanese-Canadian fishermen's story, there is also space for female subjectivity to enter. In an interview Marlatt links the (female) eroticism of her long lines to the eroticism she perceives in Steveston: "the way it feels to me is that I'm simply moving out sensually into the land, into terrain" (*GTB* 76). Recently she commented further on this intersection of female eroticism, the erotics of local ground, and stylistic erotics: "I'm thinking that what I was working with in *Steveston* was very much an orgasmic feeling of trying to gather up everything and move it out—right out to the mouth of the river. I mean, the syntax and body and landscape become totally interwoven" (*SEBS* 27).

Marlatt's feminization of the structure, the sentence, the line, and the recurring images that spiral through *Steveston*, extends to images that signal her treatment of the related concepts of time and history. In the roughs to her radio plays, she writes of the "ongoing movement of time" as a cycle like the movement of "tidal return." This connects her treatment of time to the principle of return, to the salmon cycle, and to the human cycle, "each life exemplifying some circle (connection with the past)" (*Radio Play Roughs*). Her poem cycle enacts this process of spiralling backwards and forwards in time by bringing up past historical moments into her present reflections on Steveston, as she does in "Moon" where she interweaves a "half moon, hot night" (S 21) in June during the nineteenth century, when Lulu Sweet herself might have walked the Steveston boardwalks, with a similar night under the spring moon, when

the salmon are spawning but the eroticism of place is destroyed by capitalist exploitation.

Feminist readings of *Steveston* note the fishing nets or webs, another of Marlatt's images for human presence in the time continuum (Cole 6; Godard 490). Marlatt's reflection on the Steveston community as an interconnecting network reaching horizontally back in time and vertically across racial and gender divisions puts a feminist twist on Charles Olson's synchronic conception of place in time and the decentered subject's relationship to it. She creates a feminist relational poetics emphasizing mutuality and interdependence. Marlatt's time/history spiral in *Steveston* parallels the salmon cycle: in both, she values woman and nature in a double gesture of return to source.

As she does with many of the female subjects in the poem cycle, Marlatt implicitly links Inez Houvinen, the Finnish fisherwoman featured in "A by-channel; a small back-water," with the eroticism of place. Marlatt sees Inez as so close to the river that she actually is its voice: "She runs in the / throat of time, voicing the very swifts & shallows of that river, / urging, in the dash of it, enough to keep up, to live on" (S 65). Weaving together the flow of time and the flow of the river, Marlatt shows time for Inez as different from the mechanized time that chops the days of the women who work for the canneries in "Imperial Cannery, 1917." She creates a lyrical image of a woman's life running free, free from company exploitation, free to work out her own destiny. Also, in contrast to the fishermen of Steveston, Inez does not misread the river's push but has an interactive relationship with it: "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). The closing passage of the poem leaves the reader with a celebratory, almost mythic impression of Inez as the spirit of place, whose local ground is the river itself.

The publishing process of Marlatt's Steveston project parallels the (hy)story of women's life writing as it unfolds. The radio play *One Life, Steveston* (1976) balances the featured male characters with the female river/female poet's voice. The new edition of the *Minden* and Marlatt photo/poem cycle collaboration reframes the poem by not only rearranging photographs so that they are intercut with related poems, but omitting three photographs of white male shopkeepers included in the first volume and including three new photographs of Japanese-Canadian women, as well as one of the dominantly female staff at Christine's Cafe, and two of a Japanese fisherman and couple. This reframing decreases white male representation in the book, and increases women and minority representation. A politics of selection and placement operates in the new edition that aims to make the culturally invisible visible. One example of how placement makes women visible is the photograph of three wryly smiling Japanese women posing in sisterly fashion against a backdrop of mountains that the caption indicates frame the Slocan Valley. The juxtaposition of this photograph with the poem "Slave of the canneries," which gives voice to the experience of male

Slocan resident Spud Matsushita, makes visible the women without breaking their silence.

Beginning with her earliest Steveston cycle, Marlatt writes with that subversive Penelopean double gesture of unweaving her relationship to the long poem tradition that she is writing out of, and weaving a new relationship to the emerging feminist long poem counter-tradition. In her revision, she continually reopens the poem and extends the project. While such life/long writing is practiced by contemporary male writers, the critical difference between their projects and Marlatt's is gender. Like Scheherazade's never-ending tale, the woman writer's life sentence reclaims her life in/from the margins of culture.

II

'what's at issue here is whether women can enter the culture as women.'

finding a way to write her in, here & her, write she, write suck & rush, high & daring to be, attaches her body to words where they stick to her . . . writing their all, splashing around in the muck, allure of the current she rides their rushing out, her & the words all/uvial. (FS)

Salvage: v. to save from loss at sea; to save from destruction by fire -> *salve*: obs. form of save; v. to anoint a wounded part with healing unguent; n. a solution of a difficulty; also a sophistical evasion. (OED)

Marlatt recasts her net to write the rivering multiple female subjectivity into cultural history by salvaging several uncollected poems from the margins of *Steveston*. First published in the special women's issue of the Toronto little magazine *IS* (1973), "*Steveston*. Support? Fish." is an important long poem cycle in five parts. From this early piece, Marlatt draws her new title work "*Litter*. Wreckage. Salvage." Just as Adrienne Rich dates her poems to reflect her life/long writing in process, this poem is dated (1973)—1987-88. In it and the other new pieces, Marlatt pursues the lament found in the opening lines of both the recent and early versions of the two poems—"Steveston / your women are / invisible"—by uncovering the cultural reasons for their invisibility and making them visible in the double act of searching and telling.

No longer trying to give voice to all of the concerns of the Steveston community, Marlatt recalls the feminized river images, her fascination with the lives of the "invisible" women, her critique of the way the fishermen buy the dream of wealth and women imposed on them by the dominant culture—making these the focus of her recent poems. "shrimping" spins off from the uncollected poem "These Nets," published in *Sound Heritage* in 1974, a piece that describes the shrimp caught in the black nets used in the shrimping process, and which is written with the

detailed documentary precision so characteristic of Marlatt's earlier work. These details provide the frame for the new poem which performs the allegory of the gender-trapped female, caught in the nets of male desire. The poem's dark vision, focussed on the deadly damage done by the cultural inscription "feminine" across the female body, begins with Marlatt's association of the black nets with a funeral:

steamsprayed with tar caught up at the boom and flowing like a dirge

dirige Domine who hath dominion dominate in techne lord of the nets (FS 47)

Following the a/linear free play of word association, Marlatt rewrites the priest's voice in an ironic criticism of man's "dominion" over the earth and all its creatures.

The fourth stanza of the poem follows through from the netting to the canning of the shrimp:

. . . baby shrimp she said look at them curled in their cans waiting to be picked crevette, little shrimp, sitting on his fingers stuck up playfully there and there my sweet looking good enough to eat she was wearing her short dress with frilly underwear, so pink this little crack crevasse (la la) we have taken over this fissure in the gender of it all (47)

Following the a/logic of bilingual puns, the poem without warning impersonates a male voice and makes a jarring metonymic shift from the canned baby shrimp to the phrase "little shrimp" used as a term of endearment for a little girl. The ambiguously erotic and fatherly tone imitates the way men address/undress little girls in a familial way, and address women with similar diminutive language. By mirroring the common endearments this generic "he" uses, Marlatt critiques the way that little girls are indoctrinated to elicit the look of male approval (desire). While the scene is cast in the innocent language and simple rhythms of nursery rhyme, a sinister subtext links food and desire—"my sweet looking good enough to eat"—and calls up the wolf who plots to devour Little Red Riding Hood, along with the fairytale's broader cultural designation of women as objects to be consumed. Marlatt reveals how insidious female gender scripting is when she shows that it begins with teaching little girls to be "Daddy's girl." Further, her wordplay on crevette/crevasse interrogates the cultural myth that female anatomy is her destiny. "Crevasse" marks the site of female biological difference. Diminutive terms of endearment become cultural passwords that allow easy access to the female body.

The next stanza deconstructs the cultural myth of little girls "pretty in pink" by conflating both the scene of shrimp caught in the net and shrimp about to be eaten:

this fiction pink for little girls that we were the ones plying the net, fore-ply alive in the reddening of desire from the raw to the cooked dressing her feminine with just a bit of sauce you don't want to look like a boy do you? widening the gap (crevasse) a finger's width just letting her know that's him (fishing) for her below (47)

Here Marlatt makes explicit what was hinted at in the previous stanza. She allegorizes the scene of the caught and dressed shrimp as a scene of child molestation where the little girl is caught in a cultural version of femininity designed to elicit male desire. The result is the chilling implication that cultural fictions of the feminine do as much psychological damage as "bad touch" from a trusted father figure does and an interrogation of the cultural myth that the female somehow "asks for it" by being a little tease. Marlatt makes clear that when little girls wear the colour of desire (pink → red), theirs is a costume designed by those who want to consume them. Playing with the Lévi-Strauss title *The Raw and the Cooked*, Marlatt suggests that because of such cultural cooking and dressing, "femininity" can never be known in its raw or natural state. In Marlatt's rereading of difference, "widening the gap (crevasse)" of gender is a cultural gesture that violates the female body.

"Litter, wreckage, salvage." begins where "shrimping" ends and moves through the cultural litter and wreckage of deforming prescriptions of the feminine to salvage the female subject. The six sections of the new piece loosely follow the form of the Pindaric ode—strophe, antistrophe, and epode, or turn, counterturn, and stand. The poem enacts an antiphonal dance between sections i, ii and iv which explore the experience of the female agoraphobe in the third person, and sections iii and v which inscribe the poet's related experience, culminating with the celebration of the multiple female subject in vi. As well as appropriating the traditionally masculine ode form for feminist ends, the poem also embodies the epic struggle of the female subject to swim free from/against cultural constraints, to find the words to write herself into "her element."

The poem opens with a fluid lateral movement from documentary details depicting abandoned company houses at Star Camp in Steveston to the abandoned women whose lives are locked away by the myth that a woman's place is in the home. With this movement from outside to inside, Marlatt begins to explore the cultural gap in Steveston life, to make visible the invisible women. She acknowledges how this script has become a hiding place for the female subject: "If 'the woman is within,' if that's her place as they have always said, can she expect her walls not to be broken open suddenly. . . . Dug-up clam, dehusked, who can no longer bury her head in the sand. . ." (FS 41). Following this exposure of the scripts that lead a woman to fear leaving her culturally assigned place, section ii explores the fear of the dehusked agoraphobic woman: "fear of the marketplace, of going outdoors. fear of public places, crowds, of leaving home." Marlatt counterpoints an ironic impersonation of the patronizing voice of a counsellor ("relax, take a deep breath. imagine

walking down the path to your gate. how strong is your fear now?") with the voice of the woman that penetrates to the heart of the matter to reveal the counsellor's gender blindness: "i want to imagine being in my element, she said" (42). This direct statement defies the cultural injunction against the woman's walking out her gate when outside has not been sanctioned as her element. Section iv then voices the fears of the female subject who has gotten past her gate and is "coping with the world outside." While she has made the first step, now "her struggle is within." This line echoes "the woman is within" from section i and reminds us that the female subject is not free of the imprisoning sense that she is in a man's world, not hers, when she is outside: "i can't take the bus is the same as i won't take the bus. . . she says they are staring at her. . . they thought she was dumb. . . the fear of being caught, caught out, caught without—." The female subject knows that she will be the object of the male gaze, read as the cultural "other," as transgressive and as cultural lack. Marlatt makes clear that what this female subject lacks is the words to read herself, to write herself into her element: "she doesn't have the words to alter his definition of her" (44).

Sections iii and v self-reflexively focus on the act of writing this poem as the means to female self-definition, while exploring the female poet's own experience of trying to trespass cultural limits:

I want to walk down the street as if i had the right to be there, as if it were not their construction site and stoop, slipping the net of their casting eyes, slipping the net of their market price. The street belongs to the men who live 'outside', whose small acts accrete (concrete) unspoken claim, a territory that cannot be trespassed except you hurry through, for loitering indicates a desire to be caught. . . (43)

While the scene has changed from Steveston to Vancouver's skid row, the situation is reminiscent of Marlatt's experience of gender entrapment on the docks. Like the "little shrimp," the poet is in danger of being caught in the nets of male desire. The implication is that if women step outside their "place" into what is culturally defined as male territory, they too become territory to be staked out by the desiring look ("I saw her first"). This is woman's "real" in a phallogocentric culture. From her own gender oppression, Marlatt empathizes with those who experience class oppression ("I go fishing too, to bridge that gap i let my line down into the powerless depths we flounder in") from the city fathers who stand "on the opposite side of the street having made this town, having marked it 'No Trespassing' 'No Loitering.'" The "No Loitering" sign echoes the unwritten injunction against female loitering in the first stanza and links with Marlatt's focus on the multiple class and gender oppressions experienced by a young woman, in the company of two young men, who is "flaunting her being there free, she thinks, for free—." When Marlatt questions just how free this young woman is, she makes clear that exploring the gender gap that they both fall into is the aim of this

writing: "Are you the fish that escape my line in the swift and surge . . . letting my line fall into the blank, the mute, defences breached she's letting her want out there where i am . . ." (43). The borders between female subjects, between writing and written, blur here; both have the same surge of desire, their element outside on the street.

Section v continues the first person exploration of female experience of androcentric barriers to being free, this time in several related settings that speak to the same oppression: "the baiting you do, talking to me in the street, my back against the car and you playing the line, hiding behind the tease i rise to . . ." (45). From the allegory of the fisherman angling for the woman, she returns to the scene of her earliest training in this game:

just as, back then, swimming through sexual currents looking for eyes . . . gone fishing for compliments recognition is, eyes the lure. allure. not looking (out) but looking the look for certain eyes, floating around the places he swam by, i 'lost' myself as they say and i did. fall into invisibility. silvered, dead. i floated up and down the school yard with the others, eyes re-flecting all they saw, blind to myself, more: hoping to feel that hook when his would connect: 'he looked at me!' (45)

In the intricate dance between fisher and fished, the schoolgirl learns to fish for the compliment of masculine desire, learns to use her feminine allure (like the little girl in pink) as bait to lure the male. While it seems she is the active fisher, she ends up dead fish, lost under the trick of "looking the look for certain eyes." Marlatt exposes the myth of the feminine masquerade that renders the female subject invisible in the (man's) world, still hidden "within" and out of her element. However, the end of section v re-writes this script in the feminine: "The fishy vocabularies we speak our worlds through. 'the fish never says no,' you say, the lure speaking. but watch that fish swim right on by. the fish is after something too. something else" (45). For the first time in the poem sequence, the female subject swims free of the phallogocentric lures, following the lure of her own desires, transforming the gap between the binaries of male as "active" (lure) and female as "passive" (dead fish).

The antiphonal alternation between the double narrative of the first and third person multiple female subject who struggles against the cultural scripts imprisoning her in the "woman's world" and in "the feminine masquerade" culminates in section vi. As in the Pindaric ode, the final section provides a solution, a summation where the choric strands meet and merge. The opening lines engage the reader to "imagine her . . . in her element in *other words*" (my italics 46), her own words to define her self, to write her self into culture, her element. This victory is a double one: "already past the gate she's past his point of view as central (hook/lure) to a real she slides free of." The multiple female subject is no longer imprisoned by "his definition" of her "real." Agoraphobia and

cultural invisibility are cured in the free gesture of writing the narrative of female desire into cultural history:

free she multiplies herself in any woman . . . casting a thought receives it back this we of an eye complicit in a smile she gathers fish-quick, taking the measure of their plural depth she who with every step . . . desires in the infinitive to utter (outer) her way through—litter wreckage salvage of pure intent. (46)

The woman speaking/writing her life/line no longer cares whether she has the look of male approval (desire) but writes for the complicit eyes of her co-conspirators, those women breathing together with her, working together with her, to birth the female subject.

In the spirit of feminist collaboration, I labor with Marlatt's life/long writing in process, returning to the source, to that feminist gesture that marks her salmon texts—salvage. In her new writing, Marlatt salvages the unexplored side of things, that female "otherwhere"—the realm of (her own) female subjectivity (FS 48). This salmon text that swims up the currents of her Steveston spiral, saves (salves) the female subject from being lost at sea, from being burned at the stake for not conforming to her lot, staked out (in writing) as his to desire; it salves the scar tissue of false skin and births the subject in all her multiplicity, evading the nets that seek to define her femininity.

Notes

I am grateful to Kristen Brady for her insightful comments on this essay and to Elisabeth Koster for her editorial suggestions.

1. For an excellent introduction to women writers in the epic tradition, see Susan Stanford Friedman's "Gender and Genre Anxiety: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and H.D. as Epic Poets," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5 (1986): 203-28. See also my forthcoming thesis for a detailed exploration of Marlatt's feminist reframing of the masculinist long poem.

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On *Ana Historic*:
An Interview with Daphne Marlatt*

George Bowering: *Ana Historic*: A novel. Is this a first novel, or another novel?

Daphne Marlatt: This is really, as far as I'm concerned, my first novel, because it's the first fictional book of prose. *Zocalo* was called a novel by some people, much to my surprise, because I hadn't thought of it as that when I was writing it—since it was true as far as I was concerned. It was based on what had actually happened, as much as I could remember. Sometimes I invented but not much.

GB: Now we have in *Ana Historic* two or three or four narratives going on all at once. One of them would appear to people who are familiar with your work to be a continuation of various things that they've heard you say before about your growing up on the North Shore of Vancouver. They'll say that the character Annie in here somewhat resembles Daphne Marlatt. Then there are other narratives that seem different from that, like the one about "Ana Historic," Ana Richards, who is retrieved almost entirely by your imagination from very little linguistic information. So in a sense, one might say that it is an autobiographical novel of the imagination.

DM: I like that term. See, the thing with autobiography, and I'm thinking back to what I've just said about *Zocalo* too, is that remembering is a fiction in any case, and we know that from hearing eyewitness accounts of an accident, the same accident that everybody viewed, and they all have different versions of what actually happened. So, we have this funny thing when we say remembering is real, and inventing is not—inventing is purely imaginary or fictional. What interests me is where those two cross. I think one can still be autobiographical and in fact be quite imaginative. In some cases I don't even know where the seam between those two worlds is, and I'm thinking just now of Simone de Beauvoir's saying that the trouble with writing fiction is that it replaces

*Recorded in May 1988, for "Fine Lines" and is printed here with the kind permission of CFUV, the University of Victoria's campus radio station.

memory. You may remember it until you write about it, and then the writing itself replaces the actual memory.

