Contextualizing Canadian Feminist Literary Collaboration

by

Naomi J. Watson-Laird

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

January 1996

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ISBN 0-612-13825-9

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Contextualizing Canadian Feminist Literary Collaboration

submitted by Naomi J. Watson-Laird, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts

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Carleton University
January 1996

Abstract

Canadian lesbian feminists Erin Mouré, Daphne Marlatt, and Betsy Warland use experimental language strategies to evoke new realities, disrupting and displacing dominant systems that marginalize them. Their poetry deploys a Canadian blend of American language-centred writing and French feminist *écriture féminine* to both deconstruct and re-construct conventional gender, class, and sexuality assumptions. The Québécoise and Canadian strategy of fiction/theory allows feminist literary creation to remain open and multiple, calling for the collaboration of women writers in an exploration and mapping of possibilities. This collaborative element of fiction/theory has become increasingly pluralized, resulting in a subversive strategy that extends the possibilities beyond the author+author approach. Collaboration now involves the intertextually invoked voices of many; the interweaving of language elements, genres, and social identity positions; and finally, the engagement of the reader as an active participant in the reader/writer/text continuum.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Brenda Carr for her guidance, patience, and perspicacious critiques. Her definitive skill as a supervisor has both supported and energized me throughout this project.

I would like to thank my family for the sustaining encouragement and counsel that continues to show me one of the many processes of collaboration. Nicol, "are we there yet?" -- never a destination but a journey.

To Richard, with gratitude, my loving collaborator in everything we do and are.

"Is this what happens to us? When we are no longer
free. Is this what happens to our love?"

A kind of insurrection in the dark that somehow stands
against the laws of day that bind us and cannot be broken then.

There are no wrong turnings. Only paths we had not known
we were meant to walk.

[Guy Gavriel Kay *Tigana*]

In memory of Tasmin Rahman (August 13, 1971-December 12, 1995):

I was deeply fortunate enough to call her my best friend and to share my path with hers. Although her road has now taken a different turn and I cannot follow, someday we will walk together again.

It was a dream.
It said "Nothing is forgotten.
Nothing is ever forgotten."

Richard Carpenter *Robin of Sherwood*

Contents

Acceptance Form.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Chapter I: Introduction: Contextualizing Canadian Feminist Literary Collaboration.....	1
Chapter II: Working From Within: The Relational Poetics of Erin Mouré.....	28
Chapter III: The Permeable Poetics of "i+i": Power and Authorship in the Feminist Collaborations of Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland....	56
Chapter IV: Connecting Conclusions.....	95
Notes.....	100
Works Cited.....	107

I

Introduction:

Contextualizing Canadian Feminist Literary Collaboration

Difference is where the words turn depending on who reads them and...
when we each bring our differences into that reading, the multiple nature
of the real begins to be heard.

D. Marlatt, "Difference Embracing"

Fortunately the body is encased in the skin, or we would mix up with each other.

E. Mouré, "Metal Desk"

My thesis will provide a context for examining the potentials and implications of feminist literary collaboration, a practice which is subtly evoked and coloured through radical experimentation in language.¹ As a disruptive strategy, feminist literary collaboration revises notions of authorship and singular meaning, highlighting the dynamism and interplay of the reader/writer/text continuum and its embodiment in living language. Erin Mouré, Daphne Marlatt, and Betsy Warland, all use collaborative modes of representation and dialogue on several resonating levels, inscribing lesbianism textually and foregrounding difference, continuity, multiplicity, and simultaneity, as nuanced through their shared positionalities as Canadian lesbian and feminist poets. Most importantly, their works are an open invitation to others to explore, extending the collaboration further, and existing within a continuum of multiple possible interpretations and perceived realities.

For Mouré, Marlatt, and Warland collaboration is achieved through an exploration of language strategies as these enable the possibility of sexually/textually inscribing social identity within re-configured conventions of language and literary genres. These writers

have all undertaken a language-centred practice in their poetry in order to interrogate traditional patriarchal and heterosexual assumptions about language and to provoke a mutual, dialogic, and collaborative reading of their texts. Their engagement with a language-centred praxis arises from the resonant strategies articulated by late twentieth-century American language writers and French feminist theorists, who are critically concerned with the material nature and socio-political implications of language and literary assumptions. These include the apparent monologic authority of the author, the passive receptivity of the reader, and the transparent ability of language to convey a singular reality through the accepted norms of grammar and syntax.

'Collaboration' implies a joining, or melding of both individuality and creativity; in its most basic literary forms, collaboration provides a forum for the efforts of more than one voice. However, this is often shadowed by questions of equal representation, individual authorship, and the possible problematics of privileging one voice over another. Feminists involved in literary collaboration urge awareness that the voices brought to the fray must exist on equal, if differing, levels. There must be a recognition of the varying individual experiences, ideologies, and perspectives which serve to influence the imagination, and inform both creative productivity and (perhaps simultaneous) dissension.² Literary collaboration expands the possibilities for creativity and imaginative articulation. For feminists, collaboration can be implicated as a strategy for simultaneous deconstruction and re-configuration, allowing for a reciprocal movement of interchange and dialogue.

In order to examine Mouré, Marlatt, and Warland's use of language-centred writing for collaborative ends, the first chapter of my thesis will involve an examination of the history, contexts, and ideologies of language writing with an emphasis on the ways in which women, particularly Canadian feminists, have developed this strategy for their own uses. I will draw upon theories such as those offered in Bernstein's The Politics of Poetic Form, Hartley's Textual Politics and the Language Poets, Silliman's In the American Tree,

Duplessis' The Pink Guitar, and Andrews' The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, the "Fiction/Theory" issue of Tessera, and essays by Nicole Brossard, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous.

In chapter two, I will concentrate my analysis of language-centred writing strategies on recent texts by Mouré: Furious (1988), WSW (West South West) (1989), Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love (1992), and The Green Word (1994). Mouré uses multiple tactics to foreground the traditional exclusion of women and especially lesbians from civic space; she seeks to open this for a difference-accountable politics of inclusion that entails an emphasis on self-implication and responsibility for privilege within civic spaces. As a working-class lesbian, Mouré is acutely aware of socio-economic assumptions. Through a poetics of witness, she exposes these disparities with an uncompromising examination of responsibility towards speech. Her critical strategy is a relational poetics which foregrounds the dynamism of reciprocity and mutuality, both of which have strong resonances with collaboration. Further, Mouré has entered into deliberate and provocative dialogue with traditional lyric conventions in order to disrupt and re-configure their parameters; her poetry becomes a collaborative effort with language and literary assumptions that extends the possibilities of relationality and reciprocity. Her strategies for deconstruction often involve the manipulation of language in its most basic elements, such as her work with the preposition, and the unmasking of language production and consumption within the reader/writer/text continuum. Using her often startling humour to expose more serious assumptions concerning language, Mouré raises awareness of differences and then proceeds, through her poetry, to celebrate these differences in movements that refuse patriarchal polarity and monologisms.

In chapter three, I will discuss the socio-political implications of collaboration through language-centred writing in Marlatt and Warland's works, which seek to disrupt the "North American critical mind which champions individualism" (Proper Definitions 132). Specifically, I will first examine Marlatt's How Hug A Stone (1983) for its

evocation of multiple and overlapping realities through strategies of etymology and punning, revisionary mythmaking, and autobiographical life-writing with a specific anti-imperialist slant garnered through her experience as a British colonial immigrant. Marlatt investigates how subjectivity is constructed through experiences and memory; memory itself is explored and celebrated for its multiple perspectives, as she interweaves word memory, narrative memory, physical memory, and personal memory together in dense webs of overlapping simultaneity. Her poetic re-visioning of mother/daughter relationships is mapped on several levels, merging memories of her mother, her own use of a mother tongue, and invocations of a Mother goddess. Combined together, these evoke an ongoing continuity that heals the traditional 'closure' of death, re-visioning it as part of a cycle including birth and re-birth; this cyclical movement is central to Marlatt's transformative poetics. I will also examine Marlatt's Touch To My Tongue (1984), a work that was dedicated to her partner Betsy Warland, and which reproduces aspects of collaboration on several levels: as a long poem, this text reconfigures lesbianism textually, inscribing the reciprocity and mutuality of lesbian love and desire with a particular emphasis on its ongoing, open-ended possibilities. As a work inspired by the words and actions of others, Touch highlights aspects of collaboration, slipping fluidly within a conversation of genre, media, and languages. By focusing the text's poetic exploration on etymology and punning, Marlatt collaborates with language itself, examining the possibilities of multiple origins for words through diverse cultures, versions of history, and mythology.

In section ii, I will look at Warland's Open is Broken, which was published at the same time as Touch and which reciprocated Marlatt's dedication. As a long poem, Open is embedded subversively within re-revised conventions of romance and sexual desire; it reconfigures traditional lyric modes of address to a loved one in reciprocal, dynamic terms. By deliberately merging private life with the public space of the text, Warland fractures the borders of these locations, unfolding their rigid contours to be shared with others. In

order to contextualize Warland's literary contributions, I will look briefly at her use of language in Proper Deafinitions (1990), Serpent (W)rite (1987) and Open is Broken (1984). In these works, Warland engages representations of gender and sexual identity through language, with a particular attentiveness to the web of connections between women. Like Marlatt, she engages in strategies of etymology and punning, working in collaboration with language at multiple and simultaneous levels. Through intertextual citations and quotations, Warland enlarges her collaborative project to co-implicate the lesbian and feminist writers' communities within which she works.

In section iii of chapter three, I will look at co-authored works by Marlatt and Warland--specifically, Double Negative (1988) and Two Women In A Birth (1994)--for their strategies of voice and multiplicity, structures of power and authorship, and socio-political questions surrounding collaboration. With each of their collaborations, Marlatt and Warland have created an active dialogue that slips through the confines of traditional writing practices and assumptions. They reconfigure traditional assumptions about the author/reader axis, imagining alternate models for articulation and reception.

i.

A central aim of language-centred writing is to expose the socio-politically constructed nature of language itself; language is a medium for reproducing and maintaining dominant ideologies of a culture along social, political, economic, gendered, and sexual identity axes. In order to fully comprehend how Mouré, Marlatt, and Warland each attempt modes of collaboration through the displacement of conventional language and literary forms, I will examine the social and historical foundations of language writing as it has emerged from American and French feminist praxis.

Canadian feminist language-centred writers have developed what has become known as "fiction/theory" or *écriture au féminin*.³ This praxis has evolved through the intertwining of two main streams of thought: the (mostly male) American language writers of the seventies and onwards, and the French feminist philosophy of *écriture féminine*,

developed roughly during the same period. While both have sought to disrupt prevailing ideologies at the level of language itself, the Americans placed more emphasis on a socialist critique of language and representation as a packaged, capitalist commodity. For their part, French feminist theorists have emphasized a critique of patriarchal biases which exclude the female body and desires. They have foregrounded the need to disrupt a language which does not articulate what they view as female lines and forms.⁴ These are highlighted in texts which are specifically inscribed with feminine sexuality, pleasure, and desire, through forms that particularly embody these possibilities, such as non-closure, non-linear or 'spiralling' narratives, and the multiplying of perceived interpretations and realities in multi-valent language play.

From the late sixties and early seventies onwards, certain American poets and theorists began to write out of a critique of what they saw as the capitalist structure of the traditional poetic modes of production and reception. Lyric poetry was the accepted and prevalent norm and, in many ways, continues to be so in 'mainstream' circles. For example Lee Bartlett describes how the commodification of poetry has an immediate example in American Poetry Review. As he notes, each issue contains pages,

filled not only with poems which are so comfortable in their assumptions that they can be read (like a Mickey Spillane novel) with slack attention while waiting for a bus, but also with various photographs of attractive poets alongside ads for books, conferences, journals, and writing programs...the prevalence of the photographs [seems to suggest that] the editors go so far as to distrust even the I of the poem and so must reinforce the false realism by having "real" people staring back at the reader.(747)

Formally, the lyric is composed with a musical ear to the sound quality of the language itself: this is a direct result of its musical origins (lyre) and of our culturally ingrained expectations for this form. The lyric features "the notion that the poet (a self-present subject) transmits a particular message (experience, emotion) to a reader (another self-

present subject) through language which is neutral, transparent, [and] 'natural'" (Hartley xii). Traditionally, the lyric poem has been construed as a medium for the direct expression of emotion, while maintaining a certain degree of objectivity through various "formal - but not always traditional - devices" (Aleshire 48).⁵ This includes an assumption of its ability to transcend particulars of socio-cultural and historical debates in a mistaken belief of "timeless, universal emotions" and qualities (DuPlessis 1994 71). Perhaps even more crucial for feminist investigations, lyric has conventionally subscribed to gender ideologies of "masculine, heterosexual desire with its interest in looking at, and framing, a silent, beautiful, distant female object of desire" (Duplessis 1994 71). The poets who have been lumped under the rubric "Language poets" have refused the qualities often typical of lyric poetry such as a concentration on the poet's ego, a reliance on the metrical line, regular stanzas, logical argument, and conventional grammar and syntax (Hartley 19). Instead, these poets work to deconstruct what they say is a language that has become too commodified within poetic genres. For them, the importance of the relationship between poetry and its socio-political milieu is a crucial one which must involve engaging "the contrasts of the world" and not simply observing them (Hartley 19). Rather than simply reconstitute the reality that is already known and 'comfortable', Language poets focus instead on forging new realities, on returning

the material so rigidly excluded-- political, ethical, historical, philosophical-- to the domain of poetry, which is to say that the Romantic lyric, the poem as expression of a moment of absolute insight, of emotion crystallized into a timeless pattern, gives way to a poetry that can, once again, accommodate narrative and didacticism, the serious and the comic, verse and prose.

(Perloff, 1984 49)

It is important to note that not only is the name of this school or mode of writing contested, but so too is the membership. 'Language-centred' writing has often been deemed an inadequate term for these particular works, even by those who espouse the

strategy itself. Like any works of literature, "their material cause, their means, is language, or elements thereof" as poets like Jackson Mac Low have argued (491). However, those poets who have been characterized as "language poets" have in mind the specific aim of deconstructing and destabilizing language as we know it. Often, they do not even agree with the label itself, believing it to be too narrow and prescriptive. In many senses, classifying the practice under a singular category risks reifying a manner of writing whose particular aims are to be left open and dynamic, an approach that is often contrary to conventional lyric poetry. However, I will continue to use this term "language-centred" and its variants, for the purpose of cohesion within my paper.

The language-centred magazine This was established by Robert Grenier and Barrett Watten in 1971, and formally announced "a breach and a new moment in American writing" (Silliman "Language, Realism, Poetry" xv). Many of its contributors like Robert Creeley, Larry Eigner, and Charles Olson (post-humously represented) were linked with Olson's "Projective Verse" theories. Although Watten and Grenier were by no means the first poets to step outside traditional poetics, it was, as Silliman notes,

the particular contribution of This, in rejecting a speech-based poetics and consciously raising the issue of reference, to suggest that any new direction would require poets to look (in some ways for the first time) at what a poem is actually made of [--] not images, not voice, not characters or plot, all of which appear on paper, or in one's mouth, only through the invocation of a specific medium, language itself.(xvi)

The title, "This," is one which Silliman describes as a "pronoun of presence which foregrounds the referential dimension of language"(xv) and highlights the customary critique which was made of these writers' non-referentiality. As Silliman argues, the language writers' critique of reference and normative syntax has political impulses "situated within the larger question of what, in the last part of the twentieth century, it means to be human"(xix). In the increasingly stratified complexities of modern society,

language-centred poets are reacting to what they see as the stagnant nature of lyric poetry, a poetry which they feel has often become too accepted and self-servingly neutral to be challenging to the status-quo. Here, language-centred writers have their most obvious precursors in the works of twentieth-century figures like James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and William Carlos Williams. By mid-century, the space for literary endeavours had been gradually enlarging to include new and alternative forms of what constitutes "poetry" and literary worth. This was only an official opening, allowing poets, readers, and critics of the early seventies a forum for discussion on several key issues of language-centred writing. Other poetry anthologies and small magazines soon followed, such as L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Hills, The Difficulties, and Roof; critical essay collections such as The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book and The Politics of Poetic Form; small presses such as The Figures, This Press, and Roof. All of these had the express goal in mind of deconstructing accepted poetic practices and perceptions.

Language poets, as Bartlett has noted, "generally privilege the critical intelligence over the "orphyic, bardic impulse in American poetry"" (742). The main emphasis here for language-writing is that this critical theorizing is prevalent within the poetic text itself. As Stephen Fredman argues in Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse,

critical thinking does not merely buttress the mythopoeic imagination [but rather these poets] are originally critical, practicing a vigilant self-awareness that calls forth language and subjects it to an examination of its mediatory function. For these poets the critical activity of deconstruction, of investigating a text as an endless play of subtexts, is a means of poetic creation. (134-135)

This challenge to poetic norms is often a Marxist-influenced response to perceived capitalist modes of production and reception. As the lyric poem is frequently the accepted (and stereotypical) view of 'real' poetry, such critics have seen it as a purveyor of existing culture, especially 'high' culture, that simply reifies current (exclusionary) elements of society. As a direct response to this, language poetry therefore aims to deconstruct and

destabilize existing assumptions of language and its poetic forms as a medium for both maintaining and transforming society.

One of these main conventions involves the traditional roles of the reader and the writer; customarily, the reader has been seen as a passive receptor for the works of the writer, who has been viewed as the authoritative, active producer of such works. However, the mid-twentieth century (post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, etc.) change in the American psyche from one of middle-class conservative complacency to a certain cynical distrust and detachment from traditional institutions and hierarchies has been instrumental in the development of deconstructionist writing practices (Hartley 2). Thus, rather than view the author as a monologic figure, post-modern poets have been placing an emphasis on the construction of the text as an extension of the socio-culturally and politically-engendered author. As Carolyn Forché notes, "vision is always ideologically charged; perceptions are shaped a priori by our assumptions and sensibility is formed by a [social, historical and aesthetic] consciousness. There is no such thing as nonpolitical poetry"(256).⁶

In order to destabilize the "bardic, personalist impulses of the 1960's" (New Princeton Encyclopedia 675), Language poets such as Ron Silliman, Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, Bob Perelman, Susan Howe, and Lyn Hejinian, to list only a few, began to focus attention on language itself, hoping thereby to expose how previous narrative assumptions of language had been complacently received. For example, in Carla Harryman's "For She," narrative assumptions are investigated and laid bare:

The back of the head resting on the pillow was not wasted. we couldn't hear each other speak. The puddle in the bathroom, the sassy one. There were many years between us. I stared the stranger into facing up to Maxine, who had come out of the forest bad from wet nights. I came from an odd bed, a vermilion riot attracted to loud dogs...(Under the Bridge 63).