GB: I think that's true. I'm pretty certain that I've shared that experience. In this text, the question of the relationship between invention and actuality comes up. Not only does it get mentioned by the narrator, but it shows up as the conversation between the grownup girl, Annie, and her mother. Are those conversations all invented?

DM: I don't know how to answer that because sometimes they were in part remembered, and often enlarged. I think those conversations are held in seed in a lot of the kinds of exchanges that happen between a mother and a daughter. It's just that the implications of those positions are elaborated on in the novel.

GB: We should perhaps talk about how the novel came to be written. There is no character named Ana Historic; there is no character whose name was probably Ana. There's a character who appeared originally simply as a person whose last name was mentioned in one sentence, perhaps, and then a bit more. Do you want to talk about who she was and how you got the notion of making a book out of her life, or out of her imagined life?

DM: Well, she's Mrs. Richards, who appears in the city records as the second school teacher at Hastings Mill School in 1873. The first one only lasted six months and then she married. Mrs. Richards didn't last very long either before *she* married. She married Ben Springer from Moodyville, across the inlet, and then she disappeared from history. But she's mentioned as having purchased a piano, and I could read two slightly different interpretations into that purchase of the piano because Alan Morley writes about her in his book about Vancouver, his historical text, and he calls her a young and pretty widow. So right away you have an imagination of who Mrs. Richards is. One of the sources said that she gave music lessons in her rooms in Gastown. Another source said she lived in this small, three-room or two-room, cottage behind the schoolhouse.

GB: So you have a choice of fictions already.

DM: That's right, you see, and then I decided that I wanted to know more about her, and the only way I could was by inventing her. I invented a diary for her, I invented a past for her, which is very sketchily suggested in the novel, as to why she would be there. I made her an immigrant from Britain, and I wanted to give her a different destiny from the one that history actually records.

GB: You're not allowed to do that, are you?

DM: As a novelist I'm allowed to do anything. But the thing is that Annie, the narrator, and I, at this point are both working against history because when I say I, I'm also saying I as narrator, who is Annie. Annie has to discover in the course of the book what kind of future she wants to give Mrs. Richards, and she's become quite close to her in the course of imagining scenes out of her life, imagining this diary that she's writing, and these attempts to—well, it's difficult to say whether they're attempts to write to her father or really attempts to write to herself in the guise of writing to her father. She has to unwrap a lot of cover stories, and the principal one is her own cover story, the story of her own sexual conditioning, and this comes up very strongly in her dialogues with her mother.

GB: Annie early in the book is married to a man, and has a son and a daughter, and he's a history professor and she is kind of helping him—

DM: She does his research, and then she decides she's not interested in doing research, that once she's found the novel, I mean the diary—because in the novel you don't know that it's invented—once she's found the diary in the archives, she then wants to write about this person who becomes so real to her, and that gets her into the very opposite, in fact, which is imagination.

GB: Nicole Brossard has done something like that too (in *Turn of a Pang* as it's called in English) where she has a narrative in which you keep going back and forth between what went on in the past and what's going on in the present. So that you're writing not only as a naturalized Canadian, a growing up Canadian, but as a woman as well. So that you have that history too.

DM: What I was interested in doing in *Ana Historic* was to do a woman's version of history, that being a difficult area for women because they don't inhabit history in the same way that men do. Their history is usually the unwritten history, it's the history that tends to get recorded more in oral histories. Women are not seen as world-makers.

GB: Especially in this frontier, logging camp country.

DM: Yes, it was very much male territory, male world.

GB: So the women really did get pushed into the two things: they were either wives or school teachers, or prostitutes.

DM: That's right. There wasn't much choice. How could you be an independent woman, living alone, without being a prostitute, and without being seen as in some way a failure as a woman?

GB: Yes, you'd have your place in history allotted to you already, no matter what you did. People who are familiar with your work will not be surprised to find that there are a lot of puns—"jeux de mots."

DM: Jeux de mots, oui.

GB: For instance, the woman Annie. The husband that she is living with at the beginning of the story is named Richard, so that she is Richard's Annie as the other woman is dubbed Ana Richards.

DM: Right, right.

GB: There's this wonderful scene towards the end in which she is witness to, with some other women and no men, the birth of another woman's child; and I think there is either the statement or the suggestion that when women are giving birth what they're doing is giving birth to each other. I was wondering if you were conscious of that story called "Giving Birth" by Margaret Atwood, in which at the beginning she says, giving birth, now what does that mean, and who gives it, and what is given, and who's it given to?

DM: Actually, I don't think I've ever read that story.

GB: It's wonderful because she doesn't say it at the end of the story, but what happens at the end of the story is a kind of a conclusion that they do give, that women give birth to one another, or give birth to one another's courage.

DM: Well, in a sense it's an old question in terms of the women's movement, where women have been concentrating on trying to give birth to themselves as full, active human beings, without being considered the secondary half of the population.

GB: Where did you find reference to Mrs. Richards?

DM: In the archives, in Major Matthews. Alice Patterson speaks the most familiarly about her. She was one of her pupils, and she mentions her.

GB: So they never mentioned her first name.

DM: No.

GB: Now, why do you, in the text, about three quarters of the way through or so, introduce the notion that the Mrs. part of her name might just be something that she made up in order to get where she is?

DM: Well, because that was an answer in a way to the question of how you can be an independent woman in a male world like that.

GB: You have to be a widow.

DM: That's right. And in order to separate herself from the rather predatory game of being courting material, in order to be outside of that, and free to move outside of that, she had to be a widow.

GB: But, on the other hand, men would be making jokes about widows and speaking as if widows were somehow legitimate targets of lustful jokes and stuff like that because, after all, they've been married.

DM: They know about sex. That's one of the hazards, and that actually is suggested in that scene where she's walking through Gastown.

GB: People who are familiar with your work also realize that you are not a big fan of complete sentences necessarily, and capital letters, and all that material. It took me a while reading the book to notice that the parts you write about Ana—the things that happen to her when she's in school and so forth—are written in full sentences and with capital letters.

DM: These are actually scenes from the novel that Annie is trying to write. That's her official writing about Mrs. Richards. She has her unofficial writing, which is more in the shape of musings where her own life becomes tangled up in her imagining of Ana Richards' life, and those are written in informal sentences. That is, often they're in sentence fragments, there is no initial punctuation. The trouble with initial punctuation is that it forces you into a full stop where the period is. Without an initial capitalized letter, you can see what comes after the period—especially if it's a fragment—as a second thought, an addition to what precedes it, and I like that ambivalence.

GB: It succeeds in working that way. Is that how we're to read your work generally?

DM: Yes.

GB: Because there's a problem in reading. I like the fact that the book is problematical, that there is a problem, for instance, the sliding point of view, the "I" feature, and the second person, "you." What's that "you"?

DM: Oh, that "you" shifts around quite a lot, because sometimes it's "you," Mrs. Richards, a lot of the time it's "you," Ina—and sometimes it's "you" reflexive, anywoman's you.

GB: The mother of Annie in the present, or in the near past.

DM: She's just died, so she is present, but not in the flesh.

GB: I love the scenes of the family, especially the scenes of Ina. She was one of my favorite characters in the book. I don't know if you object to the word characters.

DM: No, not at all!

GB: She's just marvellous. She really, as they say, comes to life. And the relationship between Ina and her daughters, especially her daughter Annie, is really engaging. It's the sort of thing that makes you want to see another novel written, in which that is expanded a great deal more. A lot of those scenes have to do with Annie, growing up as a teenager on the North Shore or in North Vancouver, I presume—

DM: Yes.

GB: And a lot of it has to do with Annie becoming not only a local Canadian or Vancouver, West-Coast girl, but also becoming a woman, or going through the changes in her own body. She is becoming almost a separate person rather than just a member of the family. Distinguishing her about the same time that one is distinguishing Ana Historic, Ana Richards—what is that? Is that a metaphor? What do you call that when you have those two stories resembling one another that way?

DM: They're analogies in some way. They're twins almost.

GB: A kind of rhyme.

DM: Yes. They're not identical, so they're off-rhymes, if they're rhymes. But parts of the two stories echo each other.

GB: And when Annie decides to work on her own work instead of being Richard's assistant, she is in her relationship with him, which is not explored anywhere near as her relationship with her mother, also individuating her self. She owes it to Ana, sort of. You know what I mean?

DM: Yes, she does, she does. But, you see, it's really taking in the whole generational system of individuations, which is how we come to personhood anyway, because her own daughter Ange is beginning to do that to her. There's that scene where she says "you never have any fun anymore." So, it's generational, but it takes a long time. I mean anyone who looks at any Freudian analysis of the family understands that it's much harder for women to individuate as daughters from their mothers than it is for sons. So it takes a long time, sometimes it takes a whole lifetime.

GB: She has to do it. Her mother was also an immigrant who was not happy about having to live out here in the woods, the edge of the woods where the bears are.

DM: Where there's no "culture."

GB: So there's that difficulty for her to break into the reality that she's in now, and her daughter has to free herself from that expectation, which is not just normal family. It's also family that has not come to grips with the North American life that their kids are living in. Then she has to, somehow, get herself loose from her husband, with her mother saying, hey, you've got this wonderful husband.

DM: She's got the whole script that she has to work free of.

GB: And she has to do something like that in terms of history, history and literature.

DM: Yes.

GB: So Ana means not just not historical or anti-historical. It must mean something else. Well, ana also means a collection of writings.

DM: And as a prefix, it's very contradictory. It means upwards and forwards as well as backwards. It has a whole cluster of meanings associated with it. There's also that play on an ahistoric, which is not the opposite of having history. It's standing outside of history altogether. History becomes an irrelevant concept to someone who has no history, who is outside of it.

GB: I guess probably you're outside history when you're in a place where the woods are getting cut down. History hasn't, in a sense, started yet. Kroetsch says that the people in Alberta feel, ok, we're not interested in history, we're interested in myth because in history we always lost, we immigrants lost, that's why we came to Alberta in the first place. They threw us out of the Ukraine, they threw us out of Germany, they threw us out of—wherever they were. So we lost that. Now here we are operating, the West versus Ontario, and we're losing that. So you people Back East can have history—we'll take myth.

DM: And also in the West you have history destroying myth, because we forget that the original myths are not ours at all. They're the native Indian myths.

GB: Eventually we're going to have a lot of history, aren't we?

DM: That's right, and we're beginning to find out more and more about that, but history has always meant the erasure of *that* in order to construct something that's white and western.

GB: And male.

DM: *And* male.

GB: British Columbia. There is some remark, I think, made early in the text about history as a male aggrandizement, where influential citizens say here's a great hero, somebody did this, let's build something and name it after him. So you always have a bridge named the somebody somebody bridge, right?

DM: It's never named after a woman, or if it is, it's a "generous" gesture on behalf of the man.

GB: Mrs. Richards' piano—what does it stand for?

DM: Well, the piano is a piano, first of all. It's also, like that comment to Annie, "oh you're exaggerating again"—Ina says that to Annie's notion that someone is playing Chopin in a clearing in the bush—it's that incredible imperial western symbol of culture. It's the ultimate symbol of the European drawing room.

GB: It also means that if you have a piano out here in the logging camp, you've begun to feminize the place. Domesticate and feminize would be equal terms probably to the men in that instance, right?

DM: Both realms are colonial in that way. There's the sense in which she recognizes that Harriet, who is the Indian woman who helps Mrs. Alexander during that whole birth scene, Harriet, who is simply a hired domestic, is actually the one who is holding that whole domestic scene together.

GB: And she has a language too.

DM: She has a language.

GB: There are two images of sisterhood in the novel. There's the one around the birth scene, and there's one at the end of the book where the women are working. Is she, Harriet, part of that sisterhood?

DM: No, she isn't, because it's still very colonial. She would never be included in the sisterhood.

GB: Remember the scene where a white pupil, a bully, beats up on the halfbreed pupil?

DM: Well, he insults him. He doesn't quite beat up on him, but he insults him. He doesn't want to sit next to him. It's very racist.

GB: So you have Ana in that instance being an anti-racist.

DM: That's right. Yet she can't quite escape her own conditioning because she's still afraid of the Indians. She hears all the stories and she takes them in. But when she's confronted with the children, she can relate to them. There are two halfbreed children in her class. She can relate to them as individuals, and she can see how as people they suffer under that regime. She's also fascinated, because she gets the sense that there is a whole other way of looking at the world. There is that little comment that "their magic is different from ours," our magic meaning our language, our written language that still can't contain them. It can't contain how they see and who they are.

GB: This is the author. The author speaking has been trying to do this for years and years and years.

DM: True.

GB: There's a lovely phrase—the author herself is saying it or the narrator. It says "a book of interruptions is not a novel." What a lovely phrase! This is a book of interruptions.

DM: It is, definitely.

GB: Even more that way than, for instance, *Coming Through Slaughter*, in that the moves you make back and forth happen much quicker.

DM: Yes, it's more fragmentary.

GB: I like that phrase "is not a novel," yet you call it a novel. I guess probably you want to tell people, look, this is a novel, this is not a book of poems, or something like that. In a sense you're trying to destroy—

DM: Deconstruct the novel.

GB: Remove the novel, say, "This is not a pipe," right? "This is not a novel."

DM: It's written against the conventional novel.

GB: It says you can't have continuity, you can't have an aim at the end, you can't have this unity, coherence, and all these things. Especially you can't have continuity, and that might be because continuity is maybe European, or continuity is necessarily male, or continuity is like the novel that is modelled after history, and history didn't treat us all that well.

DM: Continuity is the domination of plot. It's imperial in a way. It's the one line of development that is considered the most important, and it makes everything else secondary.

GB: And you can tell where it started from, and you can tell where it's going to.

DM: That's right, and it has a climax, it has a hero, or some sort of heroic figure, and Annie says someplace else that this isn't a novel because it's not about a hero.

GB: Yeah. If it's a tragedy, the end that you're aiming for is death, and if it's comedy the end you're aiming for is marriage, living happily ever after or going to heaven, right? There is a phrase from earlier in the book. It's so hard to tell where to break in, so I have to break into the middle of a long, long sentence. It says, "she writes as if she were living alone in the woods, her vision true to trees and birds . . . but why she had to erase so much is never given. It is part of what is missing, like her first name, like her past that has dropped away. we cannot see her and so she is free to look out at the world with her own eyes, free to create her vision of it. this is not history" (30).

DM: And I want to get back to what you just said about tragedy and comedy, death or marriage, because historically those have been the only two alternatives for women protagonists of novels.

GB: That's right. Or madness maybe.

DM: Well madness is like death. It's either/or and that's it, basically. It's very difficult to write a novel where you have a woman protagonist who goes out into the world as an independent and complete human being, without following one or the other of those alternatives.

GB: She can't ride into the sunset.

DM: Yes! Or the sunrise.

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it was the way they kept taking his joke and playing with it, making it a familiar part of their exchange, knock knock. who's there? and then a word, some ordinary obvious word like banana or tank capitalized, her son would capitalize on the exchange and back again, T'ank you. it was the unacknowledged door all of it got said through that intrigued her. why can't he or she just open it? for the joke, he said, and dummy rhymed with mummy—they have to talk to each other, right? i mean they can't just see it's not, it's not who? Van. Van? cover the eggs will you. that's not one. why not? you made it up, he chimed in on her son's behalf.

no i didn't, it's what he does when she's giving birth you know, couvade, they do that in some societies. and they were off on their own, their grownup game now. well you can't blame him for wanting to keep his eggs covered. his eggs? oh you mean he has to know they're his? of course. what if there's some stranger knocking? isn't that the point? there's always some stranger knocking at the family door.

and anyway, she thought, it's always stranger when it comes to claiming territory. after all they were only playing . . . clearly it's all about naming, he said.

naming and framing. this is beginning to sound like an old story. you mean familiar—well they weren't a family until they left. got thrown out, after she did what she did to cause it, all that loss, all the animals and plants he'd named except the two that were already named for them, with capital letters, and just 'cause she got curious right? and then they left and she kept giving him new ones to name. and he kept track, he told the story, he passed it all on down, father to son, desert camp to town.

who was Hastings anyway? i don't know but he sounds very British. that was another capital letter. he got a mill named after him and then this street and if it hadn't been for Vancouver himself. . . .

it's the name of the game, he said, butting his cigarette like a form of punctuation. terri-stories.

it's what she loved about where they went in conversation. at night they slept not far from that street and she dreamed it before it was even named. she feels it hold her body present in the whisper the wispery arms of cedar and other coniferous beings holding the clearing. she is one small part of. not even conscious she is dreaming. brush. soft. stroke. fir. by a hair. here. "let all those present show their naming . . ." she tosses

Central to The Periphery

on-the-periphery small waves enter your eye successively fluent
laps running in from the outer edge murmuring news of horizon,
hourison, that bound & beneficence, that making well which circles
us & sets us intricate in place here on the edge

& cold on the periphery of our kiss, but not peripheral at
centre our bellies pulse, this small current steady & inviolate
between us, night & the first stars come on amid these bright
banks of windowed money rising above us do not tester on the edge
of fall-out, of imperial collapse, collective-paranoia looming
always beyond the next ridge these waves come running from, innocent
of any end

& on, & on, peripheral to my view of you beyond the dry sand
tide eats away from underfoot, peripheral yet superimposed, white
telegrams of the sea are being delivered into your eye not even
night can erase. i read them fascinated, these small letters of
the sea whispering continuity, the earth & all that surrounds us
charged with coming into being at once, delivering ourselves,
reading ourselves as we can in our world. out of the palour of
& face floating in that circle of pain your body knew, you look
out at me & right through to our horizon. we are learning how far
we extend, we are learning how to heal ourselves here at centre.

Draft of unpublished poem from same period as *Touch to My Tongue*. Literary Manuscripts Collection, National Library of Canada.

undecided, not knowing whether to stay where the small lamps are or cross the border into unnameable dark.

§

in her reading, certain phrases have the habit of sticking and she carries them around with her like magic stones. to toss into the blank of the page and watch what they leave widen:

“... pre-verbal euphoria,” ... “... effortless bodily bliss ...”

but though she carries them with her they are someone else's not hers, they stick out like tiny pebbles in the wash of her daily words.

§

she tries on secret names as if she might be someone other than her—when she sits at Eleni's table, for instance, not in place or unsure of her place or not sure she isn't out of it when they discuss words. ana choristic. Eleni can flash them and bend them and sometimes it is charm, now incantation she is drawn by, Eleni's black hair that hides the inadmissible in her eye, the fury of her voice, melodic as if she were singing. she has thrown out her pictures, plants, she has stripped her walls to orient herself in space, a space bare of the accumulation, the acculturation, of what denies her in her habitat. it depends what counts for you she says, and whether you do.

§

she has named it and tried to tame it but that doesn't change anything. Ana Choristic not Ana Chronistic—the moveable “are” they are moving her out of place.

§

and the dream isn't telling she thinks. i'd driven off without him as i've pretended to do when he's dawdled, but this time i let myself forget—how could i?

it was all the other things in my head which run on like the news, like ticker-tape, like a road leading to a foreign landscape. like the road he and his pal ambled oh so slowly down, munching their chips, one long ketchup-covered straw after another, and when would it end? long after i'd reached mine. i walked fast ahead, got in the car, veered out and drove towards them, in part to save time, in part resenting their refusal to believe in it when i said we were late. it was me that ran out on time and left, pretending not to see them and feeling what it would be like to just drive straight ahead—leave it all behind. they waved, hey! hi! big joke! i stopped of course.

but that night i drove on driving on erased him from my mind, a new landscape, very hilly inside the city, top of one of those hills that was a park, and the animistic scent of flower beds where strange blooms lie hidden, trees insisting their presence in the dark, frisson for me in the car taking a turn down a steep hill i was suddenly on inner city streets, rundown houses and down-at-the-heel corner stores fall newspaper blowing and beer signs in the window neon wink, blue tv light in the windows of houses receding shadowy large enough to have been mansions in their once-uptightness falling softly apart and kids running free on bikes playing sidewalk games in the dusk that light he loves when anything seems possible when you're out in it after hours and what you might see you were not meant to—

§

these subliminal stories. what is narrative but the burden of an emotion the writing labours under, trying to recover, uncover, this thing about to be hatched.

why does she choose Ana mystic in this verbal sparring match while he, he wants his hands free, at the limit in the heart of the city. she asked him what he thought it meant, Territory.

what you think you own, he said, from the land around a town, what the town uses up, look at this place. no she said, i mean the heart of the city. & lighting up another he tossed his match into the ashtray she was toying with. look at the stuff they keep printing so it grows more worthless every day. what's anyone's word? what's anyone worth?

§

tomatoes, she writes. ripe tomatoes. it sounds vaguely like the fifties. in this block she thinks anything sounds like the fifties. hot tamata. whereas hers at the end of the lot will soften, will go slowly red late afternoon Indian summer haze the length of the alley, houses opening doors windows dazed in that anachronistic heat. even so, there's a chill as the light goes, around five, furtive as a cat slipping between the sheds.

and even so, red, they are not, my tomatoes as red as the weathered garage opposite. whose? it only says in great black letters TOM DELVECCHIO faded now NO DUMPING, and there is no Italian left on that side of the block to claim his word. mostly huddled brightpainted, rotting softly in the light these walls hold up the eaves of Chinatown, and to my neighbour with black umbrella on a sunlit day, making her way to the vegetable market, i am the odd one out.

§

Ana, Ana Mnesis. a complete case history, as in she was a case. who? 'case you don't believe me. going on making them up, day in day out. is this in the developmental books age 9, as predictable a phase as crawls, stands without support, takes first steps. part of the plotted territory we stumble through? as for age 36—?

§

at loose ends, he says, when the work doesn't come, as if the story had unravelled, loosefitting and ragged about the edges. at loose ends we never sit on the stoop like we used to, looking at what we inhabit.

i'm twisting odd strands together, finding likely ends to knot, not for my own, which seem unknown to me as my other he standing there, legs sturdy and longer every day, hoisting the knapsack over his shoulder, announces i'm running away.

but why? because you're always telling me what to do. (treading on someone else's territory, sonny.) so let him go, he says, let him find out what it's all about, the world so full of knocks and he so full of himself.

(knock, knock. who's there? putsch. putsch who? putsch yer money where yer mouth is.)

talking tough, enough to take on the wide world. it takes money they said, *get a job*, for you to be taken seriously. someone of substance means someone of independent means not a self unravelling in the wind of their direction and expectation.

§

i said when she asked, i feel at home here, but that was presumptuous as she who is also white and has likewise moved around alot could tell. i meant i seem to recognize the generosity of this light, the long peopled evenings, children racing their dream selves in the dusk—from where? i meant it's familiar yes, but not mine, though we are allowed to be here in it.

having tucked him up with the cat and watched him stretch out light in that weightless place just under the roof, i walked out into the killdeer's cry, i walked out in my slippers down the alley to the park and wept at the drinking fountain, worn benches, worn branches of the much-climbed pine in its bed. kids, rubbies, dogs—traces only. all night long water slides from distant mountains into the throat of the pipe, all night long it rises gurgling its elemental sound to itself in the dark . . .

§

it doesn't matter, he said, as if the terms of their argument were nothing at all (and if they were, how talk? how even know where each stood?). look, he said, holding up his hand, see those gaps? holding it up so she could see light shine in the spaces between his fingers. that's who i am, i can't even hold a handful of sand without it trickling through, and money means even less to me. these words were meant to answer her tilting at the discrepancy between what each could make, would make—in the argument between them.

those were his final terms then?—the terminal move of a fridge, which she'd never questioned, faced only with the difficulty of helping him move something that big, and he, not taller than she, dressed like a mover in carpenter's overalls, did move, fast, sliding their fridge with the lightfoot energy his sentences took, shifting them onto new territory.

no, they were in some lobby of a Grand Hotel, abandon meant Grand, where the fridge had to go against the far wall. hang onto it, he said, because he wanted to pull the rug out from under, his favourite rug with a border of sardines woven in blue. she was holding up the fridge so how could she see when he showed her what they were standing on?

§

transport, Eleni said, is one of the nouns i like that move across borders, it's subversive, an invisible truck of pure delight. she was watching Eleni's mouth move its freight of words. green light? she laughed. they both drove, though in the city, Eleni, with very little money, took buses, read library books. transport was easy, it was when Eleni said that being with a woman was mythological she balked.

that's so literary, it's a stereotype i wouldn't think you'd use. Eleni, whose imagination was fueled by a metaphysic of words, using mythological and gazing out the window, face not *veiled*—obscure? mouth, she said, it goes back to mouth, look it up. and then getting up, making tea with familiar gravity. pause. what do you mean? asif that were all she could say. and Eleni talking about Luce and Jane and Judith, the currents that crossed the borders of their individual lives. how she knew when to or when not to phone, how Luce knew when she was being dishonest, how her words appeared in Judith's dream and Luce's images in hers—and it's not just them, other women friends who are with women artists too. it's as if we are tapping something old and communal, as if the limits are only fiction and we actually live inside each other's thought.

she was watching Eleni's mouth which was different from hers, the way those lips met at the end of a phrase, their fullness touching and slowing each other, parting as the words came in little spurts—this notion of my work or yours . . . we don't need to own . . . and were all her other friends lovers too? and where did it end?

§

soft tomatoes. seeding and nodding into place. low moon. slow feet, soft, walking out in it to be part of it. post-partial and yet. not the dearly departed, she is looking at gardens and rot, the slow process of weather incremental to sunny situation, whether or not hers is any different, is not so much the point, walking horizontal here as long slow beams of moonlight walk her by the rooms of other lives.

§

but there are those mythical beasts again. bêtes noires. she was in the midst of a conversation, an ordinary conversation about cooking something or other for the people they were having over, all the usual alternatives of this or that depending on time and everyone's taste. and there they were when she turned and glanced out the window onto what looked like Africa, a dry stretch of skin, a few wispy trees (mimosa maybe) rubbed bare by their looming hides the colour of mud, and ponderous, like rhinoceros, wrinkly that way. she was afraid of their size, the mammoth size of their heads which leered and grinned. were they destructive? could someone lead them away without being killed?

and there was Judith in the dust, back turned to her, black scarf held at arm's length. slim and elegant in jeans, she was dancing alone in the dust of mammoth beasts who on their pointed hooves were dancing with her.

one exposure of the mind's eye. overexposed the way that dust filled the background, up in heaven too, sky. but the blackness of her scarf an extension of the slim darkness her body made, so dark even the animals receded, leering and grinning heads, shaggy manes, man in his cave. peering out of the smoke at an idea.

i leave my hand on all this, Judith said, to show it is a true story, painted at night in the sleeping quarters for all those little heads who wondered where the others went.

§

she was puzzling over "the earliest . . . , the unqualified animal-poetic mode. . . ." more stones.

§

she had painted home as a picture, coming up the path under the maple tree and up the steps she had painted she opened the door on something incomplete:

nobody home? it was silent—no movie music, no gun battle raging. well it's not nobody, he yelled from another room.

so somebody's here? i mean it's not just anybody, he pursued.

he was with himself then, not lost at all. good, i wouldn't want to think that nobody was off somewhere and somebody was nowhere.

sauntering into the room he explained with pre-pubescent clarity: nobody's nowhere and anybody's anywhere so somebody's got to be somewhere right?

that was him. talking his way right out of her skin.

§

i was sitting with someone i liked. i was sitting with someone i'd known so long and we liked each other so well we were almost married and yet, there were still things to declare. more borders, more border crossings. the state, he said, co-opts our desire into hard currency, the standard of exchange that will maintain it. he was owing not owning but owning up to it when he said, and we all subscribe to this shit.

§

perhaps she is not so much unhappy as confused. by the words and what they do and don't mean (when to, or when not to phone). she wants to call them up, her magic stones with the words cut in, inscribed, but even as she shifts them in the light to read one way, the way she thinks she understands, they shift into another.

§

she was with Luce who was saying but the dark is where we live, sitting opposite her at the table, Eleni and Judith opposite them. sitting in the particular smell of Luce's kitchen, homey and comfortable in the musty building that was always up for sale. the table stood against the wall where Luce's photos hung, clipped to a string by odd corners.

no, the dark is what we refuse to name. now she felt closer to Eleni who was not so much opposite as beside her, placing her mug of tea on the much marked table. a table with a silent history she thought, tracing old scars, old burn marks there.

Judith had said about one of the faces on the line, indistinct in the shadow of blinds like bars disappearing at its outer edge, your dark side shows. just as she'd been wondering whose face it was, Luce's imaging of herself imprisoned there, or Judith's gaze taken through the strictures of

taboo. there wasn't much left except the unknowable gaze. a face in the dark. as she was.

that's one way, Luce was saying, of seeing its power. around them the white walls with their shards of mirror were catching pieces of them sitting there—from where she sat, pieces of Luce. we refuse to recognize our power and so we go on cutting each other down to size.

power? Judith laughed, it's not that simple. either you have power or you're in someone else's.

we don't have anything, Luce was saying flatly, staring down at her tea. or anybody, if you want to really look at it.

in the silence she glanced at Eleni who was catching Luce's eye. Judith gazed at the wall with a slightly amused expression.

she had to go, she really had to be getting home, and she should offer Eleni a ride back to their side of town, but wasn't that presuming? assuming Eleni would be leaving soon? and who was she to know? the silence strummed between them when she said, i've got to go. . . .

Luce gave her a cold stare: why are you so unfree? she stopped, what do you mean? you always say you have to do this or that as if you're not responsible for wanting to. you want to go.

no i don't, she said, it's just that i have to, it's getting late and i have to get home. under the image of him coming back from school to find her gone, she was evading something she knew Luce would name, could, in an instant—for the sake of home and what that meant.

they were watching her begin to recognize the words Luce had not uttered, which she heard. you've come too far.

§

i dreamed about you finding an egg, she said. isn't that funny when you were once an egg in me?

no, he said, i wasn't an egg. i was a sperm.

knock knock, she said, that was your dad. and you were once an egg too. anyway you found this egg, all grey and wrapped in bandages. i guess it was a mummy of an egg, you showed me where you'd made a nest for it in the driveway behind a parked truck. i said that's not a good place, it'll get run over there. but you weren't worrying, you just left it, so then i had to scoop it up out of the sand.

what do you mean i just left it? i didn't care about it?

i guess you didn't think the truck was worth worrying about. anyway i realized you must have left it there because the sand was warm and good for hatching. so i bury it further up on the side of the road, and then i see that the pointed end which was sticking out is moving. i dig it up again and out comes this tiny cartoon figure of a white rooster like the rooster in the chicken hawk comic, but this one's so tiny the grains of sand are knocking him over. i pick him up and find he's connected to my fingers by invisible threads. i know i have to feed him, make him grow, so i take him to the forest ranger's tower which is a sort of doctor's office. the doctor asks me, does he know who he is? and i say, well look at the way his toes curl under, anyone can tell who he is. and i point to him in the doorway where he's standing, a huge gawky teenager. i call him Goofy . . .

oh mum, you've got the comics all mixed up.

§

it's not just anybody she will open to. Ana Leptic. restorative. Ana Thema, this double she is: banned and offering.

§

i'd been driving, no by then i was walking, and i almost missed it. but i requires you, Luce, she is whispering, i am whispering, into your hair. having got out of the taxi, the argument with the men about the unfair share i was supposed to be paying, or maybe it was she, as if i were some other me, some mother me before i saw where i was heading. but i can't say she because that's not true either. you're everything in the dream, you say. i'm your place too? in dreams places are the architecture of souls. then why did i dream yours destroyed? it wasn't quite destroyed, there were the owls—yes, there were the owls, but why owls? perhaps you're afraid?

can we disentangle this so i can tell it but telling is always one after another which is not the way we realize. and i didn't understand when Eleni said mythological. putting my mouth very close to yours our lips are all mixed up with words: i'm walking home but it's unfamiliar territory and i'm coming from the place i got dropped off, miles off, and then i'm walking down your block when i see, my god, your place has been demolished—they've taken a bulldozer to it and it's just a pile of rubble, studs leaning crazily against the cubbyholes of what were rooms, your rooms. and still i feel you there as if i could walk in on you. somebody's painted the rubble black and there's some graffiti i can't quite make out. and then i see the owls—on broken planks, in cubbyholes, somebody's set these owls, watchful and fluorescent—

the bird that howls, you said, owl with an h, an itch—looking intently into me—you know what that means?

you were shivering, with my arms around you you were shivering. but it wasn't the dream—it's not even a dream, this current that moves us beyond recognition. lips to lips, we ex-change what isn't words in circulation, though later on the street alone, the feel of you in my mouth, i release them at full shout, *women*, another, a double word, women our loyalty, our fierceness, our loving.

GEORGE STANLEY

MY NEW PAST

for Daniel Ignas

"I can go back to my old past whenever I want, to times in my childhood, or college. But my new past never happened."

-Joy, at the Achillion

Did we spend four years—a high school or college length of time—when every week, once, twice or several days, sometimes whole days together, we met, hung out, talked, touched (in that poor-spiritual way men have), & not a trace of it all left?

Not true: certain eternal moments survive; the first one, for example: your Panama hat, Lawrence's horse. But each is a 'treasured memory,' a mental vignette. The place they were is gone. Where is North Central B.C., August, 1982, at this hour?

Further & further on, but less & less tied to what went before, I seem to be journeying. The image is sand. Peripherally haunted by its random sculpture, unmoving but shifted under changing skies. Every morning I wake to a blank, then deduce the separation. I used to go, 1968, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1976—private hopscotch, contrived for the player's solace.

My new past never happened, is not available for edification. Nor is the present a distillate. There is some other kind of causality than history. To take a catchphrase from the airlines, a hub-spoke arrangement, each year

a separate outpost of childhood,
no progress.

And maturity
is getting used
to this scattered country. Who told us
we would cross the River of Lethe
in this life?

Wordsworth and Eliot,
when they got here, & saw they had
no baggage, smiled, & wrapped their loss
in forgiveness.

Forgiveness of whom?
The child I was, not knowing life would come
to sand & snow? Or my new self, drifted,
encamped beneath the mountains.

SAN JOSE POEM

for Catherine

Starting in April, sadness
carried forward from Catherine's death
which I have not mourned, in April,
in April sadness

how the city of San Jose stands in my mind,
the B of A with its bell-less tower,
hot 5 p.m., walking east on Santa Clara
cross Market and First

preserved facades,
south between Second and Third
sun on car roofs, blocks
razed to keep Mexicans from crossing
(some stores left hang
banners in Vietnamese)

South of Keyes
were orchards

Sunday afternoons
we drove to orchards

a grey DeSoto
or Dodge sedan, moving slowly down
gravel roads
quarter-sections of trees
geometrically spaced,
watered

the grey Coast hills
beyond

Visitors, we parked
in front of a small barn,
were allowed to walk in among the trees,
reached into our hands & mouths

Santa Clara plums, a sweet
green fig, ripe apricots.
Our friends gave us balsa cartons
to take fruit back to the City.

Catherine came
to San Jose as Superior
of the convent, her last assignment.
12 years she had been Superior of the Order.

At her funeral mass Gerald said
(in his homily)
she was not one of the foolish virgins
nor wd she have been one of the 'sensible' virgins
either, refusing oil to her foolish sisters,
telling them to go downtown and buy some

She wd have been in the Lord's house already
placing a glass of gingerale and a cookie
in the room of each one arriving home late

as she came to the side door
of the Hayes St. convent in San Francisco
with wax-paper sandwiches
of cabbage & mashed potato
for men who lined up
in the Depression.

Catherine entered the Sisters
of the Holy Family in 1930.
The order, since 1872,
patronized by Irish banks, established
day homes, for children of
poor: in San Jose,
cannery workers.

The fruit
left by train. The trees
sucked the water out of the ground
& it left as fruit. Water in a well

(Santa Clara & Delmas)
150 ft. (1950).

The sisters lived in underheated
California baroque luxury (mahogany paneling)

Sr. Thomasine held me as a child.

Last year, Sr. Daniel, her sister, served
shrimp salads, steaks, rolls, ice cream & coffee
to Catherine & me
in the Superior's dining room.

These people are still alive
& live on St. Elizabeth's Drive
in San Jose (& they are dead & live in this poem
with the often repetitive movements of the dead,
drawing in a skirt, just so, as to be remembered
in rooms filled with spring sunlight
& my mother's spotless furniture.