As Hartley notes, Harryman's poem appears to follow a narrative course, "but one would be hard put to summarize what story has been told"(xii). Indeed, whether the narrator is singular or plural, first or third person, is left open and ambiguous. The conventional lyric subject thus plays a decentred role and we are left instead with multiple voices or, perhaps one ambiguous, and therefore, rather neutral voice which challenges assumptions of the writer as a self-present subject. As Marjorie Perloff quotes Bernstein, it is erroneous "to posit the self as the primary organizing feature of writing...a poem exists in a matrix of social and historical relations that are more significant to the formation of an individual text than any personal qualities of life or voice of an author" ("The Word as Such" 16).

It is necessary to distinguish between the language-writers' version of the "death of the author" and the reconstitution of authorship through *écriture féminine*. The former is modelled after theories propounded by Barthes and Foucault. The latter is in response to what Nancy Miller decries as the "[premature] foreclosing" of the question of identity (106). Miller argues that "the removal of the Author has not so much made room for a revision of the concept of authorship as it has, through a variety of rhetorical moves, repressed and inhibited discussion of any writing identity in favor of the (new) monolith of anonymous textuality"(560). She demonstrates that what feminists need

instead of a theory of the death of the author, is a new concept of authorship that does not naively assert that the writer is an originating genius, creating aesthetic objects outside of history, but does not diminish the importance of difference and agency in the responses of women writers to historical formation.(560)

Interestingly, in regards to the singular meaning that is so often assumed with a single authorial agent, Kaplan says she is "reading not for ultimate meaning but for positional meanings"(quoted in Walker, 568). Also, Walker responds to Barthes' assertion that writing is the "destruction of every voice" by arguing that writing can be viewed as

"the proliferation of possibilities of hearing," a distinction that has an invaluable slant for feminists intent upon articulating and celebrating difference and multiplicity (568).⁷

For American language-centred writers, the need to destabilize the concept of "author" emerged from a reaction to what Barthes terms "the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the **author** confiding in us"(143). The author's text is now seen as "not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash"(146). For feminists influenced by such views, there are strong resonances here with the concept of collaboration, displacing traditional assumptive needs for the existence of self-represent authors, and instead offering socio-cultural webs from which to extend filaments of collaboration.

By inviting the active participation of the reader in co-creating the meaning of a text, language poets seek to destabilize the customary relationship of the active writer and passive reader. For example, an excerpt from a poem by Susan Howe reads:

Transgression links remembering Dark spell

terror Ideal
(spangs like stars)

Winter a sound to the sun
empty desolation of mortality

Old age of winter
(lean pallor

bone ghost)
plunder and massacre

Florimell embarks blindly
(being lost)

to interpret the world
(Defenestration of Prague 29)

Through the indeterminacy of such features as lack of punctuation, complex enjambment, and sporadic capitalizations, Howe's poem resists offering not only an

enclosed sentence structure, but even a single meaning. As Silliman notes in The New Sentence, this ambiguity determines that "rather than making the shift [to deducing meaning] in an automatic and gestalt sort of way, the reader is forced to deduce it from partial views and associations posited in each sentence"(84). This is in contrast to the conventional unity of concept within the lyric tradition. The reader is now a co-producer of meaning, which destabilizes the monologic authority of the writer, while, at the same time, deconstructing the passive receptivity of the reader. With a multiplicity of possible producers (writers and/or readers) the traditional 'one-way' relationship of writer to reader, production to consumption is disrupted from within, and new possibilities for collaboration unfold.

Along with this increase in possibilities, Language poets have also foregrounded the constructed nature of the lyric poem itself. As seen in the Harryman example, the normal 'look' of a poem has been traded for that of a prose excerpt. Genre-crossing destabilizes our notions of poetic structure and content, and in turn, places emphasis on the material of language and form. As noted in The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, such strategies of deconstruction and revisioning raise more than simply aesthetic issues and

involve the social implications of literary reception. By blurring the boundaries between poetry and prose, everyday and literary language, theory and practice, language poetry has attempted to establish a new relationship with the reader, one based less on the recuperation of a generically or stylistically encoded work and more on the reader's participation in a relatively open text. (676)

Even as language can be made to serve the ideologies of dominant culture, a "poetry's formal praxis is dependent upon a deep involvement in and understanding of the culture which produces it"(Frank and Sayre xvii). Paralleling our own socio-cultural emphasis on material commodities and instant gratification, Language poetry focuses,

often self-reflexively, on material aspects of language itself. For example, the following poem by Tina Darragh is derived from a dictionary. As Hank Lazer notes, through its spatial arrangement, it foregrounds the page itself, rather than the line, stanza, or paragraph, as a unit for composition:

to
clean
over: T
formal.
whip. b.
or surpass
completion or
etc.: They need
into shape. 6. l
19) 7. lick the d
stroke of the tongue
by taken up by one str
cream cone. 10. See salt
b. a brief, brisk burst of ac
pace or clip; speed. 12. Jazz.
inswing music. 13. lick and a
perfunctory manner of doing some
time to clean thoroughly, but gave
promise. (ME lick(e), OE liccian; c.
akin toGoth (bi)laigon, L lingere,
("ludicrous stick" 147)

Focusing on the materiality of language can often involve work with typography, spacing, capitalization, and punctuation, all of which lead to a disruption of expectations for syntactical normalcy and defamiliarize the "terrain of the poem"(Lazer 148). Instead of the traditional forms of the lyric poem, with its accepted persona or speaker operating within a readily identifiable scene, language-centred poetry shifts our attention to smaller units of signification. As Lazer notes,

habitual reading is disturbed so that instead of receiving a message or meaning (from writer/producer to reader/consumer), we participate in language's construction of meaning, while at the same time the fragmentation invites us to join in resistance to the coerciveness of the cliché, the trendy observation, and

the declarative sentence.(149)

However, as a result of this focus on the materiality of language, Language poetry as a whole has often been criticized as non-referential. Jackson Mac Low refutes this accusation in his article "Language-centered," where he notes that various poets and critics have termed as "non-referential" that language-centred writing which involves a "concatenation" of words, phrases or sentences which seem "to follow [one] another with little regard for the recognized imports of these signs and strings."(491) Yet, as he argues, rather than perceiving referentiality to be a capitalist fetish which reifies the existing material systems and alienates the consumer, "what could be more of a fetish or more alienated than slices of language stripped of reference?"(492). In actuality, it is impossible to use a language that is completely 'non-referential', as language is encoded with signs produced from a matrix of social, political, economic, gendered and sexual factors. These signs in turn lead to conscious or sub-conscious productions of meaning; it is simply a matter of whether or not this meaning is 'normative' in nature, even while it questions and foregrounds the contexts of meaning production.

For example, as Mac Low points out, if one was to write "'dog watermelon Racine Wisconsin Jupiter oleaginous to quarter above the of one...' each of the members of the string has meaning in itself, but the string as a whole does not"(492). It is this seemingly ambiguous nature of general import that has produced the ill-chosen term "non-referential." Each disparate word (or phrase as the case may be), conjures up various images in the mind of the reader. By being persuaded to construct larger wholes from the different elements of language that are given, the mind of the reader has shifted beyond these elements, "impelled by a complex melange of denotations and connotations and of remembered language experiences and life experiences"(Mac Low 494). Whether or not the writer has intended to produce an overall specific meaning or simply to allow the reader to generate various meanings depends on the poet him/herself. The common

denominator in both cases is that, "in varying degrees, the perceiver becomes the center--the meaning-finder"(Mac Low 494).

ii.

Feminism took a more theoretically developed stance in Europe and America in the late sixties and early seventies as a response to the political events of this time. As Selden and Widdowson argue, second-wave feminism and feminist criticism in Anglo-American societies "are very much a product of--are shaped by and themselves help to shape--the liberationist movements of the mid-to-late 1960s," which stemmed largely from "the frustrations of white, heterosexual, middle-class American women, careerless and trapped in domesticity"(211). Although this is a broad generalization, it nevertheless marks the shift from a "fight for women's rights in all areas" to a foregrounding of the "politics of reproduction," women's experience, and sexual difference(211). Women like Betty Friedan (The Feminine Mystique, 1963), Kate Millet (Sexual Politics, 1969) and Elaine Showalter (A Literature of Their Own, 1977, Speaking of Gender, 1989) along with poets like Adrienne Rich, forged the opening for political awareness of feminist issues. As Selden and Widdowson argue, this led to the development of an Anglo-American feminist criticism,"which concentrates on the specificity of women's writing, on recuperating a tradition of women authors, and on examining in detail women's own culture"(213). Feminist language-centred writers have incorporated these concerns into their own exploration of poetry and language in an attempt to braid feminist revisioning with language-centred strategies of disruption and deconstruction for the purpose of raising awareness of gender issues. What they have created in the process has been viewed as a productive intermingling of theory and creative textual practise.

As Rachel Blau Duplessis demonstrates in The Pink Guitar, theory and poetry can be extremely effective as a combined medium for expression. In an excerpt from her essay "For the Etruscans," Duplessis speaks of the hierarchization of man/woman:

For the woman finds she is irreconcilable things: an outsider by her gender

position, by her relation to power: may be an insider by her social position, her class. She can be both... Doubled consciousness. Doubled understandings. How then could she neglect to invent a form which produces this incessant, critical, splitting motion. To invent this form. To invent the theory for this form. (80)

Resonant with such Anglo-American feminist developments is the slightly later and, more theoretically-driven, French feminist criticism.⁸ Like feminists elsewhere, French feminist theorists are intent upon exposing the systemic construction of society which creates and maintains dominant institutions, yet with a different emphasis. As Gelfand explains, there has been a monumental shift in traditional Western thought. French feminism's antecedents (Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, etc) attempted to critique the traditional universals of "absolute Truth, Authority, God, the Good, Capitalism, and the Self as a coherent entity"(45).

Exemplified by the work of such writers as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, French feminist criticism foregrounds not simply the gender of the writer, but the 'writing effect' of the feminine text, thus resulting in the term *l'écriture féminine*. The goal of French feminism is to achieve nothing less than an ultimate transformation of society itself, so that it serves the interests of all members equally, specifically recognizing differences of race, class, gender, and sexual identity. It is not simply a fight for awareness of women's issues, for, as Duplessis argues, it is useless "to attack that presumptive universalized woman of liberal feminism without trying to puncture the balloon of universal man, or even harder, the universal man nuanced with, draped in contextuality and the situational"(1990 71). French feminists, emerging from a background of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis, maintain political concerns involving the relationship of language and women. For them, language is viewed as the area where patriarchal domination is both constructed and therefore, potentially de-constructed. Thus, the humanist notion of language as transparent and expressive of a singular reality is

rejected by French feminists, who in turn believe that "meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language and language is not an abstract system, but is always socially and historically located in discourses"(Weedon 41). French feminists believe that language, particularly poetic language, and politics are linked together in a crucial relationship of meaning-production.

Although they build upon the poststructuralist thought of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, among others, French feminists are heavily involved in a critique and reconstruction of the concepts put forth by these same theorists. They are concerned with their (mostly male) predecessors' lack of attention to womens' agendas, and the lack of theories concerning the figures of 'mother', 'daughter', and 'woman' in their own right, (as opposed to being merely seen as adjuncts to male figures). For their part, French feminists seek to "reaffirm the feminine and the maternal as cultural forces"(Gelfand 47); it is this project which has yielded the most productivity and creativity. The problem, as Duplessis notes is "how to lay bare the device of gender when we are immersed in its symptoms; I mean systems. How to write?"(1990 64).

For example, in her famous 1975 feminist manifesto, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Hélène Cixous calls for a new language to be explored, one which will deconstruct patriarchally hierarchized assumptions and binary oppositions. She views this *écriture féminine* as being crucial to the exploration and creation of a female-centred subject, one that is self-empowered:

woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies...Woman must put herself into the text--as into the world and into history--by her own movement.("Laugh of the Medusa" 39)

Cixous links feminist empowerment in language with a retrieval of the most common site of female repression: the body and sexuality. Cixous urges each woman to write her self "because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the

moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history." By writing the self, "woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display...the cause and location of inhibitions"(250). It is this relationship of women to their sexualities that Cixous believes must be explored in language. In order to disrupt patriarchal binaries, women must theorize the spaces between these polarities. They must determine the differentiations in the midst of a system that only configures two plausibilities: man/woman, active/passive, have/lack.

Thus, Cixous proposes celebrating multiplicity (as opposed to humanist and logocentric tendencies to eradicate difference in favour of centralized and universalized Truth). She does so by describing how "there is ...no general woman, no one typical woman"(245). To narrowly define *écriture féminine* as inclusive of all women, would be to simply reify under new terms the humanist assumption of stable subjects, particularly those based on essentialized gender. Instead, Cixous is struck "by the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform homogeneous, classifiable into codes--any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another"(246). Like Language poetry, *écriture féminine* "can never be theorized, enclosed, encoded" and will instead be manifested by those "peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate"(253).

Like Irigaray and other French feminists, Cixous describes conceivable facets of *écriture féminine* without narrowing it to a singular definition. She pictures *écriture féminine* as focusing on an infinite and complex female sexuality, on female eroticization, on journeys rather than ultimate destinations, and on open-ended articulations that allow for dynamic growth and "the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction [and] will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language"(Cixous 256). Rather than fetishize this new writing practice, Cixous notes that like the plural dimensions of female sexualities, feminine language will have multiple

possibilities and will be enacted from the moment we begin to explore and celebrate our differences:

In the beginning are our differences...The woman arriving over and over again does not stand still; she's everywhere, she exchanges, she is the desire-that-gives. (Not enclosed in the paradox of the gift that takes nor under the illusion of unitary fusion...) She comes in, comes-in-between herself me and you, between the other me where one is always infinitely more than one and more than me, without the fear of ever reaching a limit; she thrills in our becoming. (263-264)

It is precisely this type of wordplay and innuendo between the textual (theoretical pronouncements) and the sexual, that multiplies meanings and points to the diversely imagined realities that French feminists are attempting to explore. Most importantly, Cixous believes that "the imaginative liberation of the feminine in each individual will have the power to transform all of patriarchy's social and political arrangements"(Gelfand 48).

Like Cixous' pronouncements for a new discourse that will articulate differences and disrupt the patriarchally-loaded system of our current languages, Luce Irigaray has also noted the need for the exploration of a new discourse. She has concentrated her efforts on deconstructing the "woman" of conventional patriarchal assumptions, the "woman" that has been thought of as "not-he"(19), as she relates this primary construction to the determination of a system of binary divisions similar to Cixous': "animate/inanimate, concrete/abstract, masculine/feminine"(20). This particular emphasis is in direct response to Jacques Lacan's formulation concerning the character of absence, specifically in how it is enacted through seemingly neutral terms like "mankind." Irigaray believes that the neutral is a site for loss of identity. A supposedly neutral position (such as being a member of 'mankind'), denies women both their sex and their gender, a position that women are persuaded to accept through socio-cultural conditioning. In response to this, Irigaray has argued the need to valorize difference in order to "regulate subjective and objective rights.

Social justice, and especially sexual justice, cannot be achieved without changing the laws of language and the conceptions of truths and values structuring social codes"(22). Hence, Irigaray is demonstrating that the 'personal is political', that *écriture féminine* will need to do more than disrupt and deconstruct conventional institutions and practices. It will need to create anew, to offer new possibilities and sites for subjective differences.

While French feminists' writings draw upon poststructuralist and deconstructionist approaches, it is with the explicit political purpose of creating this space for the feminine consciousness to articulate its own differences. As Patricia Smart quotes Christa Wolf, *écriture féminine* is evolving from a recognition that

women, for historical and biological reasons, experience reality differently than men...they no longer want to make fruitless efforts to become part of the madness of established systems...in their writing and in their lives, they aim for autonomy. That is where they will meet men who are also aiming for autonomy.(1)⁹

For many feminists it is a hope for a society that recognizes and even celebrates these differences of gender and sexuality, among other distinctions, that fuels their efforts towards fuller understanding.

iii.

For Canadian feminists, the evolution of fiction/theory has been one characterized by influences from both Anglo-American language-centred poetics and French feminist criticism. In order to fully comprehend this Canadian brand of literary feminism, it is necessary to first examine how its antecedents were absorbed and channelled within the two most distinct parts of Canadian society, the Anglophone and Francophone communities.

In Québec, the impressive weight of French poststructuralist, psychoanalytic and feminist theory was felt somewhat earlier than in Anglophone Canada, partially due to the tide of nationalistic fervour that swayed Québec in the late 1960's and early 1970's

(Neuman and Kambourelli xi). As Gould states, due to language and cultural links, "feminist writers in Québec have generally been less suspicious of theory than their [Anglophone] counterparts"(21). The surge of experimental writing in Québec led to such literary journals as La Barre du Jour (re-named La Nouvelle Barre du Jour, 1977-79) and Spirale, which were contributed to, in part, by emerging feminists like Nicole Brossard, France Théoret, and Marie-Francine Hébert. A statement issued by La Barre's editors in 1967 reads,

what matters for La Barre Du Jour is literature in the making, but also, and perhaps more importantly, literature that will be made; that is to say, investigation (current). We are wholeheartedly in favor of a new literature; a literature that must come into being (some day soon) and be exploratory (for the moment). (quoted in Gould 17-18)

This manifesto was soon turned to feminist aims and concerns by writers like Brossard and Bersianik. They recognized that while a challenge to institutionalized systems of thought, practice, and government could be fruitful on a nationalistic level, on a feminist level it was not addressing the "distinctions between fiction and the reality of women's daily lives"(Gould 26).