Leaving the convent, dazed, dazzled
by goodness I'd go back to the Holiday Inn
generously contemptuous of the ones who ate avocado
salads in the Hawaiian coffee shop or played
video games in the black alcove

& on leaving the Inn
walk up Almaden
past the offshore banks
(the orchards burnt & dozed
when electronics came)

think of recent Santa Clara grads
hoping to retain the software concession,
steal the yup trade from Mountain View, fill the new
Civic Center with suits, music, beds of flowers, &
sprinklers!

In the old day homes
these virgins were my mothers.

I was treated
as poor.

On the polished hardwood floor
rolling in play pants. In black habit
& stiff white coif
Thomasine bends to offer
penuché on a glass plate. Downstairs,
admitted to the work areas, the stone-floored kitchen,
Sr. Malachy supervising,
two Spanish women baking,

door open on a walled garden,
a red or yellow watering can, geraniums,
tall bending stalks of snapdragon.

Catherine remembers me asking questions.
'Is it all right?' 'No.' (My mother's voice.)
'Is it all wrong?' Nuns smiling. One eternal
moment the content of the other, as we sit,
talking.

"The North American States":

Charles Olson's Letters to Irving Layton

For these Canadian these days
are beautiful — & I don't mean
the Northing's Frye, in fact the very
poet, say, Layton, whom Frye, in
print, has missed the point of!

Section of a letter from Charles Olson to Frances Boldereff, Charles
Olson Archive, University of Connecticut; see epigraph to "The North
American States."

"The North American States": Charles Olson's Letters to Irving Layton

... For these Canadians these days are beautiful—and I don't mean your Northrop Frye, in fact the very poet, say Layton, whom Frye in print, has missed the point of!*

The years spanned by these letters—1952 through 1957—constitute an important period in the development of North American poetry and poetics. Charles Olson's landmark essay "Projective Verse," published in *Poetry* New York in 1950, had established him as an innovator in the field of American poetics, and his teaching and writing at Black Mountain College was shaping him into a figure that would influence a generation of poets. Olson was an avid correspondent—as the Olson-Creeley correspondence illustrates—writing to individuals as diverse, and geographically dispersed, as Rainer Gerhardt in Germany, Katue Kitasono in Tokyo, and, by 1952, Irving Layton in Montreal.

Rapidly becoming a major force in Canadian poetry, Layton was enjoying, in the period covered by these letters, a very productive time, writing what is arguably his best work, and publishing a remarkable total of eleven volumes of poetry. Working with Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster, Layton was changing the face of Canadian poetry, countering what this trio saw as the conservatism of the 1940s and the insulated nationalism of journals such as John Sutherland's *Northern Review* with bold, exciting writing, and international magazines such as *Contact* and *CIV/n*, both of which published Olson.

In turn, Layton was published in Cid Corman's *Origin*, and also in the *Black Mountain Review*, an influential quarterly edited by Robert Creeley. Both Olson and Layton were contributing editors to the *Review*, yet they never met in person, though not for lack of effort, as the letters indicate. Layton did visit Olson in Gloucester, as he notes in a letter to me (5 December 1988), but the meeting was not meant to be: "I did try to see the C.O. in Gloucester but he was 'sleeping it off' and couldn't be roused. Though I stayed around for hours waiting for it to happen, I finally gave up and continued on my way homeward bound." Olson also managed to cross the border, twice reading at the Contact Poetry Readings in Toronto, in April 1960 and February 1962, but Layton was unable to attend these readings. When I visited him in October 1988, Layton was unaware that Olson had been up to Toronto to read, so it is a distinct possibility that

"the C.O." did not notify Layton of these visits, as their extant correspondence ceases in 1957.

Finally, it should be noted that the letters are, possibly, incomplete in their present form. Joanne Vinson Ackeroyd and the late George F. Butterick, in their work *Where Are Their Papers?* (Storrs: University of Connecticut Press, 1979) claim that (in 1979) eight letters and five postcards from Olson to Layton were housed at Concordia University. At present, we have eight letters and one postcard, and have no means of accounting for the missing material. It is possible that an error was made in *Where Are Their Papers?*, or that the 'missing' postcards were misfiled at Concordia, and will surface at a later date.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following: to Irving Layton, for his patience in answering my many questions, and for granting me permission to quote from his letters to Olson and from our interview; to Professor Ralph Maud, Simon Fraser University, for his invaluable criticism, for first supplying me with copies of the letters, and for seeing this project through from beginning to end; to Professor Francis Mansbridge, Kootenay Community College, for his kindness in supplying me with copies of Layton's letters to Olson; to Charles Watts, Special Collections, Simon Fraser University, for his guidance with research; to Joy Bennett, Director of the Irving Layton Collection, Concordia University, Montreal, for allowing me to view the original letters from Olson to Layton; and to Richard Schimmelpfeng, Director for Special Collections, Homer Babbidge Library, University of Connecticut, for permission to publish Olson's letters to Layton, "The Crisis of the Third Foot," and "THE CELTS, AND PLATO."

Special Note: As most of the Layton poems referred to in these letters are from volumes difficult to obtain, I have, wherever possible, indicated the page on which the poems can be found in either Layton's *Collected Poems* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1971) [CP], or his *Uncollected Poems* (Ottawa: Mosaic Press, 1976) [UP].

*Charles Olson to Frances Boldereff, 1 October 1954

Mt. Sept 28 53

My dear Layton:

i take you as a sign. The sophistication of yr verse contradicts yr own cry that, there, sd poet is in: exile.¹

(1) That he is, anywhere, conspicuously in the North American states;

& (2), that at a certain point of time (end of Renaissance, at least) this position makes him leader of any citizen: all are exiled, from a usable earth

it is in some such sense that to call you like that,² & to get the joy of yr own voice, the round tone of, Urself, made me say to one of several montrealers (& ex-Sir George Williams)³ have been here in recent years—a Dorothea Rockburne, now Williams, who, also, has sd, Canada, is behind the States:

I made this proposition, the morning after talking to you ::

that to be behind the States (35 years, say?) at a certain point of time is to be *ahead* of same States

Which I'd damn well say is na-ow, just abt time, and you, for me, the universe:

(1) that yr sophistication has bite in it that neither the Au (OH!) dens/ there;⁴ or the FEAR-ings here ('30)⁵ has cause or base for

and yet (2), that the burden of Ur cry (the Po-et VERSUS the Sta-te, versus sd Massey (MASS-ee)Commission,⁶ the Ex-ile

is EX (e.g., in sd US States, such WAR, was fought, by departure of EP etc.,⁷ and by WCW's conversation with Valerie Larbaud⁸ is re-VERSE, 1914, or before)

But what you do is remind us, by yr directness, of: sd happier states!

And I like it. Feel damned whittled. And anxious to see if yr verse, still of statement, isn't—by god—(thinking of one R C's like tautness of straightness)—such as, by sign, isn't just what I thought it was: business, NOW

and that you can quickly throw off any sense that CANADA, is anything more than, as stale or fresh as any other damned such counter anywhere now (that none of such dialect difference is of any

moment unless it is driven beneath by any sd man anywhere until he converts to a syntax (finds same) which is not any local but a particular which, a particular is, is a syntax understandable anywhere to anyone without benefit of differentiation between poet and any other sd citizen

Ok. Just a way to tell you the four books came in just now.⁹ And very damned grateful. Very. Very happy to sample you more than lovely thing in C-8!¹⁰

(please also tell me what the hell C IV-N stands for:¹¹ And

As of proposition made on telephone:

this place is in such throes that already (since) its calendar is now changed to be:

QUARTER I (Fall) Sept 21 to Dec 5

" II (Spring) March 29 - June 15

(CREELEY says he'll come for that)

" III (Summer) June 21 to Labor Day (Sept 5???)

CAN YOU COME FOR THAT ONE?????

That is, provisionally, are you free from present contracts the coming summer????

And if so, merely let me know as soon as possible, without making any definite plans for yrself

(Reason for latter is: that we are just these days trying to finance for coming three years: and all is up in air. But will come down in next ten days or two weeks, I'd guess. and then we can really talk business.

OK. Back on. Olson

Black Mt, North Carolina
Monday, October 5, 1953

My dear Layton:

It is such a damned great pleasure to have these books of yrs. As yet I still keep going back over the Cerberus things—and pick up some of the Black Huntsmen. The other two I leave ahead, for the surprise & pleasure of them.¹²

The point is, to find out a classical English poet (if you won't mind any such fixing!) whom I can wholly admire, and envy. For you do make those of us who disturb line & rime look like sick cats! And I take the greatest pleasure in just the thoroughness of the great voice of the tongue as you continue & restore it. By god, Layton, your music is altogether the instrument's.

And of course what makes you altogether yrself (you are, if you'll hear me, a grown man) is this wondrous origin in fable—and, to a degree, fairy-tale—of you as image & poem-maker. This is unique, to my knowledge: as though Donne and Blake were crossed, & a metaphysic of one & a lack of some Cavalier in the other were done away with as recessive.

I think I was quite wrong in my other note to bother you with any critique of any social positioning in you. On the contrary, what makes the edge (*mutwillig*),¹³ was what my friend Stefan Wolpe, composer, to whom I read you last night, used, to call this bite in (you) what makes it so very damned delightful is, that it strikes me you do dispose yrself society-wise most finely: you have got yrself placed, in that context, without any of the dull personalism which all the goddamned moderns insinuate—as tho society owed them a fucking thing, said poets! You put it back where it belongs: on yr wrongs, solely, as they are distributable. (I put too much weight on yr own statement of ex-ile: all you are is post-Ile—and a wee bit hostile.)

Anyhow, say, the Old Lady!¹⁴ (the death poem—absolutely one of the damned greatest in the language: and what I mean by poem, rather than image emerging from the fabulous—both the “dialogue” here, & yr several “epitaphs”, seem to me to work simply because behind them is such swiftness as Doge to dog).¹⁵

And the Rembrandt!¹⁶ Beautiful thing, & most clearly how I have it, fable.

The result is, that (and again I give it back to Wolpe) you enlarge the present, make it seem as large as it is, as involved as it obviously ought to be, but so damned few have the resources to make evident.

And the news fr you that Creeley is getting out two books is the best.¹⁷ For it shocks me (and needn't!) that I only know you at date Contact 8! You make the most sense to me of anybody writing (allowing me to make a trio out of it, of C, too!) ((As well is it sign again of that Creel that he spotted you, and makes these two books out of you. Damned great. By god. Absolute sense.

Also, all welcome to your idea I come up there, and do something. What do you have in mind? Could it be rather a reading, than any speech-making—with whatever discussion might naturally issue, or not issue, afterwards? That is, these new Maximus poems (I'll enclose the publisher's card of Book 1, just for yr info, and to spread the news among whoever) are now in their 40's. And they are of such a non-poem order that they make, I take it, a good sequence for people sitting on their arses to hear “poe-ms.”

As for a time, I'd suggest after Xmas, rather than before, just that by Dec 5, when I'm thru here for four months, I have a chance to take off for Mexico. But if that shld fall thru, I cld come before Xmas, if that was better for you. Whichever you say—only, after, I cld be more sure of, at this date, I believe.

(I shall ask
Harcourt to send you direct a copy of *Ishmael*. And they are so bad abt these things—as is all commerce, including Sears Roebuck, and the telephone co.—let me know if you don't get it in a couple of weeks.)

Gratified, too, that you make notice of ICH¹⁸—tho that it is obscure to you, licks me!

Am sending Souster a new one provoked by Blackburn's vol., & called PROENSA¹⁹—as return to him for C8, and yr own spring poem. It might stand with, or in place of, a review of sd vol.

And please interpret for me C Iv - N (is it yr mag????
OK. And thanks for yr letter to the Candy Mts (it got here two days ago).
Over the barrier,

Olson

PS

Let me slug in a dozen of these cards—I think one can print them as such, for a couple of pennies, no?

And if you wld-

(Book 2

depends on the sale of this #1:
And Book 3 is almost ready.
So I have a stake in this one!)

November 4 [1953]

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

BLACK MOUNTAIN, N.C.

My dear Layton:

Excuse delay—figuring out what to do with this place (now that it is so much just that drastic, & simple—and, so far as i can see, pretty much my own to do, by default of all the others: why, e.g., i wanted you & Creeley here, and Jonathan Williams as sort of “editor in charge of publications or better just “publisher”, that i think one legitimate use of it, in its present reduced, and directionless state, is to direct it toward a writing complex, a place where any of us can hole up, and shoot from, with the nicest of elementary economics, and the freest of teaching i ever heard of, or have experienced, practically one's own demonstration of, how, it ought to be done!

So yr news that you may be boxed in there, throws me as much, for that matter, as the possibility I may be too! That is, it has never been put to a clear test, but i have reasons for thinking I am, too, for political action 10 to 15 years ago, one whom the State does not want roaming around. And such a trip as we have talked abt, to Canada, might just be as much a block, States-side, as you are blocked, coming in.

Not, for christ sake, that it matters that much. They haven't yet (so far as I know) got their fingers into the post offices. Nor have they troubled to cut off publishing, yet. So we do have some short time (two years?) to do—and get into print—what we can.

///

Please keep mailing me anything of yrs comes out (laid my issue of Blackburn's book—by same title, PROENSA, into Souster's hands, and he is using it, he tells me, in Contact 9). Otherwise, what i have done is back of unwritten Maxies—and got to be such a fucking bore, i gave the studies up. And am now freer, for anything which might occur to express itself.

You see, I am not, i guess, a kind of professional—if that word means what i think it does, the opposite, of an amateur. And wld have to imagine that there is another sort of class of writer. What I am getting at is, that i get very damn sick of my own stuff, simply, that it sounds to me as though I am in service to the words, instead (as I think a professional is), to whom the words themselves are in service. That is, that the man himself directs them to serve ends which he invents, or declares, or demands. And I have no such feeling: when i feel taken (as you had it you did a summer morning when, the Old Lady, and Death, came out) i have that damned fine sense that the words boss me. And my job is to be their agent, and form solely the care that they don't (because they are so liquid) merely disperse themselves.

That is, something like this—to give you the prose of it—which took over yesterday:

"Palms and stars, or the kidneys
of birds. Or the
narratives. Reverse
them.

Or have yr own star
at the forehead.
Be taken down,
for yr suffering,
and petted, wrapped
in linen,
oiled.

Read it
as large as you
want—as anything
but anecdote. And so,
pleasant, for an after-dinner time,

nothing
more:

that Kin only
is Paradise;
and that even it,
the Recognition,
has a death: motion
(which does get itself
entangled, for
cause—which must be,
that things happen—must not
cease . . .

Or does Joy
slow anything
down?

It gets lovely
when it is there. And Kin
is why Person does contradict the magic
I forsook, fly at as prejudicing
the citizen. One is wrong
to insist upon
Center. The Star
is light, and Heat
is what we do have
to have. Love
is

Cancel it — by doing it,
found out
ANOTHER!
as you'd know
CAN
happen!

Altogether, what?²⁰

(I wanted to say, too, that I very much admired yr second of two peas, the one "English Undeified",²¹ a shooter—a beauty

that is, i guess a pun is, for me, too much at the heart of the puzzle, to me, of the nature of language to let me get more than kicks from "surplus" in the "Psychiatrist"²²

(do you know, and care to give me yr opinion of, "A Po-Sy, a Po-Sy"—in Origin 2 or 3, and the mate of "Morning News", just out in 0 10?)²³

but what you do with ballad stanzas (in the epitaphs &c), and with the limerick (as here),²⁴ wow me

that is, i guess i am driving at the wit arising from forms, as of more excitement to me than those from words (at least, for such savage wonder as you are made for:

that it is forms which you do give the twist to

(e.g., the lyric, in "Rembrandt", and the colloquy, in "Old Lady & D", as of major tone; and those others, in urgencies . . . how you have it, let fly in any direction

And I guess I'd lead you to turn that power of
yrs on to every damned inherited form there is—that there is no end of
what you can throw new light into, by the bite & the tearing of yr ice:

you very damned well seem to me to have the true complement to such
"seriousnesses"—actually, of course, only the puritan in—of Creeley, and
myself;

that you are the devil of any of the forms the English have
invented (the novel, as well as those listed above, and the "play" (any
dramatic form) . . . i can't see that, if you had the time, you cldn't blast
every one of them. And in so doing do what I take it C and I are interested
in, to do it, from the outside. But what you have so abundantly is
everything, inside—like a Catalonian dynamiter²⁵

blow 'em up,
by the chairs
they sit on

I love it. And figure you are oxyacetylene.²⁶

OK. Don't mean at all

to get hortatory. As you are, you are it. And like i say, i figure, we got
some little time to work.

Let me hear fr you.

PS:

d'ya know anything
abt the Irish?

What
i took the liberty of
quoting, above, was fr
something—prose—which
got started yesterday, called

THE CELTS, AND PLATO²⁷

why,
i damn well don't know, except
that i wanted to write something for
my grandfather!

As you are,
Olson

PS

Found out fucking
bad news by
asking Harcourt
to send you a
copy of *Ishmael*:
it went out of print

a year ago!
Bloody damn
loss. O

Black Mt.

Jan 21/54

My dear Layton:

Thank you for both yr letters. It is damned moving, how
you have it there, that, the Canadian, is between the English and the
American. And of course just what you wish EP or Bill wdln't do, is where
I like them—that is, I like them, for letting it show, just as much as
showing: Pull down, thy/panities,²⁸ oh—britches.

And I wld argue one as clearly on as yrself, to come with
us. Without patriotism, and solely because speech has gone ahead of any
of us (english canadian american australian indian, who: Kitasono²⁹ plus
men i'm sure neither of us know of)—

which certainly means reality, is,
out-running us, no?

Avison (abt Pro Verse) sd, Olson's—or any man's
programme—is his own.³⁰ Not quite. And for this reality reason: that the
thing does run, alongside each of us. And can be—I'd say, has to be—
grabbed hold of.

I'm sure that what you are objecting to, in Bill
say,³¹ and wanting (form as climax) has been disturbed and shifted by the
dying, and now death of, dimensions.

You will know how much Creeley
and myself do still work with that idea, that form is never more than an
extension of content. And I just, today, had to send off a recommendation
for Merce Cunningham,³² the dancer. Don't know whether you know him,
or his work, but the immediate point is, that, he says it flatly, as of his
own biz: the meaning of movement is inherent in its own nature.

It is these
flatnesses—in the sense of no distances—which lie at the root of any of
these "Americans" practice. And I myself track em to the obvious change
in reality, begun by the non-Euclidean geometers a hundred years ago:
that the round isN't only out there, it's in, to.

By the way, there is a distinguished Canadian
geometer whom I have learned much from. At Toronto. Christ, what is his
name. Did a wonderful book on polytopes.³³ Shit. Lost it, at the moment.
Take a look at it, if you're interested (one lovely story in it abt an
Armenian rug merchant in Hartford, Conn.,—whose models I know!—and
how he came to make those models: dreamt em!

(The Geometer's

Yes: COXETER!! a great guy

Yes: do take a look at his book. Wonderful
In fact, if he has anything like it
out recently — or it itself — I'd
like to review it for the
Quart.

costs (this is the pisser — too old to bum,
& not much for traveling with others!)

beyond

the psychological,
the sociological
& the mythological

That the mythological
doesn't have
significances,
any more than
those other two contexts
Which have piss-pooed

name begins with C, I believe (not unlike Comstock)—christ,
what is it

or Crierson

Anyhow, just to get word over to
you. And tell you how pleased I am that you are with us,
in #1, of the BMQ.³⁴ Figure we can all help Bob turn this
one into the damned best anywhere.

Oh, YEAH; as of the shit in Bill's pants, or EP's—how
you had it—messiness: I once sent this one, to Bill.³⁵

these days

whatever you have to say,
leave the roots on.
Let them dangle.

And the dirt.

Just to make sure
where they come from

I think it was. It's the idea,
anyway

And I shld so much like to come up there. Do you & Dudek
need a lot of advance notice, to arrange something which
might cover my travel? Give me some idea how much time I'd
have to let you have ahead. For that will be the only
difficulty now: otherwise, I wld jump off. And come. Bang. I
now toy with some time in March—middle, say. But let me
know how it all sits there. If you do need warning. And what
wld be good.

Back on, shortly. And please
keep letting me hear fr you
Olson

the present

that there isn't any context
except that one which
isn't one at all: all of it, (or,
what I was guilty of calling,
in a review of Melville
books for the New Republic³⁶
a year & a half ago:
totality!!

[end of March 1954]

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

BLACK MOUNTAIN N.C.

hot off yr letter³⁷

Layton

God damn it. I'm sore. And just
becoz I'd set my heart on this thing.

Look: fer chris sake (1) do you
have to give it up so easily?
& (2) why didn't you damn well let
me know at any time previous that
(a) it was a Lit Society, & (b)
that you were having such other guests
as Campbell, Auden & the shit
Viereck?³⁸ [How much do *they* cost????]

I stress this latter simply that
(1) if you broached the thing to me
in the first place, and it had
this formalness to it, you ought
(a) to have let me know that, instead
of going on the assumption it was
personal alone & (b) so long
as the Society did manage to have
V,A, & C, what kind of a fight
are you putting up so that
at this late date you dump
me

(1) when I was scheduling the
thing, & making all plans for
a month around it
& (2) when, by god, if you mean
what you say abt us Americans (EP
WCW & CO, say, not to speak of

Creeley etc) *how come* you find
the *till empty* just now???

how come the money got
spent on Auden (Eng)
Campbell (Eng)
Viereck (Eng?)

By god, Layton. Come on.
Come up to it. Or don't, for
Christ sake, dangle somebody like
me 45 months or more, without
(1) telling all
& (2) dumping as late & gaily as
this -----Sore. And want you to
make it still come off.

On yr honor
& for cause

Christ
Olson

Apr 8 [1954]

Dear Irving:

Good for you. And sorry I screamed. But at least you do
know I was set on it, and hugely disappointed. And still am. And can't
bear the thought that it waits, now, on the fall, but damn well do stand
ready to come, and so please set it, catch that Lit Soc budget from the
start!

(Figure—like my wife sez today—that i did go too much on the
future of the thing, not recognizing that you did not know how I do
slowly bite into anything, yet when the teeth are in . . .

And (last) I wld want to clear up that two month thing: I believe I
did say, from the start, that a Mexican trip wld have to throw it
over into at least January.³⁹ So—and I allow, it was more held in
my own mind than I had a right to think you might also hold it,
without word, over two months—I picked it up again the moment
I could get clarification out of that goddamn Riboud⁴⁰

((who, by the way, sails back to France tomorrow without, not only our
never getting to Mexico, but without the bastard even having managed
to get here!

So please—I had been so dangled by him that I guess I
spilled some of the complete goddamn failures of this winter over on you!

Many thanks for snapping it right back. And great that
we shall make it, October: let's set it as early as you can then make it, ok?

(By the way my failure to acknowledge yr new poem
was not my spit, but that we opened here last week, and I had to shove in
hard, for the first days

I liked it very damn much—like the conceit of
it—even tho I, as you know, think that any of us, by now, have so much of
the onset to get down & on that the offset (if I may call any *epater* . . .

tho I say that altogether gingerly, in yr case, simply
that, like no one else (and I think i must have sd Swift, as well as Donne
& Blake), you damn well do make yr whipping boys and dolls into
illuminated manuscripts

(but there you are: reading aloud to friends here
yr poems in the Black Mt Review, tho i read the Doll first I then sd but
hear this: Achigan!⁴¹

Creeley in (as you may have heard fr him already). And
it's the greatest! He's it, by god. And both of us was saying, that, if we
only damn well did have you here for the summer, we'd have *all* that at
this time wld make this place sd center!

We are announcing the summer
session in a bulletin in the next two weeks, and I do so wish it might have
been—that is, the featuring of writing as the special part of it—yr sd self
as the 3rd!

(Christ, when can you beat that rap? Any ideas? If any
whatsoever—stealing across sd border, or something, let us for christ sake
know! Best, and please write Olson

Aug 1/54

Irving: congratulations on poems in 0 12—especial the 1st.⁴² How I love
it, how you do it! In fact yesty wrote a thing on you called THE CRISIS
OF THE THIRD FOOT (t⁴³ Yr fond admirer,
Ann⁴⁴

ok. just to say hello. (Just told the Potry Umbilicus, San
Francisco, to ask you come there and chew chew chew (in the midst of
Raxwath, the Patch, Lessless Headless, Mister 'emerson, Black Cattle,
etc⁴⁵—simply that Duncan wld be on our side!

and because they are asking me for schedule when is it that I am to come to you? is the date positive? (OK—I ought to get a chance to, punch Doodeck right across his snout!⁴⁶

all right. Let's get on. Yrs, Charles Olson

[early Oct. 1954]

My dear Irving:

having the greatest time, that is, reading you to sundry characters, pressing on them how you are making it, for i gain all that i originally took from that first poem (when was it, 2, 3 yrs ago?

and i go back to that sense, get Layton here, so much so I stressed (when i got back here last week from reading Max in Boston, Gloucester & N.Y. that these little bastards—5 new writing students this fall, which begins to show some of the increment—have 4 count em FOUR on their "Faculty", ha—Creeley, yrself, Hellman, c'est moi!⁴⁷

i mean two things: (a) that how you make it from the other base of song & rime seems to me ineffable, like who might say; and (b) we must, by what means, persuade Washington to let you come over, even if only for a session (this wld seem to leave them plenty of room to disinfest any affect of your abominable presence in these States, yes?

All bastards. And await yr volume (Jonathan⁴⁸ tells me he had it, air mail, before he took off cross-country . . . isn't there some track competition by that name?

And please, if you can afford it, let me get a look at the PeaShooter (was delighted by the intro to it as it appeared in CIVN⁴⁹

I despair, of course, that your own virtues keeps you from finding the "poetry" like you call it in at least Maximus,⁵⁰ but to hell with that: it's good enough that you do what you do, and that I find it so wild, that LA MINERVE you sent me (which i damn well do believe did send some of these—POEM,⁵¹ as i remember it now, didn't involve me so much, but that means nothing at the moment

OK. Just getting started this morning, and wanted to merely gab. No great motions at all. Except that, as you will know, often one feels, when one feels so empty-headed, a swell beneath. And my own sense is to talk to you for some such reason. Especially abt rime, and song, that, for you, they mean poetry. I suppose I'd say it again as ((and you are the disproof, the utter abolishment of the thought, which makes me the easier that any

truth is not as interesting as some guy's proving, obstinately, that what it turns out to be in his hands what . . .

look, do you know a guy's pol's named Peter Voukos????⁵² (Crazy, but you & he . . .

I'd say it, that, a universe of discourse . . .

o shit, let me go to work: and this, then, over the border to you to greet you in this year of yr ascent

and eagerly await any further word on coming there, very eagerly, leaving things open so that i can get away whenever there, Leary,⁵³ you, all, say, is, the, time

Charles

For what pleasure it might give you
I enclose what followed the above⁵⁴

The Black Mountain Review
Black Mountain, North Carolina

Sun Jan 6/57

My dear Irving—I'm back here at *Music On a Kazoo*⁵⁵ wch you sent me in July, and I didn't thank you. It's been a pleasure to have & to read. (You mustn't mind I've been so slow but 5 years of this place cut me off. Now that we're closed—at least the teaching is over, & the pippul, even tho the theater's in SF., the *Review* will continue, publishing ditto, and if I can show any assets *after* sale I'll do at least one more "Institute" on Pre-Homeric Texts.⁵⁶

I wanted to write you abt FLAGS in Kazoo. For me it's one of those I take it digs a thing you, Martial, well dig—Rome (more, say, than I take it *Slav vs Saxon*, or those like the *Ladies at Some Place*⁵⁷ in which you epater les bourgeois) That is, in *Flags* the fierceness targeted at a thing, Canada Maybe it's the via "My Canuck mistress"⁵⁸—a person gets the object so that your wraths wrap it in your coils, slam into it, & every thing all sticks

Very powerful is the effect—the same power as in your own deepest—like say, for me, in this vol., such as the whole run fr "Giant" thru Dionysius⁵⁹ a lovely set they are

I don't think I'm saying it so you'll get me: It's that *Canada* in *Flags* gets treated as an organic thing—instead of split up into the individuals as victims as in so many of the *epaters*. The gain's enormous. For suddenly the social force—the two anthems—are in as images not messages, yah?

Oh. Well. To pass it along, in case it may be of interest. I'll look out for it, in case I strike another. It makes for a force of your satire by adding dimension to yr hated object—as loved objects in those others (as Martial made Rome & Spain into powers—like you say, the puma only not so much his teeth finally as that he is a puma—& bones are left or something.⁶⁰ Forgive scribble

Olson

Notes

1. Olson is referring to Layton's preface to his own contribution to *Cerberus* (1952), published with Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster: "The Canadian poet . . . is an exile condemned to live in his own country. He has no public, commands no following, stirs up less interest than last year's licence plate" (45).

2. Olson had called Layton at Sir George Williams University in Montreal from Black Mountain in mid-September, 1953. In a letter to Cid Corman (24 September 1953) Olson wrote: "I talked to him on the phone a week ago! & he asked me then, if I cld come! Was so impressed by his poem in Contact #8 I wanted to know if he might come here!" In an afternoon talk I had with Layton (Sunday, 30 October 1988) he had the following to say about his first conversation with Olson: "Yeah, you see, he called me one day, out of the blue, he phoned me and says 'Come down, I've got a job for you here at Black Mountain.' He wanted me to come down right away! I had to tell him that, look, I've got a commitment, I'm teaching, and I've got a contract. I just can't leave school, and my charges, come down, though I'm very flattered by the invitation."

3. Sir George Williams University (now affiliated with Concordia University) where Layton has taught, on and off, from the 1950s through to the present. Dorothea Rockburne was a visual arts student at Black Mountain College. See Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987) 183, and 208.

4. The reference to Auden is an allusion to Layton's satire "The Modern Poet," which Olson would have read in *The Black Huntsmen* (1951) [CP 188]. In later versions of the poem, as in the *Collected Poems*, Auden is replaced by Eliot as the object of satire. Olson owned a copy of Auden's *Poems* (New York: Random House, 1934).

5. Kenneth Fearing (1902-1961), American poet. Olson owned a copy of his *Poems* (New York: Dynamo, 1935).

6. See Layton's poem "Lines on the Massey Commission" (*Cerberus* 57; *UP* 68), written in reaction to the Massey Commission's findings that in 1948 Great Britain and the United States each published more than ten times the number of books of poetry published in Canada.

7. Dissatisfied with the state of American culture, Ezra Pound left America for Europe in February, 1908, disembarking in Gibraltar.

8. William Carlos Williams' conversation with Valéry Larbaud (a French scholar of American literature) took place on 6 January, 1924, in Paris. Olson would have known of this conversation from *In The American Grain*, where it is recreated in dialogue form in the section entitled "Pere Sebastian Rasles." Olson

owned two copies of *In The American Grain* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925; Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1945).

9. The "four books" have been identified for me by Layton as *Here and Now* (Montreal: First Statement Press, 1945); *Now is the Place* (Montreal: First Statement Press, 1948); *The Black Huntsmen* (Montreal: Author, 1951); and *Cerberus* (Toronto: Contact Press, 1952).

10. "Composition in Late Spring" appeared in *Contact* 8 (September - December 1953); *CP* 122.

11. *CIV/n* was a little magazine, running 1953 through 1955, in seven issues, and was edited by Aileen Collins. The title was taken from a statement of Ezra Pound's: "CIV/n not a one man job" (Civilization not a one man job). For a complete account of the magazine, see Collins, *CIV/n: A Literary Magazine of the 50's* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1983).

12. See footnote 9 for list of books.

13. German for mischievous, willful, frolicsome. Stefan Wolpe (1902-1972) taught Music at Black Mountain from the Summer Session of 1952 (as guest faculty), through to the Spring Session of 1956.

14. "The Old Lady"—Olson is referring to Layton's poem "To a Very Old Woman," *Cerberus* (1952), 70-71; *CP* 56. The epitaphs are from *The Black Huntsmen* (1951): For a Wit, Philosopher, Communist, and Mild Gentleman (XII); *CP* 37, and *UP* 34. "Epitaph For a Mild Gentleman" is not available in either the *Collected Poems* or the *Uncollected Poems*.

15. "Doge to dog" is not a specific reference. The Doge referred to is the Doge of Venice; Olson is commenting upon the 'swiftness' (he later identifies Layton with Jonathan Swift [8 April 1954 letter]) of Layton's satire: his ability to quickly deflate the pompous.

16. Layton's poem "Rembrandt" is in *Cerberus*, 52; *CP* 56.

17. Creeley's *Divers Press* in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, published *In The Midst Of My Fever* (1954), and designed *The Blue Propellor* (1955), which was printed by Mossen Alcover in Palma de Mallorca, and published by Contact Press in Toronto.

18. Olson's work *In Cold Hell, In Thicket* (Palma de Mallorca: Divers Press, February 1953); published as *Origin* 8 (Winter 1953). In a letter dated 1 January 1953, Layton wrote to Olson:

By the way, have you anything on hand that you'd like to send us for publication? The next number [of *CIV/n*] will have a review of IN COLD HELL IN THICKET by either Dudek or myself. Liked very much, among other, OTHER THAN, THE KINGFISHERS, and the title poem. Many questions I'd like to ask you, but they'll keep for when I see you. Wonderful freshness in your poems, wonderful vitality. You make sense, by god you make sense.

The letter in which Layton refers to *In Cold Hell, In Thicket* as "obscure" has been lost; however, he reiterates his point in an April 1954 letter:

Your work still exasperates me, chiefly because I find myself embracing what I must honestly say irritates me at the beginning. You've gone about as far as one can with prose to make it sound like poetry. My own temper and tempo are far removed from what you're doing (well, NOT temper) that I've got to untangle all my synapses before I can read you with profit or pleasure. It was that way with ICHIT; it's now again with MAXIMUS. I had the same trouble with WCW's PATERSON—I still don't think it successful (as poetry) except in spots, though I may change my mind on that too.

19. Paul Blackburn's volume of poetry entitled *Proensa* (Palma de Mallorca: Divers Press, (June) 1953). Olson's poem "Proensa" was published in *Contact* 9: 6-7 (January - April 1954).

20. The poem "Palms and stars" remained unfinished and unpublished. In the original letters, Olson crosses the poem out from "at the forehead" ff.

21. Olson is referring to the poem "O.B.E." published in *The Long Peashooter* (Montreal: Laocoon Press, 1954). As with the following poem (note 22), Olson must have had "O.B.E." in manuscript form, since *The Long Peashooter* was not published until 1954. The pages are not numbered in this volume of Layton's poetry, but the poem is reproduced in *CP* 69.

22. Olson is referring to "Pine Avenue Analyst": "His face a priest's: wise, round, contemptuous:/ One hears the faint rustling of his surplus." (*The Long Peashooter* [1954]; *CP* 93).

23. "A Po-Sy, a Po-Sy" *Origin* 2 (Summer 1951): 118-123; "The Morning News" *Origin* 10 (Summer 1953): 122-128.

24. The limerick referred to is "O.B.E." in which Layton plays with the form of the limerick, while maintaining its sense.

25. "Catalonian dynamiter" is a reference to the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), and the short poem following was written by Olson in response to Layton's poem (which he must have had, as with the above poems, in manuscript form) "Flaubert, Trillingism, Or" (*The Long Peashooter* [1954]; *LP* 97).

26. See section 3 of Olson's poem "Maximus, to Gloucester, Letter 11" in *The Maximus Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 54, where Olson uses the word "oxyacetylene" to describe what he sees as an admirable quality in New Englanders.

27. See p. 149 for "THE CELTS, AND PLATO."

28. Olson is echoing Pound's phrase "Pull down thy vanity" from "Canto LXXXI." See *The Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, pp. 172-175).

29. Katue Kitasono (1902-1978), whose volume of poetry and drawings entitled *Black Rain*, was published by Creeley's Divers Press in August of 1954. Kitasono published Olson in *Vou*, a magazine he edited, from Tokyo.

30. Margaret Avison, Canadian poet and critic. The quote is at this point unlocated.

31. See note 18 for Layton's April 1954 letter. Williams is not mentioned in any other surviving letter from Layton to Olson.

32. Cunningham taught Dance at Black Mountain during the Summer Sessions of 1948, 1952, and 1953.

33. H.S.M. Coxeter, *Regular Polytopes* (London: Methuen, 1948). Olson tells the story of the Armenian rug merchant—Paul S. Donchian—in *Muthologos*, Volume 2, 72-73. This "lovely story" is on p. 260 of the 1973 Dover Press reissue of *Regular Polytopes*.