It was the publication of various texts and exposure to conferences and films like Brossard's Some American Feminists (1976) which proliferated feminist ideas and opened a space for sharing. This enabled Québécoise feminists to identify themselves as participating within a trans-national feminist community. Like the French feminists, their main concerns centred around the use of language as a system of codes that maintained patriarchal systems. As they became more culturally and socially aware of themselves as a distinct group, their work began to come to the attention of Anglophone feminists in the rest of Canada. As George Bowering notes in his essay "Language Women," this exchange of ideas became significant in the form of unions such as "the pan-continental Women and Words/Les femmes et Les Mots, a 1980's organization that [manifested] its

power and potential in national conferences, anthologies, and regional activities" (Bowering 103).

For Québécoises feminists, "writing in the feminine" involves a "poetic writing that is often narrative" and a "mixing of genres" that "retain traces of poetic writing" (Théoret 358). Texts such as Brossard's Amantes, Bersianik's Maternatives, Théoret's Une voix pour Odile, and Louise Cotnoir's Les Rendez-vous par correspondance, have eliminated conventional borders between the essay and poetry, creating instead what has become known as "fiction/theory".¹⁰ This collaborative strategy has proved fully capable of containing the "dual polarity of fiction and theory" as Théoret states in "Writing in the Feminine." She argues that "the French and American influences which constitute the intertext of theoretical fiction in no way detract from its originality, for such writing sets itself apart from influences," and is instead a dynamic strategy (363). Due to the "often unequal advances of theory and fiction, the language is continually writing the movement of thought and defining the territory and visibility of women," even as it forges "a different relationship to the referent, to the real" (363-364).

Like American language-centred writers, Québécoise feminist writers are reviewing the use of conventional semantics and syntax, yet from a different agenda. Their aim is to deconstruct a language that does not allow for the ready self-articulation of women, and "does not permit the nominal emergence of the feminine subject" (364). The contrast here to American Language writers can be seen in the Language writers' insistence (d'après Barthes) on "the death of the author" as a monologic, singular authority. For feminists, as Nancy Miller argues,

the postmodernist decision that the Author is dead, and subjective agency along with him, does not necessarily work for women and prematurely forecloses the question of identity for them. Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production, that men have had, women have not, I think (collectively) felt burdened by too

much Self, Ego, Cogito... ("Changing the Subject" 106)

Thus, this absence of a female author was strongly felt by Québécoise feminists who have begun "to experiment with new approaches to writing that could address--both theoretically and poetically--the problematic position and frequent 'absence' of women in language, in writing, and in the culture as a whole"(Gould 26). For Québécoise feminists, "the feminist project has made poetry move on from experimentation to experience" as they write from their own experiences as women within the context of a patriarchally-constructed and maintained society (Dupre 358).

In Anglophone Canada, one of many paths to feminist awareness and understanding also developed partly through experimental writing practices.¹¹ According to Donna Bennett, many of the writings of Anglophone feminists in Canada are both "language-based and socially motivated"(232-233). Numerous periodicals have influenced Canadian writers, such as Tish, a publication by a collective that was assembled on the West Coast in the 1960's and involved writers and critics like Frank Davey, Fred Wah, and George Bowering. It "embraced the poetics put forward by predominantly male Black Mountain College affiliated writers" like Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley and earlier poetic precursors, such as William Carlos Williams and Walt Whitman (Carr 1989 16).

For feminists such as Daphne Marlatt, small publications such as Tish were often the first step for exposure to radical ideas concerning experimental poetry and aesthetics. She showed "no easy acceptance of the boundary between verse and prose" and continued to explore postmodernist techniques, but also to express the differentiation of experience and motivation that delineated her as the "lone female voice" within the group (Bowering 103). Situating herself within a lesbian, feminist subject position, in turn, led her to "write her way towards a women writer's countertradition" that involved correspondence with and reviews of various women writers, as Brenda Carr notes (1989 38). However, Marlatt's feeling of inclusion within "an emerging trans-Canadian community of women

writers" did not fully develop until the 1981 Anglo/Québécoise Dialogue conference organized by Barbara Godard:

the subsequent burst of literary friendships between women writers like Brossard and Marlatt evidenced by their collaboration/translation projects, the birth of new feminist journals like *Tessera* and (f.)lip, the development of new women's writing retreats like West Word, and feminist conferences have begun to change the face of Canadian literary history.(Carr 1989 38)

For example, Bowering describes Marlatt's ensuing work with Brossard as "collaborating in the Feminine, translating and traducing from the original French and English. Not filling the gap, but prolonging it, making a we of oui"(105). In yet another variant on the collaborative motif, Brossard's celebrated text *Amantes* is replete with intertextual citations naming the feminist genealogy and community within which she is a contributing, collaborating member:

my continent multiplied by those who have signed: Djuna Barnes, Jane Bowles, Gertrude Stein, Natalie Barney, Michèle Causse, Marie-Claire Blais, Jovette Marchessault, Adrienne Rich, Mary Daly, Colette and Virginia, the other drowned ones, Cristina Perri Rossi, Louki Bersianik, Pol Pelletier, Maryvonne so attentive, Monique Wittig, Jeanne d'Arc Jutras...

to write: the real/the skin clairvoyant (92)

Brossard's "continent" is a literary, social, physical, and spiritual site, being created by women who have placed their names there as a deliberate expression and celebration of their women-centred positionalities. This is the difference that marks or "signs" them within the patriarchal context. As Brossard writes in an excerpt from the section entitled "Lov/hers Write":

somewhere always a statement, skin concentrated
system inverted

attentive to the phases of love, this text
 under the eye: June aroused by audacity
 precise lips of this allurements of the clitoris
 its unrecorded thought giving the body back intelligence
 because each shiver aims at the emergence
 June the fever the end of couples
 their prolongation like the most unexpected of
 silences: lesbian lovers
 the texture of identities

 in reality, there is no fiction
 (15)

The text delineates Brossard's poetic project, a mixture and merging of the intimately personal, the literary and the political: fiction/theory. Writing and desire are now fully enmeshed, aiding in the deconstruction of patrilinear assumptions of genre and singularly unified semantics.

As Brossard says in her essay "Poetic Politics," it is the language markers within a text which give "subliminal information on how it wants to be read. Its structure is itself a statement, no matter what the text says" and it is through this structure of language that "a text shows its politics"(78). For feminists, these political aims involve articulation along hitherto neglected or even erased lines, such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and class. The braided format of Canadian feminist theory and writings displays elements of its two main precursors, language-centred writing and French feminist criticism. In Canada, these two streams of thought have merged to form a distinctly cross-fertilized Canadian feminist language-writing praxis--one whose political hues are often post-structuralist and feminist, and include varying emphases placed on differentiations of race, class, gender, and sexual persuasion.

For Canadian lesbian feminists Erin Mouré, Daphne Marlatt, and Betsy Warland, these explorations are negotiated through a recognition of differences as perceived in language structures and usages. What result are exciting examples of the dynamic nature

of fiction/theory or *écriture au féminin*, and the possibilities that emerge when a feminist community of writers collaborates, sharing its hopes, aims, and dreams:

inside language she leaps for joy, shoving out the walls of taboo & propriety...language thus speaking (i.e., inhabited) relates us, "takes us back" to where we are, as it relates us to the world in a living body of verbal relations, articulations: seeing the connections (& the thighbone & the hipbone, etc.). putting the living body of language together means putting the world together, the world we live in: an act of composition, an act of birthing, us, uttered & outered there in it.

D. Marlatt "Musing with Mothertongue"

II

Working from Within:

The Relational Poetics of Erin Mouré

Displacement is important, but to displace HOW? The use of paradox or parody, or irony... tools of modernism, haven't helped us too much as women. (Because they are still part of the unified system of meaning of the piece and do not breach it?) Re-creation or reappropriation of myths or words hasn't helped us get out of this civic order either.... This re-creation only works for women who would separate themselves from the civic order; it works because when they turn their backs, they no longer see that the mirror still bears their reflection.

E. Mouré, "Poetry, Memory, and the Polis"

Like both Marlatt and Warland, Erin Mouré attempts to deconstruct and destabilize existing literary and social conventions, using a language-centred writing praxis nuanced by her lesbian feminist awareness. However, as Susan Stanford Friedman demonstrates, the deconstruction of existing assumptions is pointless, without also attempting redefinition and reconstruction in its place as "a precondition of agency"(38). Mouré's relational poetics involves deliberately working from within existing civic spaces in order to expose their inconsistencies and to effect change for a more difference-accountable politics. Her development throughout the 1980's as a poet, coupled with her own experience as a working-class lesbian and as an employee of VIA rail, has led to an emphasis in her feminist aesthetics that differs from those of Daphne Marlatt or Betsy Warland. Like them, she is an informed member of the Canadian feminist literary community at large, focussing on women's and lesbian desires and articulation. Yet, she also infuses her poetry with a strong attention to socio-economic class assumptions and privileges, coupled with a poetics of witness that probes the power imbalances inherent in

our society. These strategies underscore her "rigorous questioning of and responsibility toward speech" throughout her poetry (Daurio 25). There exists within her poetry an intriguing contradiction between what has been termed her 'work writing,' with its general claim to accessibility and her refusal of easy consumption and the inaccessibility of language writing. This colours her own relational poetics, making it distinctive in its decisive stance against 'easy' collaboration, which might erase the incongruities; it is through this deliberate contradiction that Mouré's poetry often provokes questioning and response, involving the reader within the open forum of the poem.

Her concept of the reader/writer/text triad as a dynamic continuum is a guiding force behind her feminist focus on the constructive power of elements of language. As she explains in her poetic manifesto "The Acts," "the preposition, & what is prepositional, shows not motion or name but the relation between the thing & act, defines space and time, by relation-ship"; hence, objects are "defined by their "relation" to other objects, a notion that is central to her poetic practice (*Furious* 98). In her more recent texts, she has also focused on the "unit of production," the text itself as a constructed framework for her poems. This manifests itself as not only an increased self-reflexivity with the content of the poem, but also an increased awareness of the collaboration of the surface structure of the poem with the whitespace of the page. She further extends this collaborative motif through a collage aesthetics linking dissimilar images, language elements, and concepts together; this works to re-construct possibilities for reader engagement, focussing on a re-evaluation of intertextuality and self-reflexive poetic engagement with pre-conceived notions of genre and content. Mouré subverts received notions of the traditional romantic lyric form. Her re-visioning of the romantic lyric re-constitutes the figure of the objectified loved one as a reciprocating presence within the poem. She simultaneously works to re-construct possibilities for reader engagement, focussing on a re-evaluation of intertextuality and self-reflexive poetic engagement with pre-conceived notions of genre and content. Her strategy of inter/intra-textuality extends the possibilities for

destabilization of a monologic authorial voice, while concurrently highlighting the community of voices in conversation that becomes the fabric of the text. For myself, the most compelling aspect of Mouré's poetry is her engaging wit and humour; she frequently uses wry laughter as a relational and dialogical tool for collaborative change. As Eliot noted, humour can be successful as a strategy for linking "levity and seriousness (by which the seriousness is intensified)" (New Princeton Encyclopedia 898).

Mouré's awareness of feminist aesthetics was heightened from the early 1980's onwards with her burgeoning links to the feminist community at large. For Canadian feminists, who have had the benefit of both American language-writing and French feminist literary concepts, the last two and a half decades have seen the unique development of their own brand of *écriture au féminin* or fiction/theory praxis.¹² Mouré views her work as an extension of this ongoing project, delineated through her own particular experiences and perspectives as a lesbian feminist. As she discussed in a conversation with Janice Williamson, entitled "Can't We Talk About The Alberta Flag?," Mouré views her Governor General's Award for *Furious* (1988) as a form of legitimation not for her own work, which has "come second," but more as "an affirmation in a sense of that earlier work, of other people's work" and of the body of work that is spiralling out of this first exploration of "unknown, unnamed territory" (79).

Throughout her poetry, Mouré places a crucial emphasis upon voice and how it is produced through written, visual, and oral language. Her texts provoke a multiplying of voice, displacing patriarchal assumptions of singular author-ity and meaning. The danger of a monologic voice or interpretation is that "the expression of one 'sight' suppresses contradictory" images, an example of "the triumph of the social order that thrives by exclusion rather than inclusion" ("Watching The Watchwords" 3). Mouré gives a fitting example by noting that "even the word 'poet' must be modified by 'woman' to include her" (3). Consequently, for feminists and others excluded by way of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, the reading surface of a text often maintains exclusionary

ideologies. As Mouré argues, "when writing reflects, it also reinforces...whether people admit their existence or not, sub-text(s) is(are) more powerful than the surface text"("Examining the call" 9).

Moure attempts to work from within these subtexts in order to expose their constructed elements, to consciously "[create] a space where the seams are not invisible. [where the] seamless 'real' that hides more than it includes" cannot exist("Examining" 10). In order to transgress this 'reality,' we must realize that what we term 'reality' is simply another method of ordering our perceptions; these perceptions are "ingrained in us, socially, culturally, through certain ways of thinking built into language itself"("Examining" 10). Hence, if we can change the language, we can alter perceptions, creating a shift in the "real" and generating space for multiple, inclusive tactics.

As she says in an interview in Sounding Differences, "real poetry makes you develop a kind of self-critical relationship with language. You can't just use words without thinking of all the cultural and class forces that are in a language"(208). It is this relationship with language which can in turn "start off a kinetic motion inside of readers that makes them think more." Mouré views the possibility of social change as developing first from a change in peoples' perception: "poetry should bug people. Then *they* can change"(208). Ultimately, as readers' expectations are disrupted and deconstructed, they begin to probe the nature of the social text and their relationship to it, questioning its modes of production and consumption.

i.

Civic or public space is inhabited by citizens of a democracy, a nation such as Canada. However, as Iris Marion Young explains, a contradiction exists between the conventional concept of universal citizenship as implying an undifferentiating equality, and the "contemporary social movements [which]...assert a positivity and pride in group specificity against ideals of assimilation"(115). In fact, the "universal" political subject was never, in fact, universal; rather, civic or public space has been constructed in such a

way so as to exclude those marginalized on the basis of gender, class, race, and/or sexual identity. One of Mouré's strongest beliefs is that the American "cult of the individual" leads us away from a much needed recognition of difference and accountability:

[This] dream really buys into patriarchal capitalism, as consumption...if everybody's just an individual then people don't take, can't take, responsibility for themselves in a political sense. They start to think--I feel this way but I'm the only one...Plus they start worshipping other individuals--or only noticing individuals...privilege reigns. So that actually this notion of the individual can suppress difference in the end. We're all interdependent because we're different from each other; we need each other. (SD 206-207)

Concepts of social identity, democracy, and civic space are all interconnected and are crucial to an understanding of Mouré's poetic project. Mouré highlights the differences of experience and individuality that we each contribute to society, as well as how we are simultaneously and inextricably implicated within the power imbalances of this civic space. In "The Producers," Mouré indicates the social complicity and responsibility that we all bear for society's actions when she says, "What the producers do to meat, you pay for in your cells". Whether we are active participants in society's actions or politically silent "cells," we all reap the consequences of these actions in one form or another. Here, she speaks of the isolating impact of those who see themselves merely as individuals:

the meaning of a woman is the meaning of a single cell..
I speak to you without election because the cells know nothing
of democracy.
They think not of the good of the whole, but of themselves.
They think of their thin unguarded border.
The illusion of wholeness captivates us, as a kind of slavery. (Furious 60)

Rather than acting as members within a community, those who perceive themselves to be individuals often do not feel that they can have political potency. Yet they also do not want to share political/social/economic identity with others in forming a

group ("their thin unguarded border") for to do so would be to trespass on their perceived identity as an 'individual'. Collaboration can thus include implications of loss of individuality, engulfed unsympathetically within the whole. Iris Marion Young speaks to this, explaining that "modern political thought generally assumed" that the concept of citizenship "implies a universality of citizenship...[and, thus, a] status [that] transcends particularity and difference"(114). This "transcendence" is noted in Mouré's phrase "the illusion of wholeness," where she refers to the integrity of a single cell, as the illusion of the individual as a separate, sovereign entity, whose true existence in actuality is interdependent on other cells. Indeed, she speaks of the interconnectedness between differing cells as being "only a certain thickness" which "separates me from the air in this room"(60). Although 'cells' or individuals may be of differing socio-economic positions and privileges, (hierarchized around race, class, gender, sexuality), they are all nonetheless tied together in a web of social complicity and must bear responsibility for their actions in the civic order.

A "poetry of witness" develops from this concept of responsibility to the civic order, as it involves a merging of what has been hitherto separated into "easy categories" of "personal" and "political" poems(Forché 1993 31). Thus, a poetry of witness deliberately situates itself in a "social space," acting as testimony to "illegitimate forms of coercion"(Forché 1993 45). This coercion can involve anything from physical detainment and torturing, as witnessed by the poetry of the Holocaust, to more intimate instances of extremity and domination, such as testimony of abuse, marginalization, and silencing. Mouré argues that the poetic voice can be used to enact this witnessing; however, she is also adamant that if not stringently questioned, poetic testimony can establish or maintain a secondary domination, that of "the voice-that-speaks over that which it observes. However lovingly the description is accomplished"("Watching the Watchwords" 3).

In "Seebe", Mouré recalls an episode where the VIA train on which she was working hit a young Native boy at Seebe, Alberta. She uses a sequence of spiralling images

as a witness to the fluid nature of her remembrance of the details and the timing of the occurrence, yet she does not allow it to fall "apart into mere description" as she warns in the last stanza. Instead, she recognizes her own ego within the construction of the poem, "only the arrogance of Erin Mouré," (WSW 84) and attempts to highlight that she can only pay testimony to the occurrence itself--she cannot speak in place of the boy who was hit. As the poetic witness, it is crucial that she be aware of the limitations of her personal descriptive writing:

in the course of history, which is description, the boy is mute. We have no way of entering into his images now. The description itself, even if questioned, portrays the arrogance of the author. In all claims to the story, there is muteness. The writer as witness, speaking the stories, is a lie, a liberal bourgeois lie. Because the speech is the writer's speech, and each word of the writer robs the witnessed of their own voice, muting them. (WSW 84)

Mouré is noting the impossibility of the poet's ever fully speaking for the witnessed. Privilege extends to those who have the opportunity and the ability to express themselves in a legitimating forum. When attempting to speak for others, even with the best of intentions, this privilege must be noted and examined for possible complacency or even a maintaining of dominance. Mouré accomplishes this intratextual probing with a series of repetitions and references, such as her emphasis on "the assumptive power" of description and re-enaction. Her repetition of key phrases that are slightly altered with each re-viewing foreground the change in witnessing due to circumstances of time, memory, and even word usage. Mouré's poetry becomes a testament to her efforts to continually re-vise and review her own positions for accountability to power differences in civic space.

ii.

If feminists attempting to re-structure this new civic space envision it too firmly or rigidly, then, like the hazards posed to the avant-garde, they risk being drawn back into the centre, back into reification and most likely, re-integrated into dominant structures of

the patriarchal centre. Instead, women must remain actively unhierarchized and unstructured, moving as "a panic at the cell's edge"(91). Mouré works against the grain of received literary notions by disrupting traditional lyric forms. For example, in order to expose readers' assumptions, Mouré works within conventions of voice and narrative, as exposed through language-centred strategies of destabilization in "Shock Troop,"

Shock troop

shock exercise

Knife is a verb

Bayonet a verb

Coat a verb

Absolute is a conjunction

Now get up & pay for the coffee

make a sentence, fool

She knife, she coat, absolute she bayonet

he said

incomprehensible as

shock troops blowing the door in

& taking the TV down stairs to a truck (35)

Mouré uses succinct yet dynamic statements, managing in condensed imagery to conjure up the disciplined, brute force of shock troops. However, her "troops" are the words themselves, ones which are usually thought of as nouns, but which can actually work as verbs to disrupt ("knife," "bayonet") or to displace primacy (to cover up or "coat"). The raw quality of the language tersely strips the often mystical, romanticized 'poetic' voice away, leaving the reader with a 'shock' of images, along with the rather

rude and direct address--'fool'! The "fool" is the reader who may have become complacent with existing structures and images as personified by "the TV," a technological marvel for maintaining mass social and cultural values. Mouré expresses the political necessity for the existence of a feminist avant-garde, or as it is more literally translated, "advance guard"("shock troops," "*she knife..*") that must remain on the dynamic edge. Within Mouré's relational poetics, "absolutes" must be displaced ("taking...down stairs to a truck") in order to create linkages (a "conjunction" joins) within the existing civic space.

Thus, as Mouré has stated, the challenge for her is to work against the dominant ideology's tendency to absorb the avant-garde by constantly questioning her own writing strategies. In an interview with Dennis Denisoff, she noted that she is becoming increasingly "more resistant to being required to mean something and I think that's why I look at the visual value and sound value of words, and try to take away the denotative value of things all together, or at least not make it bear all the weight..There is more than one way to read"(129).

Mouré often counters notions of lyric unity by having seemingly "unrelated things placed in proximity [which affects] the meaning of each other...like objects on a table"(Two Women Talking 12). Marjorie Perloff describes this collage aesthetic as "the setting side by side or juxtaposition of disparate materials without commitment to explicit syntactical relations between elements"(1984 51). What ensues is an invitation to the reader to become active in meaning production, allowing for a variety of prospective interpretations, and furthering the collaborative aspects of the work. As Mouré writes in "Order, or Red Ends:Order 4,"

Don't be afraid of thinking
otherwise. All poems have
their own amazing order,
by which we decode

"the author's intention."

Millions of people get sick of this in Grade 10

& never

read

poetry again. (WSW 100)

The forthright declaration rings a chord within all of us who ever had to sit through a pedantic Grade 10 class. The lineal and spatial separation of "& never"/ "read"/ "poetry again," focuses on the blunt import of each word; this is in direct contrast, both visually and orally, to the longer lines above them which draw the reader's attention quickly over its surface, skimming it lightly (Holden 8).

Both the surface content and the tone of the poem speak back to expectations of the traditional lyric, satirically pointing to the impossibility of a monologic "meaning" as presented by a single, unified, "authorial" figure. As Mouré baldly states further in the same poem,

Don't make the mistake of thinking this
is poetry. It's not. I just had to say this.
It was in order.
(It is also o.k. to say "ontological"
at this point
in the narrative.) (WSW 100)

This tongue-in-cheek reference to traditional assumptions of the lyric, or "poetic" nature of what constitutes poetry, has the effect of forcing the reader to re-evaluate his/her prior notions concerning the language and structures of "real" poetry. Mouré has arranged the poem so that line breaks conflict with punctuation in one sentence even as they coincide in the next. The contrariness and inconsistency of this format leaves the reader in a balancing act. Abrupt, instructive addresses to the reader satirize romantic lyric conventions of fluidity and logical structure, engaging reader assumptions head-on. The colloquial language plays against lyric ideas of "highbrow" writing, foregrounding notions of class privilege and access to higher education. Geoffrey Grigson, speaking

about the parallel concerns of the epic versus the limerick, argues that "you cannot suppose a divine or an inspired origin for one against a secular or rational origin for the other. You can only distinguish in them differences of effect and quality" (New Princeton Encyclopedia 447). Mouré links both "ok" and "ontological", blurring the oft-perceived borders between colloquial speech and philosophical discourse, joining the two in a collaborative move that focuses on the relation between them, rather than on the legitimacy of one over the other. She thus displaces hierarchical notions of genre and content, emphasizing relationality and overlapping mutuality and difference.

iii.

Mouré decentres traditional concepts of poetic voice by foregrounding the prescriptive quality of readers' assumptions. She expands and displaces the monologic authority of 'the poet' with a strategy of inter/intra-textuality which highlights the community of voices in collaboration involved in the creation of a text. In order to sustain this act of displacement, Mouré often juxtaposes contrary ideas and concepts, as in the poem "Song of a Murmur." She concludes this poem with a footnote to "DM,SH,AL and others it may concern: This is a complex poem whose socio-political implications deserve deciphering" (SBCL 77). This note seems to emphasize distinctions of education and theoretical backgrounds that are linked to socio-economic class privilege. However, in the second asterisked endnote to this directive, the poem states "Note to people who have difficulty laughing at themselves: the above note explains nothing and is a JOKE....WHAT socio-political implications? It is clear that the poem doesn't have any. Ideology and art don't mix.**" Yet for all those readers who took the first directive seriously, it is clear that they were prepared to draw socio-political implications from this poem. Mouré, in her typical black humour fashion yanks these expectations from under them, by caricaturing them with her concluding asterisked note "the poet is only an observer, a private individual, and the murmur is an act of the imagination". As Mouré does not hold these views herself, she is parodying traditional notions of the mutual exclusivity of art and

ideology. She thus works from within the traditional lyric idea of disengagement, mockingly displacing and reconfiguring the poet/speaker as a non-unified figure who offers possibly contradictory ideas.

Instead of being inspired solely by a Romantic muse or fanciful inspiration, Mouré's texts are crafted through dialogue and sharing with other writers. She believes that we must escape the "hierarchical notion of the poet who is now going to tell you all something" and instead states that the "poem is part of the organic process of the whole community that congeals or is visible or evolves or comes together as a group of sounds, a process that moves on. What appears on the page is just a record of those sounds" (SD 209). Inter/intra-textuality can thus become a crucial strategy for ensuring the destabilization of the civic order from within. The overlapping, collaborative model that ensues allows for more dynamic movement and interplay of difference. In her prose poetry statement of poetics, "The Acts," Mouré notes her commitment to intertextual citation: "using and repeating my own and others' earlier texts...making the old lines a thread thru the eye of the words I am sewing" (Furious 85). Intertextual citations are provocative markers of how feminists "listen so carefully to each other" as they explore "the resurrection of the woman's body [that] is of Kore, not the phallic king-dom" (Furious 91). It is in women writing this new space for women that they articulate their subjectivity through *écriture féminine* rather than "having an existence affirmed by men. Knowing how they praise well what affirms their relation. They do not have to put themselves at risk...This [feminist] affirmation is the true necessity. To inhabit freely the civic house of memory I am kept out of" (91).

Like many feminist texts, Mouré's poems are replete with intertextual citations and references, articulating the genealogy of feminist writers, recognizing and celebrating the existing dynamic community of feminist creators; she also recognizes her implication and indebtedness within the current cultural and historical civic space. For example,

throughout Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love, there are quotations of and references to Bronwen Wallace, DM (Daphne Marlatt?), Gertrude Stein, France Théoret, and Gail Scott; yet, there also appear an equally large number of references and epigraphs to male and non-feminist figures like painter Frank Auerbach, writer Israel Rosenfield, poet George Seferis, and scientist Marie Curie among others. Mouré's recognition of this space is crucial to her subsequent de-stabilizing of its limitations; she feels a responsibility to examine its strictures, but also probes her own implication and privilege within it. Mouré's process of creativity is thus affected and enlarged by exposure to both the feminist community and to the civic space as a whole.

Mouré's strategy of communal intertextuality works together with her emphatic belief that she does not want to be "some big poet"(Daurio 26):

as if all voice came out of self! The big 'me'! I think women—who are, both historically and currently, in a de-authorized position vis-a-vis speech...absorb, conflate, hear the speech of others mixed in with our own words, hear more of a community of voices, voices echoing other bits of voices that we retain as synaptic triggers in the head. No one voice being 'self-present' or indicating self-presence.(Daurio 28)

For example, in "The Jewel" the poet/speaker is at various times marked as "she," "I" and even "we." As Williamson notes in her interview with Mouré, the "perspective [in] "The Jewel" is shattered"(Sounding Differences 210). This range of pronouns serves as a visible reminder that what constitutes the 'self' is actually a host for differing and simultaneous aspects of personalities: the public person and the private, sexual being, the present person and the remembered perception of self. These persona are in turn nuanced through intersecting elements of class, race, gender, and sexual identity.

Mouré furthers this decentring of conventional assumptions concerning poetic form and genre by focussing her disruptive lens on the language involved. With a self-reflexive and graceful wit, she fractures customary grammatical and syntactical notions by displacing the traditional pre-eminence of noun-verb relations. Her foregrounding of the preposition is a crucial element in her relational poetics, one she develops further in "The Acts." She notes that it is the preposition which links in relation nouns and verbs:

If the preposition can disturb the force of the utterance and phrase: this changes reading...

It is the force of the preposition that alters place! Can its displacement of the noun/verb dis-place also naming, dis-placing reality? Even momentarily. Make a fissure through which we can leak out from the "real" that is sewn into us, to utter what could not be uttered in the previous structure...

Just a new particle entering a field alters the position and force of particles already present ...

To put the weight of the utterance on the preposition, or even to let the preposition enter the field "out of order", changes this. Creates, what sounds like, a stutter. To the trained ear. Our "well-trained" ears.
(Furious 95)

The allusion to the field of poetry is a direct reference to Charles Olson's influential theories concerning composition by field, or open verse. He contrasts this "projective verse" to "inherited line, stanza, over-all form, what is the 'old' base of the non-projective" ("Projective Verse" 53). Olson speaks of this field as a space where "all the syllables and all the lines must be managed in their relations to each other. It is a matter, finally, of OBJECTS, what they are, what they are inside a poem, how they got there, and, once there, how they are to be used"(55-56). Mouré's "managing" of these relations between elements of the poem attempts to expose our assumptions by highlighting our grammatical expectancies for the preposition, and re-configuring its possibilities. She demonstrates

that the preposition, as an element of language that exists in relation to nouns and verbs, is "seen as a dependency, rather than recognized as a value: the space between over before, by"(97). She links this to the view of women in society, saying, "the prepositional is the woman's sign because it is relational. But can't get anywhere, because in the language it has no power, & can't exist alone"(97).¹³ Thus, in order to be articulated and empowered, women must find a way to dynamically express themselves from themselves, and not solely in a sub-relation to men.

In "Nice Poetry," Mouré manages to constantly catch the reader off-guard, consistently using humour as a decentering strategy that involves mercurial changes of subject matter, rhyme and anti-rhyme schemes; a systematic maintainance of poetic self-reflexivity reminds the reader of the poem's constructed nature:

The "round hay bales." So many bales per field, so many fields per quarter.
The line looks nice when we stop
before the preposition
...
It must be genetic, she said. Or the boats rolling in off the bay.
Not 'bay' he said,
"hay".

Here, the line breaks at the preposition "before", marking not only Mouré's clever crafting of the poem but also her playful wit. As Rhea Tregebov remarks, Mouré's sense of humour is "one of her greatest resources" and her poems often work best when she allows this humour "to direct the poem"(58). As a poetic strategy, it "permits a tonal variation, a lightness of movement" that is often unexpected and, unfortunately, somewhat rare in lesbian feminist poetry(58). As a mechanism for contrast, Mouré's humour often collaborates with the more serious aspects of her poetic arguments to ensure a foregrounding of her concerns and involve the reader in a complicitous chuckle.

As Mouré playfully writes in section 7 of the same poem,

We have to invent ourselves continually,
some of us use poems.

"Homes" not "poems" he shouted, that's my
brother, eating more hay & ruining the line breaks.

What if I went out & did that to his field?
ld? (123)

In fact, by breaking "field" Mouré has indeed disrupted her brother's field, as he has hers: Olson's concept of poetic field involves the poem as a "process" whereby "one perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception(52). Several times throughout the poem, her brother's 'voice' interrupts the voice of the narrator, breaking the framing structure of a 'singular' monolithic voice. This places tension on the supposed integrity of the authoritative voice, who blithely admits that "all of which is invented/ has just been invented now"(122). Mouré's compounded narrative technique also disturbs assumptions of time frame and the logical flow of narrative, as the poem flashes between episodic memories, possible invention, and the present tense of the poet in the act of creating the poem.

Critics of free verse often assume that because a text does not exhibit an obvious form, it therefore does not have one. However, as James Scully notes, the efficacy of a line break depends on "how line breaks have been working--historically, in general in the present (not in poetry only, but in ads, headlines, on labels, etc.), and in the specific, historically-developing practice of the immediate producer of the lines, the writer"(102). Rather than line breaks which are fairly symmetrical and systematic, Mouré works with and pre-empts these expectations of form, varying her line breaks and attempting a "ragged edge." As she notes in "Surface," this open format exists as a "refusal, of the [conventional] end of the line"(Furious 100-101). She is wary, constantly questioning her own structuring of a poem, as "after a while it becomes too easy, that surface that you know so well"(100). Olson spoke of the line evolving "from the breath, from the breathing" of the poet(54). As Scully demonstrates, "line breaks define energy. They may let the air out, redistribute rhythm, shift the weight of a word, reset our relationship to it...

the line break is the most volatile, productive punctuation in free verse. It is punctuation that has not been regulated or domesticated"(109).

Mouré is also highly aware of the blank space between the words, "the gaps, between the eyelids of the letters"(Furious100). As she notes in "The Acts," "when the line is written there is blank page below, into which the signs are moving"(90). Thus, to write any one thing is to fixedly refuse the possibilities of something else having been written in its place; the only way to compromise on this is to attempt to show the blank spaces, to vary their appearance and remind the reader that "the emotional 'depth' under the surface is NOT the culture that occupies the page, inherited from the visible only. It is behind that"(90). By highlighting her construction of the poem, and constantly shifting her line breaks in order to create this energy and tension, Mouré hopes to draw attention not only to her creation but also to the possibilities of what could have been created, what is "under the surface."

v.

For Mouré, as delicately explored in "The Jewel," one of the most compelling issues is that of class. Through her contradictory collision of work writing with language writing, she jarringly provokes an awareness of class, an issue which often seems to be an almost 'invisible' positionality:

The light air struck her past the room's whirl & elevator
What was in her head, then,
likely

or not failed her, failed her here at last, in the office

The light room just an office
with its stained chair & terminal & fluorescent tube
the cup with its rhyme no

rime of coffee out of the brown machine where the red
light stares all day saying ononon ononon ononon
& nonono

So she dyed her hair red

So she dyed her hair red again when it failed
 So she wore a red jacket
 So she listened for the sound of her monthly blood
 So she listened to her hair
 So she listened to the soft fold of her jacket

The light over the desk, what can she do?
 The phone speaking out of its cradle, what can she do?
 The chair shaped physically for beauty, dulling her back, what can she do?
 The green light notation of the screen, what can she do?

There are days we feel we are repeating, from some other time, we get
 out of bed with the fish taste wet gills capsized boat of sleep
 in our mouths & rubbing as if the day has punctured
 our careful wall, wall of dream, wall of physical memory
 where the body knows itself, not gratuitous...
 not gratuitous the dream punctured by the sound of alarm
 & the hard faces of the wall, the wall, the other wall, four
 walls of the room ("The Jewel" WSW 15-16)

Mouré foregrounds the dilemma facing those of the working class who, due to social and financial restrictions are forced to work at tedious, often monotonous ("ononon/ & nonono") labour. For them, the social rules of office conformity ("four walls") restrict the freedom of the self, ("what can she do?") and of self-expression ("the dream punctured by the sound of the alarm"). It is the 'working' persona that must be donned each day ("so she dyed her hair red/ So she dyed her hair red again when it faded") even as it covers over the sense of self ("as if the day has punctured/ our.. wall of physical memory where the body knows itself"). Many jobs inevitably curtail not only workers' individual and social freedoms, but also their sense of sexual freedom, often maintaining the accepted status quo of heterosexuality. For lesbians or heterosexual women, this means that their sexual identity is excluded from the workplace; they must "put away their genitals," as the poem later states.