34. Olson is referring to the Spring 1954 edition of the *Black Mountain Review*. Two of Layton's poems were included in this issue: "Lacquered Westmount Doll" and "First Snow: Lake Achigan." Layton sent typescripts of these poems to Olson in a letter dated 3 January 1953. Both poems are in *CP*, on pages 120 and 65 respectively. The only other poem sent by Layton to Olson in typescript form (in the letters which have survived) is "T.S. Eliot" (3 August 1954 letter), which was published in *The Long Peashooter* (1954), thus verifying the hypothesis (see note 21) that Layton was sending Olson several poems from *The Long Peashooter* in manuscript form.

35. "These Days" was published in *Contact* II, 1 (November -January 1952-53: 6. As Olson guesses, the published version of the poem, which is available in

Archaeologist of Morning (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), differs a little from the version he sends Layton. Olson sent this poem to William Carlos Williams, 12 January 1950.

36. "The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville," *New Republic* 8 September and 15 September, 1952. Reprinted in *Human Universe And Other Essays* (San Francisco: The Auerbach Society, 1965). The phrase Olson employed was actually "total intelligence" (*Human Universe* 112).

37. The letter precipitating Olson's angry response has been lost.

38. Roy Campbell, W.H. Auden, and Peter Viereck were the 'names' at a conference arranged chiefly by John Sutherland. In conversation (30 October 1988), Layton had the following remarks to make on this conference:

Campbell came—that is because of John Sutherland, not me—John Sutherland was a great admirer of Campbell, he'd [Sutherland] become a Catholic, you know, John had become a convert, and, I couldn't see it. And that led, of course, to the eventual parting of the ways . . . Viereck, I knew some of his poems that I liked, I didn't think he was an important poet, but I certainly turned out to hear him . . . and Auden, of course.

It is clear from two separate letters from Layton to Olson, dated 3 August 1954 and 15 April 1955, that while Layton was eager to have Olson up to lecture, Dudek, who didn't like Olson's work, put a stop to the venture:

Originally, as you know, I had planned it as a joint affair sponsored by my College and McGill. Friend Dudek won't come in on it—so that's that. Whether Sir George's can raise that much money, I don't know.

My word on this, then, is that you go ahead and make what speaking arrangements you can. In the meantime. By the middle of October or thereabouts I should know how the things stand. I'm that eager to see you I'd put out a good deal into the kitty myself. (3 August 1954)

And, from the 15 April 1955 letter:

The invite to lecture fell through 'cause LD wouldn't lend his support: I think I explained this before to you. The literary society of my own college is too small and too poor to foot the kind of expense that would be involved in your travelling all the way up here. If the literary society at McGill could have been brought in, the story would have written itself differently.

Dudek's recollection of events differs from Layton's, as the former related to me in a letter dated 26 April 1989:

I don't know anything about a conference with Campbell, Auden, and Viereck reading. These were heroes of John Sutherland, of course. Was he the organizer? If so, Olson would not have fitted. Sutherland at this time was strong on traditionalist metrical poets and Catholics. If Layton proposed Olson in a tentative list of some time, it could be that Sutherland's final choice was the first three poets only. I did not attend the readings.

39. See 5 October 1953 letter above.

40. Jean Riboud, chief executive of Schlumberger, a multi-national corporation, whom Olson met in the late 1940s while living in Washington. Olson's work "The Resistance" is dedicated to Riboud. For an account of Riboud, see *The New Yorker*, "Profiles: A Certain Poetry—1," 6 June 1983: 46-104.

41. See note 34.

42. *Origin* 12 (Spring 1953). Layton's two poems in this issue are, in order of appearance, "The Madonna of the Magnificat" (*CP* 105), and "Metzinger: Girl with a Bird" (*CP* 118). These poems are reprinted on p. 68 of Cid Corman's *The Gift of Origin* (New York: Grossman, 1975).

43. See p. 151 for "The Crisis of The Third Foot."

44. In a letter dated 3 August 1954, Layton replied: "Dear Ann: (Did you write that excellent review in BMR?) Thank you very much for yr. thoughtful note. It gave me quite a lift. It's always nice to be told my stuff is reaching out, making contact . . . out there. Wld very much like to see your thing. The title intrigues me." The review Layton refers to is in Volume 1 (Spring 1954) of the *Black Mountain Review*, and covers *Contact* 4-8; *Cerberus*; *Twenty-Four Poems* by Dudek; *Love The Conqueror Worm*; and *Canadian Poems 1850-1952*. Written by Robert Creeley, the review is reprinted in his 1970 work *A Quick Graph: Collected Notes & Essays* under the title "Canadian Poetry 1954." The review is signed "A.M." in the *Black Mountain Review*, which Creeley has told me is a "pun" on his (then) wife's maiden name: Ann MacKinnon. Layton, then, seems to have been under the impression that Ann Creeley had written the review, and Olson is merely poking fun at this mistake by signing the postcard "Ann."

45. "The Potry Umbilicus" are: Kenneth Rexroth, Kenneth Patchen, Leslie Woolf Hedley, and Richard Wirtz Emerson. "Black Cattle" refers to the patrons of The Black Cat Cafe, 710 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, a meeting place/centre for artists, which closed in 1963. See p. 149 of Ferlinghetti's *Literary San Francisco: A Pictorial History from Its Beginnings to the Present Day* (Harper & Row: San Francisco, 19 80). In a letter to Ruth Witt-Diamant dated 1 August 1954 (the same date as the post-card to Layton), Olson wrote:

Allright. The best of luck on the whole plan. It's the best

I've heard of. And hope it swings the cat (the Black Cat (or is it, still, there?????) Thank you. Olson

46. Louis Dudek had written a less than flattering review of *In Cold Hell, In Thicket*, in *CIV/n* V: 26-27 (March 1954) [see note 18]. In a letter which has been lost, Olson apparently questioned Layton as to why he hadn't managed to keep Dudek from writing the review (or at least from publishing it) as is apparent from an 16 August 1954 letter from Layton to Olson:

It's not a matter of my letting Dudek write a review—he just up and did it, & Collins thought it ought to go in. Whatever reservations & disagreements I might have are beside the point. Dudek knows my feelings for Bob and yourself, but he has his own way to make in the world. So to speak. We make it a rule not to censor each other's work and opinions, though criticism is freely offered.

47. Robert Hellman (1919-84) taught Languages at Black Mountain during the Summer Sessions of 1954 and 1955. The "faculty" identified here comprise the editorial board of the *Black Mountain Review* for issues 3-6 (Fall 1954 - September 1956).

48. Jonathan Williams. The volume referred to is the manuscript of *The Improved Binoculars*, published by Williams as Jargon 18 in 1956, with an introduction by William Carlos Williams.

49. "Prologue to the Long Pea-Shooter" appeared in *CIV/n* VI (September 1954): 19-23.

50. See note 18 (April 1954 letter).

51. "La Minerve" (CP, p. 177) and "Poem" (UP 42) were both published in *The Cold Green Element* (Toronto: Contact Press, 1955). In a letter dated 15 April 1955, Layton indicates that he sent Olson a copy of *The Cold Green Element*: "Did you receive the Cold Green Element? I hope you liked it. Bob has probably sent you a copy of The Blue Propellor." It appears, then, that Olson had "La Minerve" and "Poem" in manuscript form.

52. Peter Voulkos taught Ceramics at Black Mountain the Summer Session of 1953.

53. The Leary mentioned by Olson has yet to be identified. Both Timothy Leary, and Lewis Gaston Leary (via his wife), have indicated to me that Olson was not referring to them.

54. No typescript is attached to this letter, or at least has not survived the years, so "what followed the above" remains a mystery.

55. *Music On A Kazoo* (Toronto: Contact Press, 1956).

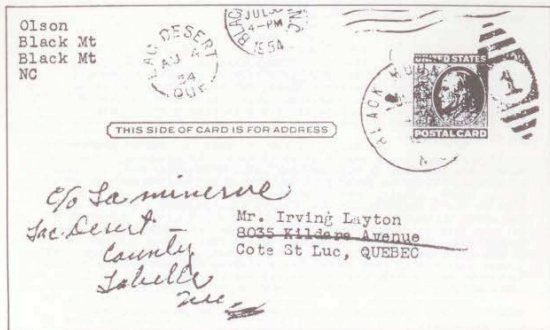
56. See "Lectures in the New Sciences of Man," February 1953, published in *OLSON: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives*, Number 10; and *The Special View of History*, May 1956, published in 1970 by Oyez Press, Berkeley.

57. "Flags," *Music On A Kazoo*, p. 29 (UP 127); "The Cold War: Saxon vs Slav," *Music On A Kazoo*, p. 31 (UP 128); and "Two Ladies at Traymore's," *Music On A Kazoo*, p. 32 (CP 197).

58. Olson is referring to the first line of "Flags": "My Canuck mistress in great distress."

59. *Music On A Kazoo*, 48-58.

60. See "The Puma's Tooth," *Music On A Kazoo*, 40 (CP 211).



November 4

BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

BLACK MOUNTAIN, N. C.

My dear Layton:

Excuse delay - figuring out what to do with this place (now that it is so much just that drastic, & simple - and, so far as I can see, pretty much my own to do, by default of all the others: why, e.g., I wanted you & Creeley here, and Jonathan Williams as sort of "editor in charge of publications", or better just a "publisher", that I think one legitimate use of it, in its present reduced, and dissectionless state, is to direct it toward a writing complex, a place where any of us can hole up, and shoot from, with the nicest of elementary economics, and the freest of teaching I ever heard of, or have experienced, practically one's own demonstration of, how, it ought to be done.)

So yr news that you may be boxed in there, throws me as much, for that matter, as the possibility I may be too! That is, it has never been put to a clear test, but I have reasons for thinking I am, too, for political action 12 to 13 years ago, one whom the State does not want roaming around. And such a trip as we have talked abt, to Canada, might be just as much a block, States-side, as you are blocked, coming in.

Not, for christ sake, that it matters that much. They haven't yet (so far as I know) got their fingers into the post offices. Nor have they troubled to cut off publishing, yet. So we do have some short time (two years?) to do - and get into print - what we can.

##

Please keep mailing me anything of yrs comes out (I laid my issue of Blackburn's book - by same title, PROEMSA, into Bousster's hands, and he is using it, he tells me, in contact w/ 3). Otherwise, what I have done is ~~write~~ ^{write} ~~book of~~ ^{book of} unwritten Maxies - and got to be such a fucking bore, I gave the studies up. And am now freer, for anything which might occur so express itself.

You see, I am not, I guess, a kind of professional - if that word means what I think it does, the opposite, of an amateur. And wd have to imagine that there is another sort of class of writer. What I am getting at is, that I get very damn sick of my own stuff, simply, that it sounds to me as though I am in service to the words, & instead (as I think a professional is), to whom the words themselves are in service. That is, that the man himself directs them to serve ends which he invents, or declares, or demands. And I have no such feeling; when I feel taking as you had it you did a summer morning when, the Old Lady, and Death, came out I have that damned fine sense that the words boss me. And my job is to be their agent, and form solely the care that they don't (because they are so liquid) merely disperse themselves.

That is, something like this - to give you the prose of it - which took over yesterday:

*Palms and stars, or the kidneys
of birds. Or the
narratives. Reverse
them.

Or have yr own star

at the forehead.
Be taken down,
Or yr suffering,
and petted, wrapped
in linen,
oiled.

Read it
as large as you
want, as anything
but anecdotal, and so,
pleasant, for an after-dinner time,
nothing
more:

that Kin only
is Paradise,
and that even it,
the Recognition,
has a depth: motion
(which does get itself
entangled, for
cause - which must be,
that things happen & must not
cease...)

Or does Joy
slow anything
down?

~~is not to be
wished. It is there. And Kin
is why Person does contradict the magic.
I forsook, fly at us premeditated
the citizen, who is wrong
to insist upon
Dasher. The Star
is light, and Heat
is what we do have
to have. Love
is~~

*Cancel it - by long it
found no way
As you know
I AM
The R*

Altogether, what?

(I wanted to say, too, that I very much admired yr second of two peas, the one "English Unfiled", a shooter - a beauty

that is, I guess a pun is, for me, too much at the heart of the puzzle, to me, of the nature of language to let me get more than kicks from "surplus" in the "Psychiatrist")

I do you know, and care to give me yr opinion of, "A Po-Sy, a Po-Sy" - in Origin 2 or 3, and the mate of "Morning News", just out in O 10?)

but what you do with ballad stanzas (in the epitaphs &c), and with the limerick (as here), wow me

that is, I guess I am driving at the wib arising from forms, as of more ~~important~~ ^{important} to me than those from words (at least, for such savage wolder as you are made for:

that it is forms which you do

Charles Olson to Irving Layton, 4 November 1953. This "poem in process" is part of "The Celts, and Plato"; see page 149.

how come the money got
 spent on Auden (Eng)
 Campbell (Eng)
 Virek (Eng)?

By god, Layton. Come on.
 Come up to it. Or don't, for
 Christ sake, damn's somebody else's
 me ~~55 months~~ or more, within
 ① telling all
 + ② changing as late + jaily as
 this — Says: And would you
 make it still come off

Charles Olson to Irving Layton, end of March 1954.

THE CELTS, AND PLATO¹

The religious sense is the sense of the self,
 and of the depth of life, by the self, in one.

Religions, however they
 trade on such motion, in fact invoke a contrary system than that sort of
 life which is palpably the act of any one of us. (The self is an act, in that
 it is not in the given of it as much as in its discovery, which comes from its
 directed use, and the intent to know it for what it is. "It goes against my
 nature," someone says, indicating they do know something to which they
 abide, by which they measure, on which they depend (proving whoever
 it was who said, each man does know the shape of his soul).

What one
 wants clear, is that religions do appropriate this desire, to see the face,
 to know who I am—as my grandfather told me,² he didn't see his own
 when he stopped to scoop up water at the pool, Clontarf³; he saw a
 differing one, and was sure, of course, that it was the Sidhe⁴ who grinned
 at him for something he'd done to bother their host, as it is felt, if you
 swat a wasp the hive of them will attack you, the air is so full of such
 species & forces.

One has to have practiced magic, and thus know that
 symbols are able to pluck from the busy air what swarms; and one has to
 have refused the power, turned back to the heat born in us, to that
 company, to the facts from which image comes—even to have discovered
 that personality is a use of the self as symbol, has the same implicit
 arrogation—to guess that religions, flatly, are so much magic too, no more
 than the white of black practices.

A device of duality (that fallacy
 that an important thing is always either-or, that contests are two, and
 outside) has tricked out religions as good verse, evil. It is the
 intimidation of the word and concept, the divine, as goal, as claimed end.
 But it is no trouble, testing the air, and knowing that now we are human is
 our own power, and such power, that divine is only half of what the other
 half is the thrown-down thing, the demonic. In other words that neither
 are the equal of, known, the Center—whom my father saw.

Palms
 and stars, or the kidneys of birds.⁵ Or the narratives. Reverse them. Or
 have your own star at your forehead. Or be taken down, from your

suffering, and petted, pampered. Read it large—as anything but anecdote and so, pleasant, for an after-dinner time, nothing more. That kin only, is Paradise; and that even it, the Recognition, has the death; motion, which ought to be entangled, which must be that life increase, must not cease—that that Joy . . . (Or does it slow anything down? isn't it weight, of root, and so how we do thrive, how we are—Self?

It gets lovely, when

it is there. And Kin is, I guess, why Person, in religions, does contradict that amount of magic I fly against in those systems. And so I am wrong to insist upon Center. Satan, surely, is Light. And so it is Heat which we do have. And heat can be Saviour—has to be. Our own is not known until Mate. Love is, the Spheres.

Notes

1. See 3 November 1953 letter from Charles Olson to Irving Layton. Transcription of this piece is by George F. Butterick. Some of his notes have been drawn from as well.

2. For material on Olson's grandfather (John Hines), see "The Grandfather-Father Poem" in *Archaeologist of Morning*, 216.

3. Clontarf is a western suburb of Dublin.

4. The Sidhe (pronounced 'shee') are now generally seen as Irish fairies; however, in early Irish poetry, as Robert Graves tells us, "they appear as a real people—a highly cultured and dwindling nation of warriors and poets . . . (a)11 had blue eyes, pale faces, and long curly yellow hair" (*The White Goddess*, 207).

5. See Olson's 3 November 1953 letter to Layton for the poem "Palms and stars." These last two paragraphs seem to be a synthesis of Celtic magic ("Palms and stars, or the kidneys of birds . . ."), and Plato's most 'artistic' work, the *Timaeus*. Certain passages in this tract seem to be echoed by Olson, such as the phrases "and the other stars which reverse their motion are subject to deviations of this kind," "he who lived well during his appointed time was to return and dwell in his native star," and "the gods, imitating the spherical shape of the universe, enclosed the two divine courses in a spherical body" (Levinson, 1967).

THE CRISIS OF THE THIRD FOOT¹

Example, Layton:

"I dance my shanks, here, in the field, reply"

(ORIGIN 12)

"a crown on him, yes, size of a mountain lake"

(same)

or, where it shifts to the fourth foot, or does it?

"Breaks from the cold fields, bounds ahead"²

(BLACK MT REVIEW 1)

how Layton pushes past it, falls from the cliff of that foot and then remounts the line, makes it have its second life. This, is the making of the great firm line of the language. And though it seems English, and that Layton here is as traditional, one could insist that just this *crise* is what makes the factor of *lineage* crucial in a verse differently based than that which is based (as Layton's) on the syntax of the completed thought.

That is, there is point now to speak of a syntax which is, ultimately, dependent upon the authority of a completed man, might I say, in this sense, that the syntax is of the man's own making, not something accepted as a canon of the language in its history and the society. For example, there are languages (Mayan is one) where there is no syntax accepted as proper to the sentence. Each person declares the syntax according to the necessities of his own precision in the moment of what he is stating or telling. The parts of speech can be so freely disposed in any language which is undeclined, the so-called agglutinative languages.³ And if I take it "American" is agglutinative, then such syntax is, in experience, more natural to it than English syntax.