The poet/speaker concludes the poem with a terse verse-paragraph of phrases structured around the mandates of the workplace: "I have to get up & go to the office. I have to comb my hair. I have to look like. I have to speak without laughing. I have to wear my sweater...What will I do with my writing." (19) This last sentence is interesting in

that it posits a division between "writing" and working, echoing the earlier punning of "rhyme" with "rime of coffee" (work). This creates a false binary, assuming that writing is not work when in fact "work" and "writing" are not at all mutually exclusive. Yet, Mouré seems to be marking as privileged those who have the "luxury" of time and money to be able to write full time, with no need for a 9-to-5 job as a secondary (or primary) income source. She speaks back to the romantic notions of the writer as either a "starving artist in a garret," or as a member of the educated, "highborn" class with the time and whimsy to write poetry. As she says in "Examining the Call," "what work is, what counts as work, is determined [by pay structure and amount] as well by values in language, that we perpetrate or transgress"(10). Instead, like many writers of the twentieth century, Mouré must also pursue a day job and keep her writing "on the side", and thus, secondary.¹⁴

Mouré's foregrounding of class issues and what has been termed "work writing" has often conflicted strongly with the "call for accessibility" as she terms it in an article of the same name.¹⁵ Work writing is a contemporary genre which speaks to how an individual's attitude towards "love, death and nature," or what have "traditionally [been] the three main subjects of imaginative writing in English...are in large part shaped by the kind of daily work he or she does"(Wayman 12). Although she recognizes that characteristics of work writing include the use of colloquial language and class consciousness, Mouré feels it necessary to interrogate the "unspoken" assumption that "work writing must be accessible." For Mouré, "accessibility" is another term for "easy to read," a concept which risks lulling the reader and maintaining the status quo("And Just Leave Them There..." 58). It would seem to be a significant contradiction in Mouré's poetry that even though she is working within the public space of a genre such as work writing, nevertheless her poetry is often deemed "inaccessible." Mouré thus deliberately refuses an 'easy' collaboration or unity within her own poetic concepts: she provocatively ensures that the tension created by these jarring models extends her relational poetics, creating dynamic questioning and movement.

As she argues, even if we are not consciously attempting to reflect the civic order, replicated language or so-called 'accessible' speech "contains patterns of thought/speech that are socially ingrained...the 'accessible' is not so much in the work itself, but is, as well, a way of reading" ("Watching" 3). Hence, following a 'subversion/ containment' argument, although the content matter may be disruptive, if the language and the structures used are conventional, they allow the reader to maintain a feeling of comfort: "the 'content' may disturb us, but the reading surface sends us sub-textual messages that everything is fine" ("Examining the Call" 9). ¹⁶

A criticism that is most often made of Mouré is that her work is increasingly "inaccessible" to those who do not have the theoretical or academic background that might supposedly make its "multifaceted" elements easier to understand ("My existence" 210). Mouré decries as useless the critics "who reject the colloquial & common culture," along with others "who laud the common & denigrate the intellect, as if we were not thinking," while still others "play between the two, as if culture is a strong wind blowing in the path of honour" (Furious 86). She echos Kamboureli's argument that the anti-theory cry for "practical" language,

evokes the closed-in world to which [women] have traditionally been delegated, while its sensible and utilitarian connotations imply that women can not have access to the imaginary, the symbolic, and the intellectual... [the] endorsement of 'practical' language offers no corrective alternative to the ways in which linguistic structures have framed the female subject. (Kamboureli 12-13)

Mouré feels that it is necessary to combine "the colloquial expression with the words of intellect," in order to form this possible alternative space within language systems ("The Acts" Furious 86). The overlapping and multiplying of these elements then aid in reconstructing and extending the possibilities of language.

Mouré also focuses on the class assumptions of privilege and accessibility to education that are inherent in the choice to use "colloquial" or "intellectual" language. Rather than rigidly adhere to one or the other, she would prefer to disrupt these class and socio-economic assumptions by crossing the "thin border" between the common and the elite, creating a new space for interaction and interplay. Such a space, lacking borders and 'signposts' of referentiality, exists "on the edge of confusion", multiplying the possibilities (SD 209). This in turn can lead to the support of a difference-accountable politics by allowing for inclusion of what was hitherto excluded or marginalized, namely aspects of class, gender, race, and sexual identity.

Like other language-centred writers, Mouré argues that "referentiality distorts more than it conveys, it injects us with the comfortable" (Furious 89). Instead, we must probe these familiar structures and forms of language in order to reveal the seams that hide its constructed nature, looking for images that "act within a context but do not refer to it" (Furious 89). Accessibility is actually a trap which lulls the reader so as to "comfort and nourish their assumptions, not abrade them," which simply maintains structures of the civic order (Daurio 28). Mouré notes that she "can't be responsible for making things easier on the reader... You can't read all poetry like you read the Globe and Mail..." (28). As she writes in "Nice Poetry" ,

The field looks nice
with its edging of trees, trees with real birds,
real nice.
O stop making it so easy on the reader
who wants nice poetry & the line
to stop before the preposition." (SBCL 121)

Here, Mouré has deliberately used colloquial language, traditional grammar, and punctuation in order to emphasize the 'easy' quality of the writing: it parodies the use of conventional lyric nature images such as 'field' and 'real birds'. Even the bland, insipid use of the word "nice" aids in lulling the reader into comfortable, passive consumption. However, the mood quickly shifts, with the exclamatory "O" parodying the lyric

apostrophe to the absent, unseen (or possibly deceased!) person or personified entity. As the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics notes, the strategy of using the lyric apostrophe "gives life and immediacy to [the] language" as well as foregrounding the ongoing relationship between the poet/speaker and a specific reader or character(42).¹⁷ Mouré's subsequent parody of this effect actually involves addressing herself, the poet/speaker directly, self-reflexively highlighting the responsibility of the speaking voice.

vi.

Strongly parallel to her disruption of the traditional lyric, Mouré works from within the conventions of the romantic lyric in order to fracture its habitual parameters. She deliberately and subversively situates lesbianism within civic space in order to reformulate its concepts of love and desire with new images that speak more truly to her experiences as a lesbian. Kevin McGuirk notes that the traditional love lyric features a heterosexual relationship of domination, where the (usually male) poet/speaker transforms the "addressed lover into a merely voiceless figure--a mirror--by which the poet establishes and explores his or her own identity"(71). However, in accordance with her relational poetics, Mouré's love poems displace this "one-way" viewing of the loved one, celebrating the reciprocity of intimacy and reconfiguring collaboration sexually and textually. As McGuirk argues for the parallel case of Adrienne Rich's love poems, the lesbian aesthetic disrupts the observer/observed dichotomy and is instead nuanced by a collaborative love and desire: "touch, contact, mutuality, the presence of two lovers to one another--these replace the gaze of desire dominant in the male tradition"(73). In the second section of "Nice Poetry", the poet/speaker reflects:

The invention of memory is a perilous task,

for instance:

I touched her thigh.

Whose thigh, she asks me, scowling.

I hope it isn't her thigh you are touching in the public place of the poem.

It's worse than at a bus stop. (120)

Mouré intentionally foregrounds not only lesbian desire, but also the subversive act of including this desire within the poem. The "scowling" inquisitor is possibly a shocked reader, whose response Mouré pre-empts and parodies as hostile to the disruptions of conventional social ideology. She follows up on this by spiralling references to her "hand on her thigh," both in section 6 and in section 8. Mouré then tilts the focus towards other connotations of lesbian desire, which she resolutely situates within the context of conventional lyric images:

having dreamed in the dream's silence
of my hand on her thigh
at the crossing of little fields

small twilight
the quiet haybine
a soft hat with its inner hatband worn next to the skin (122)

.....
Or: her at the metal sink pouring
spring water
into the coffee pot.

Her confidence tremulous under the wire.

Because that's what I thought of!
The way I had to say it!

"Her confidence tremulous." So

what
about memory.
What is a pure air? (123)

The blank spaces are left in anticipation of the interjections of the reader who queries the sudden change of tone from the relatively domestic ("sink," "water," "coffee pot") to more complex images such as tremulous confidence. Mouré has succeeded in disrupting specific assumptions of heterosexuality and poetic genre, while simultaneously drawing the reader into active participation with the text. Even the final question from the

poet/speaker to the reader echoes this dynamic movement between the two, showing the continuum of the writer/reader/text relationship and attempting to foreground a recognition of sexual difference.

As a lesbian feminist, Mouré attempts to disrupt the current heterosexual civic space by working from within it towards a legitimating context for lesbian desire and reaffirmation. In order to effect this change, Mouré, like many other lesbian feminist writers, believes that "the same old tired forms of writing about love aren't good enough...love between women should [not] be written in the same tired way" ("Can't We Talk" 79). Instead, what is necessary is the invention of new images and situations to describe this new reality that women, of any sexual identity, are experiencing.

In "Speaking of Which," Mouré describes active lesbian resistance to heterosexual life, deliberately situated within the public space of a bar. As heterosexuality is the norm, it is thus constantly inscribed and maintained as normative by dominant institutions. Mouré explains in an interview with Janice Williamson that "love is only recognized if it's done in the official way" ("Can't We Talk" 79). This is echoed within the poem,

The silver paper from the bottles, torn & rolled up, are
our diamonds, or
thrown up into the scarce air: stars.
By these stars you know us, don't you.

By these official stars.

.....
we move our elbows on & off the crowded table, we are women with
this & this dream, we have eaten in *these* places, we slept with
men or boys at the age of, at the age of, too young,
wanting to see what it was, that body,

then finally,
not caring for it,
not dreaming of it either except as a sign, like the outside of a house
when the walls are burning, a sign
like hallways, or diamonds, that body

We wanted to see it knowing how little it would mean,

how little of our past it would bring back to us,
how little...

.....
because this fury is our hardest core, because the bar is full of women's
talk & whispers, by these signs you shall know us,

the bright oxygen, the air inside us who stared
then walked away, from the word *cock*, & *ravishment*
To name what our own tongues will call *something*,

our arms close to each other, so close, the ashtray full up
with diamonds, our diamonds, our first born stars (*Furious* 38-39)

Mouré appropriates Biblical language for her own ends, as the phrase "by these signs you shall know us," portends a creation, or coming (in this case, of a space for lesbian desire and affirmation). She evokes a sense of affirmation and collaboration within the lesbian community, a group linked together by its active resistance to the heterosexual norm, "because this fury is our hardest core." It is due to this resistance that women are present in "the bar...full of women's/ talk & whispers," and that they are able to recognize the struggle of each lesbian to confront a homophobic society, "then finally,/ not caring for it,...we wanted to see it knowing how little it would mean." These women have purposefully extended the civic space, actively placing themselves inside the "civic house of memory" and engaging in provocative dialogue from within its "walls" in order to effect this renovation.

Mouré's poetry often seems representative of what T.S. Eliot said, concerning witty or light verse and its property of "tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace" (*New Princeton Encyclopedia* 898). However, it also depicts a (surprisingly) deeply spiritual, sacred response to the world;

acknowledged overtly in imagery and language drawn from the church...

For [Mouré], there is no divorce of the spiritual and the political. And therefore, as her aesthetic becomes more sophisticated, she tends to appropriate the imagery and language of her Catholic girlhood to speak

of her adult commitment to feminism. (Glickman 137)

In "Speaking of Which," the image of the "first born stars" contains strong Biblical overtones both of the story of Moses and the first-born male Egyptians who were slain by God, and of the birth of Jesus. Although the imagery may be thus loaded with meaning drawn from Christianity, as Glickman notes, Mouré is not attracted to this discourse due to any evangelical belief "of happiness in some apocalyptic hereafter"(136). Rather, Mouré is conscious of the "emotionally meaningful way of speaking" in the signs of this Christian discourse as, "like English, it is her native sign system"(136). She collaborates with these words and phrases for their depth of meaning, yet re-configures them to describe her lesbian feminist desires and aims.

In mythology, stars are often deemed 'official' signs or portents of things to come, particularly the birth or appearance of public figures (i.e., the birth of Jesus). Like Marlatt and Warland, Mouré uses an appropriating strategy, reclaiming these signs to signal the beauty and import of lesbian desire. For Mouré, these stars divine a lesbian legitimacy and ascendancy to 'earth,' the plane of the 'real,' perhaps a lyric transcendence grounded in the everyday: "our arms close to each other, so close, the ashtray full up/ with diamonds, our diamonds, our first born stars"(Furious 39).

In her poem "Rolling Motion," Mouré delicately and lovingly describes lesbian desire, yet she does so without recourse to the "usual" images of female sexuality--there are no invocations of breasts or female genitalia. Instead, she emphasizes a grammatical non-conformity which "successfully [abandons] subject-object dualism and [develops] the lovers' reciprocity"(Williamson 79). This circumvention of traditional noun/verb pre-eminence bestows an increased sense of rhythmic motion and an emotional sense of movement and inter-connectedness, while also foregrounding the mutuality that extends from love-making:

Your face in my neck &
arms dwelling upward face

in my soft leg open
 lifted upward airborne soft
 face into under into rolling
 over every upward motion
 rolling open over your
 Face in my neck again over
 turning risen touch billows
 my mouth open enter
 dwelling upward face
 in your soft leg open
 lifted upward airborne soft
 face into under into motion
 over every upward open
 rolling open over your
 Face in my neck again
 & arms (Furious 35)

The short lines and repetition of phrases and words ("Face in my neck"), as well as the profusion of prepositions, impart a feeling of motion and renewal to this poem of lesbian desire and eroticism. Williamson notes that "Mouré's looping phrases string together new rhetorical erotic possibilities which pre-position rather than position the lovers in relation to each other"(1991 181). With the repetition of the capitalized word "Face," Mouré provides for a slight separation into sections that help to create this sense of return and departure, a spiralling motion that reinvents itself. By concluding her poem in the midst of the next "wave," without benefit of traditional punctuation or textual closure, the poet instead slips through the restraints of prescribed closure by simply allowing the final phrase to continue on "Face in my neck again/ & arms ." This could be read as cyclical climax, or perhaps, a resting or "dwelling" place that, unlike a male orgasm, is left open and multiple. As a subversive technique, this enactment of *écriture féminine*, therefore, stresses the plurality and mobility of women's sexual desires, textually inscribing them not only in the surface content, but also the form and structure of the poetic language. The poem's intimate spacing illuminates a warmth and closeness that embodies a compelling sense of lesbian desire. Although subversive of dominant norms, for those participating, this lovemaking is marked by renewal, affirmation and unhesitating

passion. The form of the poem is therefore intrinsically linked to the content, mirroring and supporting the lesbian self. Language strategies have intersected, been shaped by, and helped to shape the articulation of the subversively desiring lesbian subject.

As a lesbian feminist writer of working-class background, Erin Mouré actively engages in theory and in practice with language strategies of disruption and deconstruction. Through her language-centred, feminist writing strategies, Mouré attempts to create a space for difference-accountable politics. Having forged a personal and poetic aesthetic that emphasizes the need to disturb traditional assumptions from within, Mouré focuses on positionalities of class, gender, and sexuality, nuanced through a strong, collaboratively resonating relational poetics. These perspectives are foregrounded through her clever manipulation of language, both its most basic elements and its production and consumption within the reader/writer/text continuum. The difficult task of revisioning which Mouré sets for herself and her readers is aided and abetted by her startling humour. Lightness and depth are joined in a reciprocal movement into an awareness and celebration of difference.

III

The Permeable Poetics of "i+i": Power and Authorship in the Feminist Collaborations of Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland

the complex, balance between i and we, neither capitalized nor capitalizing on the other...[and] a recognition of real differences of life-experience, privilege and accessibility to the centre...[make] attention to difference in the work of others essential, and collaboration rather than assimilation an essential writing practice.

D. Marlatt, "Difference Embracing"

One of the main tenets of traditional literary works is the presumed authority of the author. In order to create a space for multiple possibilities, postmodernist writers often attempt to destabilize this notion.¹⁸ In conjunction with this, many feminist writers and poets have recently begun to collaborate on texts, proffering a multi-voiced authorial presence that celebrates difference and divergence. Therefore, in this chapter, I would like to look at co-authored works by Marlatt and Betsy Warland, specifically Double Negative (1988) and Two Women In A Birth (1994) for their strategies of voice and multiplicity, structures of power and authorship, and socio-political questions of feminist collaboration. In order to thoroughly understand each writer's contributions to these, in section i of this chapter, I will engage Marlatt's use of language as nuanced through collaborative techniques in her works How Hug a Stone (1983) and Touch To My Tongue (1984). Marlatt's creative use of etymology, punning, and revisionary myth-making all contribute to her poetics of reciprocity, while collaboratively contextualizing her experiences as a lesbian feminist. Her aesthetics of collaboration displaces hierarchy and primacy, and is nuanced by her anti-imperialist perspective as a British colonial immigrant to Canada. She trains her poetic lens particularly on the socially-prescribed norms of gender as focalized

through mother/daughter relations in the nuclear family, attempting to disrupt these and to create alternatives. Marlatt explores how the self is partially constituted through multiple elements of memory; memory can involve any or all aspects of word memory, narrative memory, personal memory, and physical memory. Marlatt in turn collates these in an investigation of multiplicity and simultaneity that disrupts patriarchal notions of closure and singularity. One of her main poetic explorations attempts to comprehend the differing patriarchal and post/colonial factors that have marginalized both herself and her mother before her; Marlatt maps this quest for understanding as one of renewal and re-affirmation by interweaving the layers of maternal motherhood, a Mother goddess figure, and a mother-tongue. This in turn becomes idiosyncratic of her transformative poetics which seeks to displace patriarchal linearity and stasis through a collaboration with language involving cyclical movement and inter/intra-textual creativity. In section ii, I will discuss Warland's use of language in Open is Broken (1984), Serpent (W)rite (1987), and Proper Deafinitions (1990). Warland engages representations of gender and sexual identity with a particular attentiveness to the web of connections between women. These linkages are developed by means of etymology, revisionary mythmaking, and strategic punning--all of which aid to make language a collaborative system of multi-interpretive meanings. For Warland, a lesbian feminist collectivity is an empowering subversive strategy.