But saying that, without insisting upon another formalism hidden in language & implicit in it—or at least in the twin of language, the emotions (I am thinking of Bach's doctrine of the affections)⁴—without, then, paying attention to the crisis of the 3rd foot—one shall not be further on that dreary continuing debate of *vers libre* versus *vers classique*

1. See 1 August 1954 letter of the Olson-Layton correspondence, footnote 43. Transcription of this piece is by George F. Butterick. Some of his notes have been drawn from as well.
2. The first two quotations are from Layton's poem "It's All In The Manner," published in *Origin* 12 (Spring 1954): 200; *CP* 100. The third quotation is from Layton's poem "First Snow: Lake Achigan," published in the *Black Mountain Review* 1 (Spring 1954): 33; *CP* 65.
3. Olson is perhaps drawing upon Otto Jespersen's 1922 work *Language: Its Nature, Development And Origin*, in which Jespersen talks of "the so-called agglutinative languages" (376). Olson owned a copy of Jespersen's *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (9th ed.; New York: Doubleday, 1956) so it is possible he read other works by this author. Jespersen's definition of agglutination in *Language* would have appealed to Olson: "Both meaning and relation are expressed by sound, but the formal elements are visibly tacked on to the root, which is itself invariable: agglutinating languages" (76).
4. A theory attributed to Bach, the doctrine of the affections involves "rhythmic, melodic, and motivic formulas developed for the expression of certain affects" (Bodky, *The Interpretation Of Bach's Keyboard Works* [1960], 211). Bodky taught music at Black Mountain, and held a Bach festival the first summer that Olson taught at the college, so it is a possibility that the two men discussed the doctrine of the affections, or that Olson read some of Bodky's earlier work on the subject.

Observation: vision—voyeurism—scrutiny—espionage? H.D. was enticed by the invitation to anonymity in the public interest. She also welcomed the recognition of a deep connection between the so-called "objective" observations of the scientist and the "subjective" insights of the poet. She had long been an initiate of this mystery and it would be the basis of her own war-record, the *Trilogy*:

There is no rune nor riddle,
it is happening everywhere;
...
you have seen for yourself
...
I am sure you see
what I mean . . .
(*CP* 559-60)

Mass: mob—crowd psychology—mystery—communion. For H.D., just as "every concrete object / has abstract value" (*CP* 523), so the individual mind has a collective dimension as well as common touchstones in actual experience. Whether or not one accepted Jung's model of a "collective unconscious" or Freud's methods of psychoanalysis, both depended on the belief that dreams have weight in the world and that there is significance in "the meaning that words hide" (*CP* 540). Highly selective in her own society, H.D. sought the companionship of those who shared these beliefs. From the maternal matrix of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, they led her to work with Freud in Vienna in the early thirties and to join, a decade later in London, Lord Dowling's circle of seekers.¹ Between these dates (1933-4 and 1943-6), she became a participant in the social and intellectual experiment known as Mass Observation:

(I speak of myself individually
but I was surrounded by companions

in this mystery)
(*CP* 520)

Here . . . we must give a short outline of Mass-Observation's early history.

It was founded early in 1937 by three young men, all of them remarkable . . . The crisis of Edward VIII's abdication had brought to the attention of intellectuals the extraordinary hold which the monarchy still had over the British popular imagination. It had also seemed to expose gulfs between the 'Establishment' and the 'people', and between the newspaper press and public opinion. Its broader context, social and international, was such as to worry intelligent people. While the South-East of England prospered, the North, Wales and Scotland still suffered mass unemployment. In Spain, Franco was beating the Republic . . . Franco's Falange appealed to atavistic loyalties. In Germany, Hitler's rise to power had been a triumph for irrationality. Could anything be done to check the revival, as it seemed, of barbarism, to avert the major war which seemed certain?²

The "three young men" were the poet Charles Madge (b. 1912), the ethnologist Tom Harrison (b. 1911) and the documentary film-maker Humphrey Jennings (b. 1907). In a letter to the *New Statesman* of January 1937, Madge called for "mass observations" to create a new "mass science," and in February Mass Observation was initiated with the statement, "The anthropology of ourselves is still only a dream." Accordingly, Harrison gathered a team to study industrial life in Bolton, Lancashire (known as "Worktown" in the reports), while in London, Madge organized a "National Panel" of volunteers: Jennings' role was in presenting the material collected. By the end of the year, there were over five hundred unpaid Observers, whose main task was to record everything they did between waking and sleeping on the twelfth day of each month. The purpose of these "Day Surveys" was "to collect a mass of data without any selective principle." M.O. valued the fact that its Observers were amateurs: "subjective cameras, each with his or her own distortion"—and that their reports were not only anonymous but largely unmediated.³

Angus Calder has seen in the work of M.O. "a contradiction characteristic of the thinking of 1930s intellectuals—who were typically, the heirs of a liberal-individualist tradition in a period of 'mass politics'"; he continues:

Freudianism appeared to offer the chance of a new kind of liberal individualism based on appreciation of psychological differences between autonomous personalities. Marxism seemed to call on the intellectual to immerse himself in the 'masses' and the 'struggle'. Harrison's politics, when he chose to name them, were Liberal . . . Madge had been a committed Communist. But both seem to have been relieved to retreat from the dilemma of their

generation into the supposedly neutral position of the 'scientist', where consciousness could be neither 'collective' nor 'individual', but 'objective'.⁴

Yet from the start, Mass Observation also revised the myth of scientific objectivity and acknowledged the relativity of facts. It evidently owed as much to Madge and Jennings' shared interest in Surrealism as to Harrison's original approach to sociology. An early directive draws Observer's attention indiscriminately to:

Behaviour of people at war memorials,
Shouts and gestures of motorists,
...
Bathroom behaviour,
Beards, armpits, eyebrows,
Anti-semitism,
...
The private lives of midwives . . .⁵

The list itself is surrealist: its notations could be those of poet, filmmaker or anthropologist. For each, the interpretation would be different, but all might see the texture of actual experience as a means of social transformation.

Although their party-politics differed, all three founders of M.O. were broadly left-wing, and argued that the social scientist must find out "what people do want, do get, don't get and could get to want."⁶ Historians of M.O. have tended to stress the populist aspect of the movement, especially in the phase which followed the Munich Crisis of 1938. Tom Jeffery writes: "M-O was part of the articulation of a popular consciousness which would make its greatest impact in the early years of the war but it also links that 'war radicalism' to the later 1930's."⁷ Other accounts have stressed its artistic as well as political radicalism.⁸

In a remarkable series of books, now being reprinted, M.O. published selections from the wealth of data collected by its members. The first was *May the Twelfth* (1937), of which there will be more to say; another was *The Pub and the People* (1943). Later, illustrated, collections included *Britain Revisited* (1961) and *Living Through the Blitz* (1976). The latter was drawn from the newly established Tom Harrison Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex. The Archive's Director, Professor David Pocock, has recently recruited a new panel of Observers to record their daily lives and to report on events such as the Royal Wedding of 1981 and the Falklands Crisis of 1982. Hence M.O. reports continue to be an important resource for contemporary cultural studies, particularly those concerned with the mass-media, and are also significant to semioticians.⁹

H.D. became involved in Mass Observation early in its history. She was one of the first well-known people to join the National Panel. Replying to a questionnaire in November 1937, she says: "I joined M.O. at the suggestion of a friend."¹⁰ In the same reply, which is printed below, H.D. connects Mass Observation with her interests in psychoanalysis and astrology as "part of this so-called Aquarian age movement" towards harmony and world-peace. Having been made aware, by long expatriation, of the evils of nationalism, H.D. hoped that "M.O. in time might . . . help to break down these barriers that make eventually for prejudice and at last analysis for war."

The initial impetus for H.D.'s interest in M.O. may well have been here emotional involvement with the abdication in 1936. As an American living in Britain, she reports, "I felt divided loyalties." This division was not simply between Edward VIII's royal duty and his romantic enthrallment with Mrs. Wallis Simpson, but between British monarchism and American republicanism. By a coincidence very appropriate to M.O., H.D.'s only report was a Day Survey for 12 May 1937, the date of the Coronation of Edward's younger brother as King George VI and Elizabeth, Duchess of York, as Queen Elizabeth.

As an Observer, H.D. was sensitive to the roles of myth and fantasy in this national event: "Coronation seems to take us to child-level, fairy tale, fairy prince, all that." Unlike her British companion Bryher, who plays a subversive role, mocking the ceremony, H.D. is largely uncritical of the Establishment's orchestration of public sentiment. She allows the elaborate ritual to catch her poetic imagination ("I get words. King, Priest, Prophet") and admits intellectual curiosity ("Symbolism interests me"). Her report shifts continually between naïve and sophisticated levels of response. This is achieved partly by a technique she would later use in *The Gift*, that is, the filtering of information through scraps of speech: "Has old Queen Mary a crown?" etc. The naïve question of a foreign onlooker is worked into a patchwork of association. The "old queen," mother of two kings and familiar from newspaper photographs, is recognized by H.D. in her archetypal dignity as displaced matriarch. The image superimposes itself on "a vivid dream of my mother (dead ten years)" with which her Coronation Day began. H.D. hints at a possible interpretation of the dream in terms of "some conflict and fear, re change in Queens"; the association will lead her, eventually, to the recoveries of matriarchal value in *Tribute to Freud*, *The Gift* and *Trilogy*.¹¹

In her report, H.D. says that she "could not resist" using *this* May 12 as an opportunity for Mass Observation; she took notes in pencil while "listening-in" and typed them up later. Though an author by profession she thus joined with those amateurs (many of them were women) for whom the day-diary was an opportunity for personal expression, an excuse for the pleasure of writing. Following M.O.'s instructions to its volunteers, H.D. began her journal "with dreams and night thoughts if any" and noted the different phases of the day precisely by the clock. (A

later variant of this pattern would appear in the angelic hours of "Sagesse," the second part of *Hermetic Definition*.)

H.D.'s Coronation Day was spent in Switzerland, with Bryher, her eighteen-year-old daughter Perdita, and Bryher's Swiss secretary-housekeeper Elsie Volkert. She was grateful for this company, noting that she had witnessed two previous royal events (the funeral of George V, and the abdication of Edward VIII, in 1936) "alone in London flat." On May 12, 1937, the four women listened in to the day-long ceremonies in London on the radio, doubly distanced from their source by place and by language, for the bulk of the commentary was in French. Consequently, H.D.'s report has a particularly quirky relationship with the medium of radio and offers a running commentary on the language medium itself:

'Yoeman guard' makes us laugh. It must be explained to V.; B. explains that to say 'Yoeman gard' is a sort of 'false English'. 'Acclamation frénétiqne'.¹²

Similar motifs occur in another report from Switzerland, described as that of an "English Girl":

All this in French of course. I giggled to myself; it seemed such a very roundabout position to be in: an English person in Switzerland, listening to an English ceremony being described in French . . . The commentator was particularly impressed by the costumes: couldn't stop enlarging about the magnificent velvet, 'cramoisie' silk and embroideries passing before his eyes, and the grandiose apparel of the 'Yeoman Guards' (pronounced all in a gulp, as in French, which also sounded a bit odd) . . .¹³

If, under the same conditions, H.D. is especially well-attuned to verbal assonance ("*cramoisie* . . . *canne d'ivoire*"), Bryher's visual imagination is at play: "it's too terribly Kino for words," she comments, drawing on the knowledge of Russian cinema that informed her journal *Close Up*. In this manner, H.D.'s report becomes a tapestry of linguistic and cinematic events and the Coronation itself reaches the reader through three layers of commentary: that of the French-speaking radio, that of the English, French, Dutch and German speakers listening-in, and that of the author herself. She manipulates the multi-layered material, enjoying the opportunities it offers for word-play that crosses both national and linguistic boundaries.

In the interstices of this complex commentary on the rites in Westminster Abbey, there are glimpses of the lesser rituals of H.D.'s day and Bryher's household:¹⁴ H.D.'s habit of taking morning coffee in Montreux and writing while she does so; the exceptional appearance at 10.45 a.m. of the maid with elevenses on a tray; the "usual lunch" at 12.40 p.m. ("Now homage is paid . . . —dimensions seem very mixed, this with cheese"); at 2.30 p.m., "the car comes," for further chauffeur-driven observation in Montreux; at 4.30 p.m., fellow-expatriates arrive for tea;

at 7.50 p.m., dinner, with "Two republics . . . represented at the table"; and finally, an hour's reading in bed.

3

Are there traces, in H.D.'s later writings, of her participation in Mass Observation? I have already hinted at resonances in *Trilogy*, and suggested a connection between her Day-Survey and the ritualization of clock-time in "Sagesse." We might also find in the apparent eccentricities of "Sagesse," composed in 1957, stylistic influences from the thirties. The trajectory of its opening sections moves from a newspaper-photograph of a caged owl, *via* an imagined conversation overheard at the Zoo, to angelic legend.¹⁵ Documentary *montage* is at work here, as it was in the classic publications of Mass Observation. Observers were encouraged to record casual speech in public places and news-clippings were interfiled with their reports. They also told their dreams.

This movement from the public to the private sphere, or from "observed" to "lived" experience, is evident in the structure of the book *May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation Day-Surveys 1937*.¹⁶ The first section of the first chapter, "Preparations," sets the scene by inter-cutting newspaper reports. The last chapter, entitled "Individual Reactions," concludes with Observers' dreams. Between these extremes are two chapters, "London on May 12" and "National Activities," that move from events in the capital into the regions and beyond. The book contains an analytical coda, "The Normal Day-Survey," whose single diagram depicts "the social area of the observer" as three concentric circles. The innermost circle is that of the family and household, the next that of strangers and chance acquaintances. The outermost circle is described by the editors as a "penumbra" that includes "institutions, classes, celebrities, . . . ancestors, literary and mythological figures, public mouthpieces (newspapers, radio, etc.) and such abstract collections as *The People*."¹⁷ It is immediately obvious that this outer circle could also be seen as an inner one. We may also note that H.D.'s position, as an Observer in Switzerland, is both on the geographical perimeter of the Day-Surveys published in *May the Twelfth*, and also at its psychic borderline.

It is intriguing, to a student of H.D., that the medium of radio should be located in that vague "penumbra" which also includes "literary and mythological figures." During the Second World War, H.D. would become convinced that radio-waves could carry messages of the kind accessible to psychic mediums. She did not firmly draw the line between the "intelligence" pursued by spies and that of visionaries.¹⁸ Both Charles Madge and Kathleen Raine were involved in the editing of *May the Twelfth*; their poetic and mystical interests were more akin to H.D.'s than the political and scientific concerns of some other Mass Observers. It has been pointed out by David Chaney that, while the dominant method of construction in chapters 1 and 2 of the book is cinematic and perhaps attributable to Humphrey Jennings, that of chapters 3 and 4 shows the

influence of radio and may be the work of Charles Madge. The editors of *May the Twelfth* noted the role of radio, not merely in diffusing commentaries on the Coronation, but in shaping the significance of the event. For if, as they remark, "the broadcasting of the ceremony and processions, and of the King's speech" offered individual access, it was also a means of "unifying behaviour" in the relatively recent rituals of nationhood. While some Observers raised questions about whether it was appropriate to eat, while listening-in to a "sacred" broadcast, and whether one should "stand up during the playing of the National Anthem,"¹⁹ others were conscious of the extent to which the elaborately costumed ceremonial was part of a performance staged for the mass-media. Indeed, one report makes a connection of which H.D. seems to have been unaware, between such occasions and government propaganda:

Reviewing it all calmly afterwards, one sees how very dangerous all this is—the beliefs and convictions of a lifetime can be set aside so easily. Therefore, although people will probably always like pageantry, colour, little princesses, etc., and it seems a pity to rob them of this colourful make-believe element—nevertheless because it makes it in the end harder for us to think and behave as rational beings when we are exposed to this strain and tension—I would definitely vote agin it. It is too dangerous a weapon to be in the hands of the people at present in power in this country.²⁰

As if to endorse this perception of Coronation Day 1937, the editors of *May the Twelfth* end their book with reports that have a "disturbing quality." Heading this section "Dreams and Phantoms," they choose passages that "represent that residuum of the day which at present defeats precise analysis or explanation, but which is important as giving it its dominant tone or character, a character which is made up of the totality of the fantasy and image-making of all the individuals."²¹ It is ultimately this concern with "image-making" that locks H.D. onto the concept of Mass Observation and, in "Sagesse," connects her photograph from *The Listener* with her meditations on Christian symbolism. The medium in which these can co-exist is precisely that of the imagination, where individual experience and collective experience meet. Fittingly, Madge and Jennings extract from H.D.'s Day-Survey the intimate dream-material with which it begins, and place this among the more arcane "Individual Reactions." Her contribution to *May the Twelfth* is a mere paragraph, from "Usual breakfast in bed . . ." to " . . . I seem to take an older-sister half-protective interest in this X."²²

This is the only part of H.D.'s report that has been published before, and the anonymity of its author has been preserved until now. Each page of her typescript bears the initials "H.D.A." (Hilda Doolittle Aldington), but it was filed by M.O. under the code-name "CO.11," which H.D. herself used when replying to the November 1937 questionnaire. Both items, together with the letter of November 14, 1937 reproduced

below, are in The Tom Harrison Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex Library, Brighton, England. Special acknowledgement is due to Angus Calder, who is writing a history of *The Mass Observers*, for drawing my attention to H.D.'s presence among them. I am also most grateful to Dorothy Sheridan, the Archivist of Mass-Observation, for her assistance at all stages of this project, and to Perdita Schaffner, H.D.'s daughter, for permission to reveal the identity of "CO. 11."

Notes

1. See D.B. Ogilvie, "H.D. and Hugh Dowding," *H.D. Newsletter* 1.2 (Winter 1987): 9-17. Ogilvie mentions Jung as an associate of Lord Dowding, who met him in Switzerland between the wars. There is no evidence that Jung and H.D. met; see John Walsh, "H.D., C.G. Jung and Kűnsnacht: Fantasia on a Theme" in *H.D.: Woman and Poet*, ed. M. King (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1986) 59-66.

2. Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan, Introduction to *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937-49* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984; repr. Oxford UP, 1985) 3.

3. Madge and Harrison, *First Year's Work* (1938), cited in *Speak for Yourself* (Calder and Sheridan 5). There was clearly a difference of opinion about the value of "subjectivity" among the founders of M.O. In their Preface to *May the Twelfth* (1937), Jennings and Madge quote with pride Professor Julian Huxley's comment that some M.O. reports "would put many orthodox scientists to shame in their simplicity, clearness and objectivity" (iii; see note 16 below).

4. Introduction to the Cresset Library Edition of *Britain by Mass-Observation* (1939) by Tom Harrison and Charles Madge (London: Hutchinson, 1986) xiv-xv.