Finally, in section iii, I will examine the process of collaboration as enacted through Marlatt and Warland's collection of co-authored texts in Two Women in a Birth. By merging their own distinctive styles, they hope to disrupt conventional strategies of voice, invoking instead a tactic of multiplicity and plurality. Such a move necessarily deconstructs the traditional monologic authority of the writer, while simultaneously rewriting the structures of power inherent in the process of creation and production. They also revise assumptions of the singular lyric voice, opening it up to "multiple voices or voice fragments"(Perloff, 1984, 50). The conversation that ensues is not an example of Barthesian "death of the author," but rather a re-construction of this author-subjectivity, a

"challenging of centrality" that "highlights" difference and distinction (Yorke 153). Their collaborative continuum evokes a specific and subversive political aim of decentering dominant assumptions of the Author-ial figure through a multi-layering of forms, content, and genres. Marlatt and Warland hope to share this creative disruption with their readers, and thus extend the collaborative model, engaging in self-reflexive, provocative conversation with the feminist community through inter/intra-textual citations and with the reader.

i.

From the official beginning of her writing career in the 1960's with her involvement in the "Tish" collective to the present time, Daphne Marlatt has continued to focus her poetry upon the materials closest at hand: her own experiences and impressions as an immigrant Canadian lesbian of British colonial background. Her poetry has always contained a lyrical awareness of the material and ideological structures of language, yet this perception has become further intensified through the exploratory lens of her developing feminist, lesbian locations.

As Marlatt notes in her essay "Changing the Focus," this lesbian identity involves a "lower case i" which is not "monolithic, or massive and solid--it has very permeable boundaries, is on a footing of exchange, sometimes even con-fusion, with lower-case you." (132) She has become increasingly aware of the multiple nature of the self, a subjectivity that, for her, includes layered past/present experiences, contexts, and perceptions, especially as embodied in memories. As Marlatt describes it, her sense of identity does not really develop in a linear fashion like the traditional plot development for a novel, but more as a "movement backwards and forwards in psychic time...the pieces never 'add up' to a single version because none of them are outdated—that's just it, they all coexist in whoever 'i' is" (131).

Thus, Marlatt's exploration in fiction/theory has revolved around the central issue of how the self is constructed; for Marlatt, the self is at least partially constituted through

memory--in its own right, a multi-faceted concept. Thus, Marlatt's poetic spaces often include re-examined memories and perceptions of the mother/daughter relationship; she probes the common experiences of motherhood, involving marginality and female identity norms which they experienced separately, in differing times, spaces and contexts.

Attempting to evoke multiple and overlapping realities, Marlatt undertakes an etymological study of language, designed to reveal and explore word origins. In so doing, she defuses the assumed univocal meaning of referential discourse, and, instead, expands upon the possible meanings and relations of words, their origins, and their reception. The open-ended process of investigation is through elements of experimental language, particularly as a strategy for the exploration and mapping of previously un-cited space. Marlatt has noted that her exploration is an ongoing one which is continually open to review and re-examination, even as her own perceptions change and develop. I will briefly explore How Hug A Stone for examples of how Marlatt re-configures social and gender roles through a persistent probing of the mother-figure. Touch to My Tongue, as a long poem dedicated to Warland, displaces these roles further, re-constructing the mother figure from the prescribed realm of reproduction to a psychic-erotic conflation with a female lover.

In an effort to understand her own subjectivity as a mother, marginalized by her gender and her sexuality, Marlatt explores her relationship between herself and her now-deceased mother. She interrogates her own imperialist background in Malaysia, as well as how this environment affected her mother who, as a white woman, was both a member of and a marginalized figure within this colonial project. Daphne Marlatt immigrated to Canada with her British family from Malaysia when she was nine. As she actively adapted to Canadian culture and Canadian English she began to comprehend the structures of language, embedded as they are within a socio-historical context, past and present that, in turn, constructs 'reality'. As she notes in her essay "Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination,"

when you are told, for instance, that what you call earth is really dirt, or what you have always called the woods (with English streams) is in fact bush (with its creeks), you experience the first split between name and thing, signifier and signified, and you take that first step into a linguistic world that lies adjacent to but is not the same as the world of things, and indeed operates on its own linguistic laws.(222)

Thus Marlatt's awareness of "the relativity of both language and reality" began from this early time. The privileges that support one reality over another have become a strong focus of Marlatt's poetry as she infuses her lesbian feminist position with an anti-imperialist slant. For Marlatt, the "relativity" of reality and its composition through language was highlighted by her relationship with her mother(Wachtel 4). As Pamela Banting notes in "The Phantom Limb Syndrome," her mother "whose role, identity, and status changed with immigration from colonial memsahib in Malaysia to isolated Canadian housewife, became increasingly nostalgic for things English"(11). This led to a "deepening neurosis i could neither understand nor address," as Marlatt notes ("Entering In" 222). Her mother's sense of dis-ease was accelerated by the Canadian landscape around her that denied her own lived reality of English values, mores, and even language. However, identity within language is, of course, dependent upon factors such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. As Marlatt remarked in an interview with Janice Williamson, "When We Change Language," it is necessary to be critically aware of how the "issues of racism and classism are...subtly bound into that experience" of colonialism(191). For Marlatt's mother, as her title of "memsahib" suggests, her time spent in Malaysia was a time of high privilege due to race and class. Yet, as Banting quotes Carr, this privilege was also tempered by her gender which prescribed a limited role and identity for her: "'memsahib' is...a derivative of 'sahib' the white colonial male master of the household, and thus reflects the 'mem's' subordinate status"(24).

Marlatt's remembering of her relationship with her mother has led to a profoundly emotional and critical involvement in self-exploration, as Marlatt tries to comprehend the patriarchal and post-colonial factors that marginalized her mother and the dominant homophobic ideologies that have, in turn, marginalized herself both as a lesbian and as a feminist. It is from this homophobic experience that she first truly became aware of the intolerance society bears towards difference. The difficulty lies in the need to constantly re-examine perceptions and attitudes for their degree of tolerance, understanding, and recognition of difference. In a remark strongly reminiscent of Mouré's emphasis on difference-accountability and self-interrogation, Marlatt notes that "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" ("When we change language" 190).

Like Mouré, Marlatt foregrounds the need to critically "look at the language first of all" and it is through this strategy that she attempts to articulate a space for lesbian and female legitimacy and desire (190). For some critics these concepts may seem to circumscribe a specific identity for women, tilting (dangerously, perhaps) towards essentialist prescription. Yet, Marlatt terms identity politics, "considered essentialist in theoretical circles" as nonetheless, "very important to us exactly because it's so often objected to, erased or denied in the feminine movement as a whole, and maligned or oppressed in the mainstream. How can we work for change if we can't name ourselves collectively?" ("Changing the Focus" 130). She is not attempting to be prescriptive, as she notes "how deep the gendered expectations are." Instead, she is celebrating the "attractive and diverse range of marvellously capable women," while endeavouring simultaneously to articulate a collective space for women, for lesbians ("Changing the Focus" 30).

In her creative-critical essay "Musing with Mothertongue," Marlatt points to the need to exist as a feminist writer on "that double edge where she has always lived, between the already spoken & the unspeakable, sense and non-sense" (47). This manifests

in her provocative use of experimental language techniques and strategies of etymology and punning. As a woman writer, Marlatt feels the need to verbalize the space that is not addressed or even recognized by "the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority, subject through verb to object," which fails to

convey the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated cycles her body knows? or the mutuality her body shares embracing other bodies, children...how can the separate nouns mother and child convey the fusion, bleeding womb-infant mouth, she experiences in those first days of feeding? what syntax can carry the turning herself inside out in love when she is both sucking mouth and hot gush on her lover's tongue? (47)

Here, Marlatt has disrupted what Glen Lowry explains as the traditional image of woman "either as mother or whore; her sexuality acceptable only as a function of reproduction...As an object, woman has been stripped of her ability to act"(83). Marlatt merges maternal images ("bleeding womb-infant mouth") with images of an active sexuality, thereby subverting both this binary and the mother/daughter binary, and instead positing a female figure that is capable of simultaneous and overlapping identities. Lowry notes that this type of feminist plurality is parallel to a female economy of language which thrives on excess meaning,"(90) and which Marlatt demonstrates throughout her poetry.

The open-ended aspects of *écriture féminine* require a strong element of what Lowry terms "exposure" from the author. As he argues, "in letting us read the I Marlatt...[is] open to the risk of being other than the self/selves [she has] imagined, but this is a necessary risk for those who have been confined by monologic meaning"(95). I believe that Marlatt would welcome any possible multiplying of meanings construed from her words as being in excess of any supposed essential or original meanings; any monologically intended "self/selves" risks reification and linearity under the guise of a singular authorial 'intention.' Like Mouré, Marlatt feels the necessity to exist "on the

edge" of the mainstream, avoiding re-absorption into the dominant order, a system which cannot fully articulate her differences, her changing state of subjectivity.

In How Hug A Stone, Marlatt records her poetic impressions of a trip that she and her twelve-year old son Kit took to England. The text enacts a collage of genres, its prose poems divided into sections by maps of England, upon which Marlatt has marked her travel route. Her palimpsestic over-writing documents her journey, inscribing herself and various placenames onto a landscape which, historically and geographically, often omits what the dominant order does not consider of import. In conjunction with this, Marlatt's five maps show contrasting views and perspectives of overlapping territory, concretely pointing to the multiple versions of "reality" that are construed from our changing subject positions.

How Hug as a long poem draws upon narrative, lyric, and epic, to articulate a quest for renewal and re-affirmation in the originating layers of a maternal mother, a mothertongue, and a mythological Mother goddess. Marlatt's prose poems interweave various manifestations of what have traditionally been devalued forms of women's writing, specifically the travel diary, the journal, and autobiography. As Carr notes, autobiography "may be seen as a project of self-definition and self-authentication" for women, and in this case, Marlatt's own "self-representation in language touches the woman writer where she lives, in her own statements about her life-writing that may be read as glosses on or as intratext with her life-fictions"(1989, 84). As she says in an interview, Marlatt attempts to "shift that ground which is usually background for the figure so it becomes foreground"(Carr 1991,103). This fracturing of the accepted field of poetry is reminiscent of Mouré's strategies of disruption in "Nice Poetry." Marlatt refers to Robert Duncan's "opening of the field [where] you could shift back and forth so radically between a large and very serious poetic vision and the colloquial, the profane, sexual joking. The fluidity of those levels of language, that was very important"(Carr 1991, 100). For How Hug A Stone, it is the interweaving of these levels of language,

genre, and form that mark Marlatt's rupturing of perceived notions of the reader, writer, and monologic content.¹⁹

As a long poem, How Hug A Stone draws closely upon questions of narrative continuity and constructions of history. Marlatt explores the need to view subjective identity through language as a narrative construction that exists in multiple states, both past and present: "without narrative how can we see where we've been/ or unable to leave it altogether, what we come from?"(19). Here, the language forms a "narrative continuity" that refuses the linear push in a chronological, unidirectional approach. Instead, Marlatt foregrounds self-definition as a process of negotiation between lived history and its narrative, for the movement of narrative involves a backward and forward motion and does not remain static. This both echoes and revises her earlier poem "departure," where the poet/speaker wonders "without narrative/ how can we see where we're going? or that - for long moments now, we happen"(15). The final "we" speaks to the feminist project of articulating the self, and the necessity for such a narrative to include a collaboration of the 'backwards and forwards' movements of reviewing and revisioning our selves. As she says, "what if history is simply the shell we exude for a place to live in? all wrapped up. break out before it buries us. stories can kill"(51). Within the context of How Hug A Stone, Marlatt indicates the need to create a new history, an alternate "story" that will be able to narrate the silences of those like her mother who are relegated to the margins through neglect and mis-representation.

One manner of accomplishing this involves the exploration of a Mother-goddess figure, specifically that of the pre-Christian Bride/Bridget as worshipped at Avebury henge. Marlatt merges the figure of her own mother with this spiritual Mother of "ground & source"(73) from which we have been cut off by dominant institutions and cultures. Patriarchal systems seek to maintain narrowing concepts of linearity and ultimate closure, and binary formulations of male/female, positive/negative, have/lack. In creating this multiple interpretation and layering of motherhood and mythological female figures,

Marlatt deconstructs the 'closure' of death, re-casting it with notions of birth, re-birth, and ongoing continuity through experience and memory, both emotional and physical. Even though her mother may be deceased, the memories and consequences of how lives were lived, remains and continues. Marlatt enacts her healing through strategically reclaiming a mothertongue, a language that works to subvert dominant language systems.

It is in the two poems "long after The Brown Day of Bride" and "Avebury awi-spek, winged from buried egg" that Marlatt collates her mother image with the image of a cyclical goddess who embodies birth, death, and rebirth in a continual motion. Marlatt's overlapping of these figures foregrounds the need to disrupt dominant versions of death as an ending, as closure: "the enfolded present waits for us to have done with hiding-&-seeking...our obsession with the end of things"(75). Instead, she seeks to multiply the possibilities by a re-visioning of mythology. In her use of Celtic mythological images and figures, Marlatt echoes Mouré's strategy of using an "emotionally meaningful" language that bears deeply ingrained cultural and socio-historical connotations. Bronwen Wallace spoke of a "feminist way of dying," that accepts the physical death of the body as natural and simply part of a cycle; rather than "the denial and technological nightmare that the medical profession is built on--denial of the body," Wallace spoke of accepting the "power in the body" as it adjusts to new turns of a natural cycle(SD 292, 295).

Marlatt made a decision to visit Avebury henge, in a deliberate choice "against the phallic worship of the sun god at Stonehenge"(Carr 1989, 306). Avebury was consecrated for pre-Christian, Celtic worship of a goddess figure. Carr notes that this figure was named Bride, but was then later Christianized, her identity overlapped with St. Bridget; as "each successive goddess subsumes the attributes of her predecessor in this matrilineal chain of female divinities...[she] embodies a healing of the dualistic positive/negative, birth/death vision of the human cycle"(1989 307). This healing is enacted through the goddess' multiple manifestations that parallel seasonal cycles: "spring/maiden; summer/mother/birth; winter/hag/death"(Carr 1989 307).

Thus, "long after The Brown Day of Bride" speaks of the goddess Bride/St.

Bridget, in her "winter" manifestation:

her tomb-body..built to contain that primary chaos, long barrow of bones, dismembered or not, of potsherd, all mingled together.

winter, this time of year, submerged. as i am, heavy with cold. on the other side "down under" watching almond blossoms in the chill streets of their world. a place to visit, blurring distinction between corpus & corpse. (72)

Marlatt has imaginatively entered the tomb of the goddess, recognizing it as an otherworldly "place to visit" from which she can look back at her own reality as an outsider, an observer ("almond blossoms in the chill streets of their world"). The poetic construction of the "tomb-body," recalls her many prior references to "womb" as both a holding place and a place for birth, "built to contain that primary chaos." Finally, in a move that thickens the conflation of mother/Mother figures, Marlatt invokes a mothertongue, a feminine body of writing, "blurring distinction between corpus & corpse"; in this case, even as the "corpse" is designated for re-birth and renewal, so too is the corpus, or mothertongue of feminine language, as it undergoes change and re-visioning.

Marlatt's extension of this poem in "continued" speaks to the re-emerging of a mothertongue. She notes that "we have forgotten parts, we have lost sense of the whole" and are only now engaged in a "struggle" to regain "our 'selves' our inheritance of words. wanting to make us new again: to speak what isn't spoken, even with the old words"(73). It is of decisive importance that the reader not mistake this revisiting of historical, cultural sites, and language as a nostalgic commemoration solely of the past. Marlatt's revisionary mythmaking is a mapping strategy for "versions of history that are versions of her." There is no one single route; instead, Marlatt celebrates the power of myth to enrich our language and thereby our consciousness of subjectivity: "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"(73). With this final focus on elements of language, Marlatt notes the subversive power of writing what has been silenced, the spaces "between the words", where awareness of both commonality and differences can be achieved, "of all possible relation."

In "Avebury awi-spek", Marlatt extends the merging and overlapping of the images of 'mother', with Mother/goddess and mother-tongue. As she argues, "narrative is a strategy for survival. so it goes"(75). The cycle of birth/death/re-birth that is implicated in the image of the Mother, becomes characteristic of Marlatt's own "transformative" poetics, through alliterative words of movement and re-birth:

transformative sinuous sentence emerging even circular, cyclic
Avebury, April-May leaps *winged* from *buried*. sheds lives, laps, folds,
these identities, sine: fold of a garment/ chord of an arc (active
misreading). writing in monumental stones, open, not even capstone or
sill, to sky (-change). *she lives* stands for nothing but this longstanding
matter in the grass, settled hunks of mother crust, early Tertiary, bearing
the rootholes of palms. they bring us up, in among stone-folds , to date.
("Avebury awi-spek" 75).

Here, the poetic language embodies an *écriture féminine* that does away with the closure of grammatical prescriptions and traditional language structures. The goddess is manifested in her spring fertility form: "April-May leaps winged from buried," which "sheds lives," and takes on new identities of overlapping presences. The reference to the absence of capstones or sills sets up a direct contrast to Stonehenge, leaving the goddess' tomb "open" and thus always in a process of birth/death/rebirth. Marlatt literally and figuratively 'reads' the Mother (both the archetypal and her own) as an ongoing presence ("she lives"), inscribed in the "writing in monumental stones..this longstanding matter in the grass, settled hunks of mothercrust." Marlatt's use of the word "matter" contains deliberate allusions to mater/mother as well as meaning a situation or entity of import or substance. Finally, she views her mother/Mother as embodied in the stone that endures and wonders "how hug a stone (mother)...the old slow pulse beyond word become, under

flesh, mutter of stone, *stane*, *stei-ing* power"(75). She posits in the ancient structures of stone a form of writing, of language, that communicates itself across the ages in an endless continuation--"stei-ing power"; this, in turn, evokes a collaboration with language.

Conflating the images of mother/Mother with enduring stone thus multiplies the possible meanings of the title "How Hug A Stone": it can be interpreted both as a searching question on how to embrace language as a disruptive strategy, and how to come to terms with the plural relationships to a changing, differing mother figure.