5. 30 January 1937, cited by Calder and Sheridan, 4.

6. Madge and Harrison, cited by Calder, new introduction to *Britain by Mass-Observation*, xv.

7. *Mass-Observation: A Short History* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1978) 3-4.

8. See, for instance, David Chaney and Michael Pickering, "Sociology as an Art Form in Mass Observation" and Bjorn Sorensen, "The Documentary Aesthetics of Humphrey Jennings," in John Corner ed., *Documentary and the Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986).

9. See also Daniel Dayan and Elinor Katz, "Electronic Ceremonies: Television Performs a Royal Wedding," in Marshall Blonsky ed., *On Signs: A Semiotics Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

10. The identity of the friend is unknown. It may have been Bryher, who, H.D. reports, gave Elsie Volkert a Mass Observation "folder." Bryher's only report to Mass Observation was sent from Switzerland two years later than H.D.'s. It was a reply to a questionnaire of June 1939 on attitudes to race.

11. In the second part of *Trilogy*, "Tribute to the Angels," there is a subject-rhyme between "mère" and "Mary" (CP 552). The same motif recurs in the unpublished portion of *The Gift* (cited in my introduction to the Virago edition of 1984, xvii). In H.D.'s "Notes" to *The Gift*, an undertow of female anxiety about royal *droits de seigneur* surfaces in her discussion of her grandmother's "personal preference" for the Scottish folk-song "The Four Marys," Beinecke Ts., 9-10; printed in *Montemora* 8 (1981): 76.

12. In this quotation, as in the complete report which follows, I have made few corrections to the text, and then used square brackets, since H.D.'s spelling mistakes and slips of the pen are sometimes revealing. "Yoeman guard" or 'gard' would, in correct English, be 'The Yeoman of the Guard,' i.e. the monarch's ceremonial bodyguard, which still wears Tudor uniform.

13. The identity of this young Observer can only be guessed at. Her account of listening-in to the Coronation coincides with H.D.'s: 10.30 . . . I joined the rest of my family in the library, which has become our combined living and dining room. The radio is there: we turned it on, just in time to hear the departure from Buckingham Palace. ("CO.23," *May the Twelfth* [1937]: 273, para. 9)

14. "CO.23," cited above, describes her own "daily ritual" of practising taping and limbering between 9.30 and 10.30 a.m.

15. See H.D., *Hermetic Definition* (Oxford: Carcanet Press, 1972) 58-62. In his Foreword to this edition, Norman Holmes Pearson says that "The occasion [for 'Sagesse'] was a picture of an owl in the London zoo, published in *The Listener* for May 9, 1957." H.D.'s subscription to *The Listener*, the weekly magazine of the B.B.C., testifies to her continuing interest in the radio even after she had moved permanently to Switzerland.

16. Ed. Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge, with T.O. Beachcroft, Julian Blackburn, William Empon, Stuart Legg and Kathleen Raine (London: Faber & Faber, 1937; repr. 1987). I am indebted to my colleague David Chaney for his discussion of the structure and contents of *May the Twelfth* in "The Symbolic Form of Ritual in Mass Communication," forthcoming in P. Golding et al. (eds.), *Communicating Politics* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1987).

17. *May the Twelfth*, 348-49.

18. It has been suggested that this contributed to her disagreement with Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, who was privy to Military Intelligence even after his dismissal from R.A.F. Fighter Command in 1940; see Ogilvie, cited in note 1 above.

19. *May the Twelfth*, 267, 269-70: "Reactions to Radio."

20. "CO.41. Female Typist. Single. 39." (*May the Twelfth* 304-5, para. 63). By contrast, H.D. refers uncritically to the "little princesses"—a news-media cliché well out-of-date by then—when describing her Aeolian Hall reading of 1943 (letter to May Sarton, 21 April 1943, Berg Collection, New York Public Library).

21. *May the Twelfth*, 328.

22. CO.11. *May the Twelfth*, 339, para. 129. H.D. initially typed "C" for the "much younger writer, I will not name," but amended this to "X." In her interpretation of this first dream, the identity of X remains in flux between the two royal brothers ("Is X the new King or is X, Edward?"). Chaney points out: "For this coronation, a unique feature was the extent to which members of the public thought that it should have been Edward VIII rather than his brother . . . being crowned" (*op. cit.*, note 16 above).

Getting up and breakfast (with dreams and night thoughts if any.)

Usual breakfast in bed, woke early with a start, wondering, thinking "we will be helped" and putting this for unusual reason (for me) into conventional religious symbol, "Christ will help us," recalled that it was morning of coronation, wondered if it were raining. Remembered dream. I was talking to older woman, pleading for a much younger writer, I will not name, well-known in London cinema and literary circles; I said to this older dream woman, "X is after all very clever. I may have made fun of him in the past but am truly very loyal." In dream, I am in old-fashioned room with lace curtains (Victorian England?). I change my chair and lean nearer to this older woman (the old Queen?) to say, "yes. X is *really* very clever and I am sure he should be praised (accepted)." The talk goes on this way, I am half excusing myself, half pleading for said X. Is X the new king or is X, Edward? In any case, I seem to take an older-sister half-protective interest in this X. The night before, after long talk over dinner-table, re coming ceremony, I had vivid dream of my mother (dead ten years). In the first part of the dream, I, in my London apartment, had lost everything. In the second part, my mother comes to me, in charming travelling costume, and everything is given back, some conflict and fear, re change in Queens, or general fear and sub-conscious un-rest?

Morning 9 a.m. - noon.

Post comes; I re-read some old MSS, having to do with a novel about my war-years in London. I become engrossed in this, am called to go out in the car, by B. with whom I live, here. She has camera and we go out into Montreux to "observe." The streets seem very quiet, like Sunday. We meet one or two groups of self-conscious school-mistress types of people, with heavy, thick, tri-colour ribbon favours. A few school girls. The flag on the Dutch club is the French flag. A few English flags, but not to notice, as the town is often decorated for foreign visitors and various diplomatic delegations. The Zermatt herb advt., has been replaced in the principal pharmacy by an Eno fruit salt herald. I noticed that, a day or two ago, and all here, were amused. The round plaques of gilt-covered chocolate R. and E. medallions are all sold out in the chief confectioner. I usually have coffee in the morning and write there, but to-day we return to hear the radio. B. orders coffee, contrary to usual rules of the house and the four of us, my daughter, 18, P.; the secretary Miss V.; B. and myself sit around the little dining-room table, in the library where we have meals when alone, where the radio is. I had not intended to do the more serious "mass" work but could not resist and looked out pad and pencil and jotted a few notes

while listening-in. I copy them from the blue paper and rough pencillings in my untidy type-script. I will not re-copy.

10.30 at radio. French voice speaking. French words make fairy tale or story out of beginners' French lesson. "le green park"—his use of word "prairie" makes us laugh—casques rose—and so on, convert the scene into another dimension—la cour—le cortège du roi, like Puss in boots done for a French primer, easy and exciting and glamorous words don't connect all this with London. Bells ring, stage-bells, off. Impression through these words of colour. Close eyes. Imagine a film. Voice speaks of crowds, 2 or 3 million people. Music. Like a fair. Complex.

Who is it, the English consider "between God and the pope"? The king, one presumes.

(B. snorts.)

Benediction, benediction, word benediction with French accents, contact of king with people, of God with king—benediction, accents. History of the rite, over centuries (in French, always remembered).

10.45 the maid comes to lay cloth but I say, "no, just bring in the coffee on tray." The coffee and buns very welcome.

(Just now while I type this, the house-boy brings my post, a card from Austrian friend, now in Cornwall. He is a great "fan" of Edward and I, too. The card is Edward, very flattering, and written on back are wishes for my "happy coronation." I am deeply touched at this, and/charmed.)

More radio talk (this copied, as I said from the pencilled notes done exactly at the time stated)—of contact of King and God.

The voice changes, we imagine a Belgian is now speaking.

Miss V., the Zürich secretary, now tells us, across all this, of having read in the paper that crowds waited in dense fog all night. B. makes communist salutes, ironically. V. wants to know what she means. All that is explained in German, over the French voice speaking of affairs in England. We laugh and break across and talk. We always laugh when the word "Buckingham" comes up, pronounced "Pookinham." "Yoeman guard" makes us laugh. It must be explained to V.: B. explains that to say "Yoeman gard" is a sort of false English."

V. discusses what I have been wondering, how is Edward feeling, what does Edward think now? Where is he? Where is he listening? We take for granted, he is listening. Now we laugh over French turns of speech that calls the "oil," "cream for anointing," "Cramoisie" is a word that keeps re-appearing, the velvet on the thrones?

We laugh, all 3, when kiss is bestowed—now, "canne d'ivoire" is all 18th century etiquette.

11.30

"Cramoisie" again and again. He loves it, his over-worked little word. Organ.

Lecture on kings.

Streets almost empty, he tells us.

I ask of American time. I am glad for company. I was alone at radio in my London flat at time of abdication, also at time of funeral. I am glad to be here with these 3.

They say U.S. time is 5 hours earlier. We do not imagine people at dawn in N.Y. listening-in.

V. remarks that the fanfare is like music she loved as a child.

11.45. English voice.

Cross, chalice, altar cloth to be placed on altar.

Staff—

Sceptre—cross—

Spurs—(interruption)—I ask or want to ask interpretation—V. breaks across to have translation—confusion; symbolism interests me.

Orb—rose-red cushion—St. E. crown.

Now B. is angry when oath to church is enlarged on.

Noon—(I got tired, water-logged, reached saturation point, went up to my room, but P. soon followed and said, "B. says he is being oiled and salted, you better come back." I went back.)

12.10—V. says in German, "now the music is beautiful." I get words, "King, Priest, Prophet."

"Poor King," we say.

12.40. We have usual lunch. Now homage is paid—anthem—dimensions seem very mixed, this with cheese.

V. asks if "Rose-Marie" will be there? We laugh. V. again remarks on fanfares. B. says, "its too terribly cino [sic; Kino] for words."

12.45. B. screams with laughter when we are told 2 bishops "support the queen." V. waits for fanfare after crown, she balances basket on head for crown, to show how it is done.

1.05 B. looks out her Lenin on the book-shelf. I have asked how anything can change this. She says, "Lenin says when there is a communist rising in England, it will be most terrible there has ever been."

Miss V., ardent Zürich calvinist, keeps saying, "but its Catholic, not Protestant." Then she says ironically, "all the catholics can laugh to hear that, be glad." She says, "that is no reformation, you had in England."

B. explains that C. of E. has no confession, no "pictures for worship." V. asks, has old Q Mary a crown? B. explains, "another kind." I say, "a remnant."

V. repeats, "they call it protestant, listen to that, catholic." I feel so tired, over coffee, cigarettes. P. offers to switch off. B. is deep in Lenin. V. asks for translation of word, "recollection." We try to explain, she says, "ach, stilles Gebeten." We speak of how tired they must be in W. Abbey. We discuss word "theatre" as here used in radio. Again V. says, "it is Catholic." I say, "well, we have Lenin now and Calvin both in our midst. B. & V. I do not know who P. or I will impersonate." All laugh.

1.25. V. starts to make rough notes, re Mass folder, B. gave her, but very confusing as she asks us each in turn just what she shall say.

End of radio. We separate. Now at 2.30, I get these notes together.

About 2.30.,

the car comes and B., P., and I go out to "observe" the town, Montreux-Territet. The Chaffeur asks in French, what the words "les peer" and "les peeress" mean. This makes us laugh. He listened in faithfully and seemed impressed, but we did not discuss the matter except as a pageant. B. said to me, "note red, white and blue flowers in buttonholes." It was simply a group passing. There was no elaborate show in windows, and as all the "colony" were assembling for the service at St. J. the Divine, at Territet, there were not many English about.

We pass the church slowly as B. wants to take some snaps of the crowd. There is a long rank and file of boy-scouts and girl-guides with attendants in the usual uniform and the usual banners, from the English schools round about. We drive slowly past the crocodile, and dodge a few possible acquaintances under umbrellas. We are pretending to be on a trip to Zürich, to avoid the ceremony and general tea after church, at 3.30 at one of the big hotels.

One feels, as B. directs her camera at odd groups, that she is directing a machine-gun or about to hurl a bomb.

We wait in the centre town square, while the chauffeur goes to get the latest local paper. B. is trying for more snaps. I read of trouble in Ireland. Front page has portraits of King and Queen, of course.

It pours.

I remark how refreshing it is to have town as usual. B. remarks, "democratic Swiss would not decorate."

3.45.

I have early cup of tea in my room and cigarette. We are expecting guests later for tea. B. brings selection of new books for me to choose from. I am glad to find a book, right out of all this, and choose, "Spanish Prelude" a pre-revolution book, written by an American, I get lost in it, want a change, a chance to refresh mind, over-strained with all this intensity and watching.

P. comes up from radio to report to me that "they have got back home safely to 'Pookinham' Palace." Long speech after, by announcer to the effect that we were to tell our children and grandchildren of the great spectacle we had been present at, via radio.

4.30. Dr. G., a Scotch American of our acquaintance comes with his Dutch wife. Of course we discuss all this. He too is exhausted listening-in. He was chiefly annoyed by final speech, as he wanted to hear the bag-pipes of the return procession. He notes funny remarks of the announcer, chiefly how he picked out the "white boots" of the highlanders, always in the details.

Again we discuss the word "theatre" or the French "estrade" and go off unto long discussion of Swiss Family Robinson in which B. specializes and to which Dr. G. was also devoted as a boy. Coronation to us seems to take us to child-level, fairy tale, fairy prince, all that, the sub-conscious pull back to unreality and phantasy of king and queen.

I tell of the peeresses wearing "dickie" and Mrs. G. is very pleased and amused that they economize (I read this in London paper) and don't all wear the full embroidered dress under the robes.

Talk goes on and on in this strain till about 6.15.

7.50.

Over dinner, we listen to the colonies and "commonwealth of nations," a phrase rather stressed, it seemed to me.

I scratch a few rough notes, think of Roman Empire solidarity and am proud that States was apart, is apart from this, that that colony which my people helped found, stood out, as Edward VIII stood out against all this superimposed pomp. At same time, I find it terribly impressive, listening to the far voices and continually harp back to Rome, all roads lead to—London. I think, too of tiny Helvetia. Two republics are represented at the table, U.S. and Helvetia. The national anthem of U.S., Swiss and Empire have the same tune, ours starts, "my country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty," the Swiss also has for theme, "liberty." One always loved the liberty of the INDIVIDUAL in England. I always felt it, but when E. went, I felt divided in loyalties.

B. speaks again of the new trouble in Ireland, as Ireland speaks.

When finished, P. asked if she should leave it on, B. said, "turn it off; if anybody made war to-day, we won't get any satisfaction about it to-night."

I can only add, what many must add in like notes on "mass observation" that we were very tired out by it all. We parted after the radio was snapped off, went to our rooms with books to read as is our usual habit. I took some prescribed sleep-tablets, that I indulge in about twice a month, on an average, as I feared I might keep myself awake all night going over this. I read for about an hour in bed, a usual habit, and then slept well.

H.D., LETTER AND REPLY TO M.O. QUESTIONNAIRE, 1937.

The Mass-Observation Bulletin for October 1937 asked four questions of Observers:

1. *Why did you join Mass-Observation?*
2. *What do you think it is for?*
3. *What do you yourself most hope to gain from it?*
4. *What suggestions have you for work that it should undertake?*

On 14 November 1937, under her code-name CO.11, H.D. replied as follows:

Sunday, Nov. 14.

Mass Ob.,
Dear Sir,

I receive your new folder, just as I am about to start for a two to three months stay in America. I send in a few hurried notes, taken from the first list of questions.

I like very much sending in notes, though fear they are of an informal and rather untidy description. I get so tired of writing. But as I say in one of the notes, this is like writing a letter or chatting with a friend, with whom I do not want to loose touch.

I send a few of your folders to States. People seem interested, and I shall talk of the work while there. The bank address reaches me as quickly as anything.

Again thanking you,

CO. 11.

1. I joined M.O., at the suggestion of a friend, I liked the feeling of being anonymous but with a directed purpose, the feeling that in case of war or certain political trouble, I would in someway, have made a statement that linked on to human doctrine and human behavior. Astrologists tell us, whether we discount their theory or not, that we are moving forward into the great age of "friends." M.O. and psycho-analysis seem part of this so-called Aquarian age movement, the moving forward where we are all in a whirl of unity, not of disruption, the biblical "as the snow cometh down and the rain from heaven." This is symbolized by the classic figure of Aquarius with the water-jar, or the second coming, as in a cloud—a snow-cloud, I visualize it.

2. This is the religious or poetic conception of what the world seems to be feeling. I think M.O. may be a factor of that spirit. I do not feel I

should apologise for these remarks, though in ordinary conversation, I should make a joke of them probably.

3. I think I myself hope to gain from it a link between my psycho-analytical findings and my own actual writings. Or perhaps in the ps-a jargon, a bridge between ego and id. In writing these notes, I have the feeling of being in touch with an intelligent friend, one who does not expect too much, nor do I myself stand on guard, as in creative writing, expecting too much of myself. I have made this link with one or two young people, who come to me for "help," yet who shy away from any actuality of the ps-a description. One, a young musician, whom I think has written to you, seems at last content that I have "helped" her, through getting her in touch with M.O. I have tried the same approach with less success with several older women who drain my energy and strength with their eternal probing and their unwillingness to "fit in" to the scheme of things, via the direct ps-a algebraic formula. Also this sort of understanding breaks down the self-consciousness of national barriers. I am still startled and inwardly a little frightened, when after years of common come and go, to have the remark flung at me, "YOU as an American," etcetera. (a woman in the shop where I have lunched for instance, and with whom I have chatted for about eight years, remarked to me, lately, in a hurt tone, "what—YOU an American?" Why YOU anything?) M.O. in time might, this is my hope, help to break down these barriers that make eventually for prejudice and at last analysis, for war.

4. I don't know that I have any special suggestions. The main thing is that the ideas reach as many people as possible. As I repeat, everything should or will flow into the center stream, if the force back of it and the sincerity of the workers is of sufficient power. One stream of thought should join another—making for happiness in mass as when two friends find themselves talking together, almost thought-reading, at one in the highest intellectual sense, the at-one-ment (atonement) we were taught as children, to believe in.

Number Thirteen

A Daphne Marlatt Section

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H.D.'s Contribution to Mass Observation

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