As with How Hug a Stone, the multiple subject positions in Touch to My Tongue are inscribed through language and explore the relation of the self to its partial constitution through memory. This profusion of positionalities is most aptly paralleled by the diverse forms that Marlatt includes within this one volume of poetry. She incorporates essay ("Musing With Mothertongue"), collage photographs, prose poems, notes, and various intertextual quotations all with the express purpose of exploring "different approaches to signification and representation, and signalling to the reader the need to translate (in this case, intersemiotically between different media)"(Banting 12). Williamson notes that the photographs, by Cheryl Sourkes, form a "visual archeology of the lesbian imaginary" that is "particularly significant in Touch to My Tongue where language calls through associative echoes"(177-178). Within this fiction/theory, cross-genre format, Marlatt's poetic language is generously woven with words and phrases re-birthed from other languages and cultures, including "the dead languages of Latin, Greek, Old English, [and] Old Norse"(Banting 23).

In Marlatt's Touch to My Tongue (1984), the erotic, lesbian feminist text articulates the body and, simultaneously, "how the body inscribes itself into the text"(Banting 12). She dedicates this to her partner, Betsy Warland (who reciprocates in Open is Broken 1984), signalling the way her poems "are in conversation with other lesbian writing, a conversation which offers an understanding of the multiple subject positions available to lesbians"(Williamson 176). Touch explores traditional romantic lyric

modes of address to a loved one: yet the subversive content of lesbian desire and articulation deliberately places this text in a movement that disrupts these conventions from within. This prose poem sequence is provocatively marked as a collaboration, not only of genre, media, and languages, but as a conversation of the ongoing love between the beloved and the speaker. As was noted with Mouré's love poems, this positioning displaces the traditional one-way economy of the (male) lover's gaze and the passive, observed, beloved. Instead, Marlatt reconfigures gender and power expectations, placing the two lovers as desiring individuals, who collaborate within the open process of their relationship.

For Marlatt, this particular text explores the relationship between bodily memories and textual surfaces, as she writes of her love and desire for her lesbian partner. Yet, as Janice Williamson notes, "while a connection between writing and the female body and representations of love between and among women must be spoken, the problem of how to write and speak them without falling into the same theoretical limitations which have censored these representations is a difficult one" ("It Gives Me A Great Deal of Pleasure " 173). Marlatt treads a fine line between exploring possible bases and origins for lesbian feminist articulation and what her critics call the taint of essentialism and its inherent prescriptiveness. Rather than maintain the cultural ideologies of woman as a passive receptacle for male desire, Marlatt instead disrupts these representations and expresses the female body as desiring and dynamic in all its relationships, whether heterosexual or lesbian.

For example, in the opening poem, "this place full of contradiction," the poet/speaker is able to "read" her lover's face as one would a text, picking out traces of history and experience:

even the lamps pick up your glow, a cabin of going, fjords in there, a
clear and pristine look the winds weave through your eyes i'm
watching you talk of a different birth, blonde hair on my tongue, of

numbers....i see your face because i don't see mine equally flush with
being...(19)

The speaker feels she can read her lover's body, seeing inscribed within it the history of Warland's Norwegian background ("fjords in there") and reminders of their more immediate history together ("blonde hair on my tongue"). She also sees the shared connections of lesbian desire that bring them together as well as their immigrant backgrounds: "we meet in these far places we find in each other." This concept of overlapping and mutuality spills over structurally into the prose-poem format of the text--as a long poem, *Touch* embodies continuum and dynamism. It circles back on itself with recurring images of a cyclical earth goddess that refuses containment: "my house no house. i can only be, no vessel but a movement running."(10) It also mirrors how the body receives information and forms perceptions from simultaneous sensory perceptions, filtered through experience and multiple layers of memory. As she describes it in "The Measure of the Sentence," this prose format gave her "room to play around," as she "wanted to build syntactic structures that [she] could sustain far longer than in verse"(90). For Marlatt, the prose sentence "fascinated" her, "its elasticity as it kept spinning itself along, drawing out threads of meaning in its extension across the page...a moving step in the process of thought"(91).

Marlatt specifically pushes and probes at her use of language, going beyond the most readily available singular meanings, in an attempt to multiply and layer their weave. She creates the excess of meaning that is contiguous with *écriture féminine*, as in the poem "Yes," where the poet/speaker exposes diverse meanings for the word 'jade'. The more traditional meaning--of a green stone--reminds the poet/speaker of her wedding band: "gone. only a white band the skin of years hidden under its reminder to my-self of the self i was marrying"(21). Simultaneously, the meaning of jade as 'stone of the flank', or "piedra de ijada" brings to mind the bodily memory of "that space between the last rib and the hipbone, that place i couldn't bear the weight of his sleeping hand." Thirdly,

"jade" signifies a "worthless woman, wilful girl," the 'self' that the poet/speaker felt she became when she married and insisted "perversely" on attempting to "retain this small open space that was mine." Marlatt underscores the changing state of her sexuality from girl through submissive wife to active lesbian. Sexuality becomes an identifying element of subjectivity, yet it is an element that is always open to re-vision and dynamic movement. To write a lesbian sexuality is to "refuse the canonical terms of 'tradition'" (Williamson 175). As Williamson notes, "the word "perverse" has come to organize heterosexual perceptions of lesbianism"(174). Marlatt consciously refutes this: "not perverse but turned the right way round, redefined, it signals us beyond limits in a new tongue our connection runs along"(21). Thus, her lesbianism is 'redefined' in a new language of legitimation through the 'connection' with her lover. This, in turn, becomes an open, interactive relationship, "leaving the need for limits at your place," as the lover feels the joy of sharing equally in passion: "leaving the urge to stand apart i sink into our mouth's hot estuary, tidal yes we are, leaking love and saying it deep within"(21). Marlatt deliberately works within traditional lyric images of nature and fluidity that often signify the male-imposed, female space. She reclaims this practice, "which conventionally involved a male speaking subject and a mute female body--fantasized, fragmented, and fetishized--as the object of his discourse"(Carr 1990 114). Instead, Marlatt's language evokes two female lovers in mutual, mobile, dialogue ("our mouth") and pulsating openness ("leaking love") that disrupts the active/passive, heterosexual expectations of the traditional love lyric.

As in How Hug A Stone, Marlatt re-examines the mother/daughter relationship in terms of its connotations for female subjectivity. For example, as Williamson notes "contradictions emerge between distance and proximity; difference and sameness; autonomy and fusion; and the problematization of the category woman versus the search for a fixed identity 'woman'"(182). For Marlatt, this relationship is explored through the mythological mother/daughter figures of Demeter and Persephone with their connotations of cyclical death and re-birth. She links them metaphorically to the figures of two lovers

amid the images of wildflowers and "miles and miles of rolling range" ("Prairie" 16). The 'personae' of Demeter and Persephone slide and overlap with these two women, refusing to be fixed in rigid mother/daughter identities. Instead, the lovers slip through the prescribed limits of the reproductive realm and become situated in a symbolic/psychic level of mutuality and reciprocal desire.

Interestingly, Robert Graves' "The White Goddess", which both Marlatt and Warland read, quotes Sir James Frazer merging these two within the mythological figure of the white goddess, who was "either Demeter or her double, Persephone" (67). In "kore," Marlatt constructs the identities of mother/daughter as merging with those of the lesbian lovers as Persephone rises from the "hidden" ground to "amorous Demeter, you with the fire in your hand" (23). The "hidden ground," a later poem, situates a possible space for lesbian sexuality as marginal to the centre, a fragile place that is "not terra firma, not dry land, owned, along the highway, cleared for use, but that other, low-lying, moist and undefined, hidden ground, wild and running everywhere along the outer edges" (27). The "hidden" ground has multiple locations and an excess of meanings and origins as "running everywhere"; the figures of mother and daughter merge ("inhabit together") in a multi-faceted relationship of "lost daughter, other mother and lover." "[Here] i am you" notes the movement, the overlapping of individualities, which allows for "speaking in and of and for each other" (27).

The repeated "you", echoes the earlier poem "kore" which contains the pun 'yu'/'you'. The endnotes for Touch connect the "yu" from "yu! cry jubilant excess" to the second person pronoun, but also to the Latin *jubilare*, "to raise a shout of joy." This provides a literal and figurative "excess" of meaning in the poem, as "jubilant" had already accrued this implication, and indeed, the ear associates it further with "jouissance." French for pleasure or 'bliss,' "jouissance" also has a theoretical import in the French feminist re-appropriation of Lacan's phallogocentric term for female pleasure as "primal, contiguous, and other" (Gelfand 46). This is supported by the strategy of *écriture*

feminine within the text which leaves the poem open, rejoicing in this fluid merging of subjectivities, the sharing of sexual/textual orgasm as a joint venture: "your fruiting body bloom we issue into the light of, sweet, successive flesh..."(23).

The re-invention of the Demeter and Persephone myth in Touch to My Tongue and of the Mother Goddess mythology in How Hug A Stone is termed revisionist mythmaking, by Rachel Blau DuPlessis. She discusses it as a strategy for the critical deconstruction of cultural hegemony.²⁰ She cites revisionary myths as an "attempt to forge an anticolonial mythopoesis, an attack on cultural hegemony" which excludes by way of race, class, gender, and sexuality, to name only a few (1985 107). However, DuPlessis also notes that this revisionist mythmaking has ironic, and possibly dangerous, overtones, as "one of the social functions of mythic narrative is precisely the solidification, consolidation, and affirmation of a hegemony..."(107). For feminist writers like Marlatt, it becomes crucial that the use of mythic narratives be accompanied with an interrogatory, self-critical gaze that avoids reification under a new guise of "liberated" mythopoesis(107). Feminist writing must continue to probe and to explore in multiple, overlapping directions, to chart possibilities, and to leave the maps unfolded for constant probing re-vision and renewal.

Daphne Marlatt's poetic focuses on language as a "writing in order to be," a poetics of process that pushes the barriers of the patriarchal order in order to find "multiple meanings rather than the one (right) meaning"(1986 67). Her exploration is undertaken with the express aim of attempting to articulate what has not been addressed, of approaching "the unspoken, that which lies always on the far side of the settled, the defined"(67).

ii.

For Betsy Warland, like Daphne Marlatt, the recognition that "language was not truthful; that language was often used to erase the reality of another person or exclude

them" came early on in her life, growing up as a first-generation American with Norwegian roots. She speaks of "having a skewed relationship to language right from the beginning" as everyone in her community "spoke English as a second language" (SD 306). This has developed into an intensely interrogative view of language and how it constructs women, as it is informed by Warland's lesbian feminism. She aims for an ethics of inclusion, based on her recognition of difference and the need to merge the personal and the political for an awareness of these differences. Warland has been actively engaged in bringing women together through conferences, journals and symposiums across Canada, such as the 1983 "Woman and Words/Les femmes et les mots" conference. For Warland, this collectivity and sharing of writings is "like writing home, not back to the home you came from, but writing your way towards a home you're making for yourself and for others" (SD 307).

Warland's lesbian feminist viewpoint has evolved gradually over the last fifteen to twenty years. In A Gathering Instinct (1981), the presence of lesbian desire was only visible "between the lines" and "women's eroticism was still dealt with as mysterious, or in terms of nature" (SD 311). It was not until her next book, Open is Broken (1984), that the female lovers became explicitly named and their desire articulated. Warland notes in her essay "Moving Parts" that in the interval between the two books she had read and been "deeply provoked" by various feminist writers like Audre Lorde, Hélène Cixous, and Mary Daly (127).

It is this influential and supportive community of lesbian and feminist writers that Warland co-implicates in her texts. In Open is Broken, which she wrote for Marlatt, the textual surface is interrupted and simultaneously supported by intertextual citations and quotations. The "Notes" section at the end marks the collaborative contribution of others such as Brossard, Cixous, and Marlatt herself in the form of theoretical inspiration and material for specific poems. These disruptions break the supposed monologic authority of the singular author and instead, expose to the reader the genealogy and history of feminist

lesbianism. Warland remarks that by the time of publication for Open is Broken, she had come to terms with publicly expressing her sexuality; although publishing these love poems for Marlatt was "a terrifying thought...publishing and reading from our books together not only made it possible, but empowering" ("Moving Parts" 127). As Marlatt explains in an interview "Text and Tissue," being open about their sexuality and their relationship freed "up energy to continue the work. If we were closeted, so much energy would go into maintaining that cover. What would we have left to work with?"(5). She also notes that merging their private and public life becomes a "collective act," with the express purpose of creating a "dialogue" where "hopefully there will be other women who join us"(5). Blunt and Rose argue that this type of feminist collaboration is one of many "challenges to the distinction between the public and the private and to the comparative value accorded them"(3). Marlatt and Warland's blurring of these borders aids in the "contestation and renegotiation of the meaning of [public] spaces," opening it up for sharing with others(3).

There is a joy in sharing, in communicating differences through sharing that Warland brings to her texts. Like Marlatt, she focuses on wordplay and etymology as a strategic manoeuvre for digging at the root(s) of words and re-mapping their related subtexts. For example, in "Induction," Warland reinscribes examples of her poems from elsewhere in the text by re-inserting them into new textual spaces. Like other lesbian feminist writers, such as Nicole Brossard, she cites this spiralling, re-visioned space as *écriture féminine*, a strategy that articulates sexuality within the textuality of the poetry:

showing 'our sexts'

women's texts subtext
between

the

lines (17)

By her focus on the 'text/sex' similarity of sound and appearance, Warland also emphasizes her active placement of lesbianism within conventional, heterosexist lyric space. Indeed, she critiques this placement of a lesbian collective presence as sub- or 'under' the dominant heterosexual in "Up from Under," section I,

these are the words commonly used to describe our love:

degenerate
destructive
perverted
unnatural
narcissistic
disgusting
dirty
obscene
queer
repulsive
self-indulgent
sick
evil

evil: "upo, under, up from under, over, uproar, open" (17)

The final uncovering of words associated with lesbian subculture, welling from below in an affirmative, opening process, marks Warland's vision as a writer. Without this vision, Warland says in "a language that holds us" she "would be full of despair and unable to write"(SD 304). As Phelan notes, "the construction of a positive identity requires a community that supports that identity. Building such a community requires both a withdrawal of support or belief in the values and structures of the prior community or culture and the creation of new values and structures"(59).

Warland speaks to the courage and intense energy that is needed to deliberately position oneself as marginal within dominant circles. She recalls a reading that Marlatt gave of one of her poems during the public "coming out" process:

...before you became
pinpoint of intensity
planet of light within theatre black hole
as you read love poems to me

i saw the audience shudder

...

stunned we clapped

in horrible awe

as you struck/each poem

and blazed

yourself aflame (31)

Phelan further argues that "identity formation," as it is strongly linked to this necessity for community, "is a matter not only of ontology but also of strategy"(136). For lesbian feminists, at least "part" of this strategy "must be to grasp the means of production of truth and to claim the status of truth-speakers"(137). This leads to the lesbian feminist deconstruction of exclusionary, hierarchizing language and systems, and the exploration and articulation of possibilities in its place. The danger with this re-visioning is what Mouré and Marlatt warn against and what Phelan describes as the "impulse to totalization, to power/knowledge, that is endemic to modernity"(138). Warland notes that the kind of feminist reader "who is drawn to experimental writing wants to be challenged, wants to see the radical impact feminist consciousness has had on our writing and thinking, and wants her presence as a reader to be challenged as a result"(304). For Warland, *écriture feminine* and fiction/theory as deconstructive/re-constructive strategies, allow her to work through the constraints of traditional language form and content.

Open is Broken is constructed as a long poem, dedicated to Marlatt, and provocatively situates lesbian love and desire within the space of conventional love poems. Her subversive articulation of female desire is enacted through startling images, and a transgressive voice which challenges the status quo to "consider me dangerous"(34). In the "Prologue" to Open is Broken, Warland defiantly exposes her private life to public view, 'broken open,' as she metaphorically places the frailty of subjectivity within the symbol of an egg, "origin of all"(34). In section I, she speaks of the raw sense of unmasking that comes from the "surrender" to the loved one, as she senses "something in

the garden not present before"(35). Warland uses the extraordinarily gentle image of "an egg without shell, yolk and white shimmering" to evoke the sense of careful movement that comes with standing "skinless before you/ a flower unbolted, quivering in its moment"(35). As a testament to her love for Marlatt, Warland's text reconfigures aspects of collaboration, openly celebrating Marlatt as the ongoing source of sexual/textual inspiration for these poems. Finally, in the act of sharing this personal collaboration publicly, Warland invites the reader to situate herself within the continuum of the *sext/text*:

as you hold this/these pages throb
 a radiant throat in your hands
 each line a wave/blood/pulse
 beware
 words alter change:
 "to curve, bend"

you expected to be uneasy
 (wave/blood/pulse)
 but not afraid
 lungs fisting the air amulet against...
 you could stop reading
 but the pulse in your hands has led you here (52)

Warland celebrates the fluidity ("wave/blood/pulse") and overlapping continuity of the text ("this/these pages throb"), enlarging the collaborative project to include the reader and the dynamism of sexual/textual reciprocal partnership.

Like Mouré's and, to some extent Marlatt's, Warland's texts are sometimes seen as inaccessible to the non-academic reader, who may or may not be familiar with the activity of engagement necessary to comprehend the rich possibilities of language-centred writing. There is also the question of accessibility to the non-lesbian reader; a difference of sexual identity can obviously have crucial repercussions for perspective and analysis. Warland suggests that "the heterosexual feminist reader still has an investment and location in

patriarchally defined reality, so she can imagine it embraces her"(SD 305); she may not necessarily feel the impetus to attempt understanding and disruption of prior assumptions.

However, in response to charges that lesbian experimental writing is prescriptive and/or exclusionary, Warland is quick to note that although the divisions amongst heterosexual and lesbian feminists may seem at times to be too wide to bridge, there is still a certain commonality in terms of the disruptions to patriarchal assumptions, whether it be on the level of content, form, and/or language. As she says,

I doubt if it is ever static...sometimes people are working on one or two or all three of these levels. I enjoy all of these ways of resisting and exploring...we need it all. I do have this vision of lesbian feminist writing revolutionizing literature, along with other previously repressed voices, and banal ['realistic'] writing runs counter to this vision, but those writers and readers do not likely share my vision.(SD 310-311)

Hence, for Warland, language-centred writing becomes a praxis, characterized by the drive to disrupt patriarchal reality through plurality, mobility, and simultaneity.

This becomes even more fully expressed in *Serpent (W)rite* (1987), whose subtitle, "(a reader's gloss)" points to the mapping and exploration that takes place within the text.²¹ In a move parallel to Mouré's strategy of inter/intratextuality. Warland includes culturally-important terms, names, and signifiers along the right margin of her text. As Donna Smyth says, "this is a polyvocal text, words run down the right-hand side, directing our attention but also, fugue-like, picking up a theme, repeating, directing us back to other texts"(73). She then refers to the myriad intertextual citations as "a tissue of intertextuality, quotations, 'voices of author-I-ty', ranging from the Bible to Nicole Brossard (another book of revelations), woven in a web of woman-desire/need/assertion of identity"(73).

serpent tongue licking at Cassandra's ears

(how she gained the gift of prophecy)

two words flicking
dnghu, language, bilingual
 crawling across the page
 the Goddess of Nidaba
 first deity of writing
 who invented the tablets of clay
 who dis/covered the 'art of writing...
 depicted as a serpent

bilingual wordsmells
furca, two-pronged fork for digging in the
man-, manuscript

nightworld refusing the curse of half a tongue (7-8)

Here, Warland focuses on the senses of smell, (often associated with snakes) and the sense of touch ("licking at Cassandra's ears"). For snakes, these two senses are combined within the tongue, an organ which is also used for oral communication; in this instance, it also has obvious connotations of love-making or sexual communication. The poet/speaker, then, makes a connection between the dust that the serpent is made to crawl in and from which women are made (thereby refusing to acknowledge the theory of Adam's rib as the source for Woman.)

This image of dust is echoed in the realization that Nidaba, the 'first deity of writing/ who invented the tablets of clay' was also 'depicted as a serpent'. Warland establishes Eve as a woman whose "need in her breast" is a "longing for words," for knowledge. Again, she links the serpent to language:

'the serpent...appears to have been primarily revered
 as a female in the Near and Middle East and generally
 linked to wisdom and prophetic counsel' (9)

It is this need for language, for a discourse that is legitimated and accepted that eventually spells Eve's 'downfall', as she refuses to acknowledge Adam's pre-eminence and established position within the Garden:

Adam's naming not an ending
 more words wanted out
 words which spoke of experience, interpreted perception
 words of discourse (9)

For Eve, this knowledge is of a simultaneous sexual/textual nature that is located within
 the text of the body:

taking the bite opening the lid
 ...
 Eve the 'living'
 Pandora the 'all-gifted'
 first woman in Paradise
 first mortal woman among gods and goddesses
 first mortal womb
 ...
 wom(b)an's words
 a language of ventriloquism
 ...
 Eve, Pandora damned for *openings, upo, evil*
 their *lid, klei, clitoris*

the body condemning the body condemned the body lost (11-12)

Warland exposes the multiple sexual/textual nature of this forbidden knowledge, by conflating the Eve and Pandora myths of "fallen" women. Eve's downfall resulted from her insistence on "words" with which to express herself, while Pandora was damned for opening a box that let evil loose on the world. Pandora/Eve is condemned not only for searching for personal articulation, but also for sexual articulation as Pandora's "box" is linked both to womb and clitoris. The final phrase mirrors Warland's construction of the text as a whole, as it spirals back to the Adam/Eve myth, presenting alternate viewpoints throughout this first "Turn." All in all, there are eight 'turns' in the text, and each turn works with language to disrupt this Adam and Eve mythology and the cultural inadequacies it represents.

For Warland, this language exploration is achieved through numerous spatial and graphic techniques, such as her frequent use of textual whitespace. As Donna Smyth notes, these spaces, "between the lines, between the letter" are "sources of resonance":

(we are here)

(an open mouth) (57)

Thus, for Warland, as with other lesbian feminist writers, the 'mouth' implies not only the mouth with which we talk, eat and touch, but also the vagina, an aperture that also metaphorically 'talks', 'eats', and 'touches', most subversively when it is in contact with other women. What has been driven from women for so long, this expression in language and words, is now being re-discovered and explored; for Warland, this mapping is taking place within the context of lesbian presence and utopian-figured desire.

In the opening poem of *Serpent (W)rite*, two women are making love, but with the repetition of the vowels "a e i o u" the sense is that it is on a pre-linguistic level of articulation. Through the undulating motion of the lines, the warm sense of merging is characterized by "we lose ourselves in each other," a reference to loss of individual ego boundaries. They deliberately accept their exclusion from the dominant heterosexual space: "accept our condition/give up the Garden/ *leu-forlorn, analysis, catalysis, paralysis/ soluble, assoil, resolve*"(2). In the aftermath, the poet/speaker recognizes she is lost or separate from the male-dominated world ("the Garden") of patriarchal assumptions ("analysis, catalysis, paralysis") which assume her lesbianism to be a deviant "condition." Although the place she has literally and figuratively come to has "landmarks," these are "now seen/through different eyes" as her lesbian experience has marked her. Yet, this is a place of beginning, of initial confirmation; when "confronted with how lost we are," she and others begin to express this difference; they "resolve to make this place home." Phelan describes this need for community as one which "extends through time as well as space"(143). She quotes Alasdair MacIntyre as saying "the possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide"(143). It is therefore necessary for

lesbian feminists to view themselves as stemming from an historical as well as cultural context, in order to fully affirm their lesbian social identity.

By the final "turn" of the text, Warland has spiralled back to its beginning site, but from the new vantage point of having discovered a language with which to articulate it:

we are open circle
word without end
a well-come
break down in communication
breg-, *suffrage* + *down*, *from the hill*

over the hill
we are the split subject
split, slit, slot
hollow between the breasts
no longer divided against our / selves
are the subject of two mouths
which now *face*, *form*
words of our own
prefix and suffix in dialogue
no longer waiting to be heard
no longer eating our hearts out
my word!
eating pussy
 cat got my tongue
we make love in the company of four

two Eves four mouths
refuse, *refundere*, *to pour back*

the scense of opposition
dis-cover
 language, lingua, tongue
has many sides
dialects,
a variety of languages that with other varieties
constitutes a single language of which no single
variety is standard (136-137)

Here Warland refuses the polarity of patriarchal discourse by speaking of exchange and inter-connection, of "prefix and suffix in dialogue." Rather than the closure of heterosexual opposition, these lovbers are "no longer divided against our/selves," but are

dynamic and ongoing, "word without end" as they "make love in the company of four...two Eves four mouths." Like Mouré and Marlatt, Warland's exploratory discourse "has many sides" and refuses to reify itself in a prescriptive "standard," but instead insists on the mutuality of differences, of "speaking in tongues" that informs lesbian "dialects."

iii.

It is important to note that lesbian feminist collaborative work is quite different from more traditional literary collaborations. Lorraine York argues in her paper "Lesbianizing Authorship" that traditional works "tend to keep individual ownership of particular poems or literary methods intact"(155), pointing to the most obvious example as Wordsworth and Coleridge's Lyrical Ballads (1798). As Wordsworth was careful to later "reinscribe the map of individual authorship-ownership of poems and even lines of poems," in the "famed Romantic collaboration," the "language of conjunction quickly cedes to the language of separation"(156). For Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland, the process of collaboration involves a specific and subversive political aim: rather than merging their voices in a seamless unity, they hope to celebrate the contrasts and differences that each brings to the text in a collaboration of sexual/textual reciprocity. Through the multi-layered forms, content, and implications of their collaborative texts, they disrupt conventional notions of singular author-ity, engaging instead in an open and creative conversation with each other, with the feminist community through their inter/intra-textual citations, and with the reader. Their deliberate act of sharing their explorations of language and their interaction together provides an alternate model for creativity and extends the collaboration beyond the text itself.

It must be noted that Two Women in a Birth is essentially a re-printing of various works by Marlatt and Warland, both separately and together.²² It is comprised of Marlatt's Touch To My Tongue(1984), Warland's Open Is Broken(1984), and their collaborative Double Negative(1988), "Reading and Writing Between the Lines,"(1988) and "Subject to Change,"(1991) all of which had been previously published. The mode of

collaboration has changed from the publication of Open and Touch through to Double Negative and Two Women In A Birth. The first two were written in tandem but separately; Double Negative comprised a mixture of poems and whole sections written together or in conversation with each other; by the final section of Two Women, the collaborative lens has narrowed to involve each poet writing alternate lines and phrases. As I have already discussed the first two of these, it is the last three that I would like to focus my inquiry on.

In Double Negative, Marlatt and Warland record their poetic impressions while on a train ride through the outback of Australia, and in retrospect after their return to Canada. The text comprises three sections, divided with negative collages by Cheryl Sourkes. The first, entitled "Double Negative," involves a series of poems recording the trip in journal-like fashion; the second section, "Crossing Loop," was written after they returned to Canada and explores in dialogue format the constraints they felt during the trip; the third section, entitled "Real 2" involves a series of poems, each one based on a line taken from the other poet's poems in the "Double Negative." Double Negative was Marlatt and Warland's first text to be published under both names, yet within the first and third sections, the individual writers are not identified.

Mouré remarks in her review of Double Negative that "the modalities of style speak loudly"(68), yet I believe the average reader would need to be very cognizant of each writer's specific style in order to distinguish between them. This also assumes that the poems were written in isolation from each other; in fact, Marlatt "recalls the act of composition as being one of handing the notebook back and forth, a collaborative alternation in which the two women each wrote half the poems in the various sections"(Carr 1990, 112). Carr describes the "resulting textual weave" as a "cat's cradle" of "intratextual resonances [criss-crossing] between and within the lyric section, the prose poem section, and the 'Crossing-Loop' dialogue"(Carr 1990,112). The couple speak of this collaboration as "not simply a working together there are challenges backings up

required words we graft from each other's text that can't be later edited out" ("Reading and Writing Between the Lines" 139).

This intense form of poetic collaboration is paralleled with the section entitled "Crossing Loop," which Carr explains is "the Australian term for the side spur where trains wait for other trains to pass...now reframed as a textual waiting place, a place of digression where the text loops back on itself, re-reads itself"(112). Even as it reflects on the actual process of production and questions each poet's creative and editorial choices, this section functions self-reflexively to engage the theory within the text while also specifically pointing to its acts of construction. Collaboration is heightened as the discussion is truly "fed" from one to the other, the contribution of each being noted by "D" or "B." Like any two writers, they are not always in agreement, but can learn and differ creatively from each other. For example, Marlatt questions whether "the cyclical nature of female orgasm" can effectively be communicated within the metaphor of the off-phallicized, unidirectional train, while Warland seems to believe so, contending that for her, the tracks represent an umbilical cord of

continuous dependency on the earth which we're never really cut free from. Also, the train is constantly starting and stopping, departing and arriving, coming and waiting at crossing loops and in that sense it's cyclical [as rhythm is cycling back repeating itself, the rhythm of our movement everything].(108)

Thus, although Marlatt and Warland may be collaborating in an effort to diffuse author-centrality, their individual perceptions and sources of inspiration are still prominent within the text. Rather than become an undifferentiated "we," the text has become a shared space for "i+i" to work within, allowing for, and learning from differences of experience, of opinion, of creativity. This is crucial, for as Yorke notes, "lesbianizing collaboration that erases the "i/I" completely would not be anti-capitalist at all, but hierarchical"(164). Even as Marlatt and Warland share a commonality in their lesbian-

identity, this identity cannot "be assumed to signify a homogeneity." As well as this particular positionality, they also bring individual variables of class, culture, experience, and ethnicity to the overall identity. Individual differences are still hinted at within the collaborative structure, enough so, that dangers of domination or hierarchizing are possibly offset; it is this divergence which in the end proves the most productive, allowing for interplay and response.

As a critique of the socio-economic assumptions of publishing and advertising, a collaborative attempt like Double Negative succeeds. Yorke feels that collaboration can disrupt "the notion of writing as an individual mode of production" and revise "our very understanding of the subject-object relation in art"(157). Collaboration is not a stable concept, for it "exists on a continuum," with varying degrees of orientation to author-abdication(154). This can be seen within the structure of Double Negative itself, where certain sections like "Crossing-Loop" clearly mark voice, while others do not.

In Two Women in a Birth, this collaborative process has become more fully integrated by "Reading and Writing Between the Lines," a fiction/theory collaboration. Here again the individual sections and pieces are not identified by author, although the mentions of "ground rules, how i can revise me but not you" and "words we graft from each other's texts" implies that there is, at some level, a separation in the 'ownership' of words, of pieces, as well as a self-reflexivity concerning the collaboration process itself.

In her review "Virtual Author," Mouré questions the 'construction' of a collaborative voice that refuses "the public level of authorship," wondering "are we really... breaking down the individual author or just creating a "virtual" author for public view?"(70). However, Mouré's definition of a lesbian feminist collaboration may be too reductive; it is not 'simply' this disruption of a singular author, but rather a displacing of the centrality of that author. As the text remarks there is a certain "military censure" implied in the term collaboration, that bespeaks "subversion" or the subsuming of one voice within another. Instead, the text refers to Mariatt and Warland as "working together

reciprocally" to subvert "the definitive" author (133). Rather than an homogeneous "we," there is "i+i. starting off on different sides (of the same coin), tossing our idiosyncratic perceptions into the ring" (Two Women165).

As an example of lesbian aesthetics, Two Women in a Birth figures lesbianism textually. York argues, "collaboration exists on a continuum" that "does not erase difference and distinction; it highlights them"(154). Touch To My Tongue and Open is Broken are dedicated to each other, even as Double Negative is dedicated to Nicole Brossard and Jane Rule, both of whom have been highly influential in creating a lesbian space for presence and desire. Like Mouré, Marlatt and Warland are deliberate in their quotations and citations of others' works that have often been the forerunners for their own texts. They are foregrounding the literary community and genealogy of lesbians that have collectively aided in the authorship of this text. By emphasizing this intertextuality, Two Women in a Birth achieves multiple layers of collaboration through the two (present) authors and the history surrounding them within the lesbian literary community. Also, the collaboration becomes a collaboration of genre and media, as the original text includes negative collages by Cheryl Soukes, poetry, prose, and dialogue, in an intermingling of theory and practice. Thirdly, as an experimental, or 'language-centred' work, the text emphasizes the "collaboration" of multiple word origins and connotations. As York points out, their "poetry typically unearths word derivations in order to "remother" the word"(162):

yet the urge is to gather as a wave to the sea
handwriting waving as eye passes through
like all those children on backyard fences
sentences as waves
o contractions ("she didn't say nothing")
of double negatives TRAIN: "tragh-, contract"
o contractions from a small room

2 of/de 2

PM-1 3½"x4" PHOTOGRAPHIC MICROCOPY TARGET
NBS 1010a ANSI/ISO #2 EQUIVALENT

PRECISIONSM RESOLUTION TARGETS

the shutter opening and closing (DN 97)

Here, as elsewhere, the sexual/textual format intermingles the 'reality' of the outside world, "children on backyard fences," with the inner world of memory. These memories are comprised not just of remembered images ("from a small room") and conversations ("she didn't say nothing"), but also of remembered sensations and feelings within the body itself ("o contractions"). The puns on both the sound and the connotations of room/womb thicken the possibilities for interpretation. The multiple and simultaneous nature of the "real" becomes evident, nuanced as it is through gendered experience and memory, and always changing perspective.

This issue of multi-faceted 'reality' is addressed in the final section of Two Women In A Birth, "Subject to Change." As Marlatt and Warland noted in the introduction to the first publication of this piece in the Capilano Review (and not included in Two Women), various problematic issues "of merging, loss of identity, the ownership of words...surface in the decision about whether to identify our individual entries or not"(75). The reality of collaboration becomes the process of construction, the groundrules that went into the makeup. Although this, at first, seems too prescriptive, such conditional premises disrupt assumptions of lyric, "muse-inspired" impulsive creation. As Marlatt and Warland describe it,

the plan was (does anything ever go completely to plan?) to write for a half-hour stretch each morning for five days, then shift to alternating sentences in a joint paragraph, and end with alternate, individually-authored paragraphs. as we began the first phase, b.w. suggested that in addition to the poem we keep notes on the side of the page documenting everything marginal to the text (what we said to each other, our actions, etc.) the difference in language was startling, and most days our notes far exceeded our lines in the space they took up. we have edited these marginal notes considerably. keeping everything in seemed too digressive, nor was everything recorded, so a certain amount of selectivity was there from the beginning. the rest of the collaboration has been edited very little.(74)

The difference in this section in comparison to the separately-written Touch to My Tongue and Open is Broken and even to some extent Double Negative, is the interplay and dynamic process that becomes apparent as the text unfolds. The structure of the page itself disrupts our assumptions of poetic genre and form, highlighting conventions of public and private space. Primarily, the inclusion of the notes on the right-hand side allow the reader a peek into the process of collaboration, no matter how edited this process eventually becomes. The poetic text becomes merged with the documentary text, as is notable in the journal-like poem entitled, "March 5":

<p><i>not that precedence is everything</i> <i>we are always in response to</i> <i>light on the table, these drooping</i> <i>tulips,</i> <i>open onto death</i> <i>illuminated feathers</i> <i>drifting</i> <i>down</i> <i>the dance of talons, hopping</i> <i>wing spread</i> <i>always in response to</i> <i>our hunger</i> <i>fear</i> <i>desire</i></p>	<p>there's an immature eagle on that tree, defeathering its catch [chair falls over as D. gets up to see] you'd be great at bird watching! <i>wonder what it's got?</i> a bird - probably a duck, i first noticed the feathers flying</p>
--	--

Here, the poem is in the act of playing with ideas of precedence and response, when, as Warland notices an eagle outside, defeathering its catch, the drift shifts to images of "illuminated feathers" and "the dance of talons".²² As the title of the section notes, their feminist project is "changing the subject," and yet this "subject is always subject to change"(91). This becomes even more metaphorically evident as they realize that what was at first perceived as an "immature eagle" defeathering a "duck" becomes a "red-tailed hawk" and a "crow." This parallels their realization that even as the reader constructs the meaning within the text, so too does their perception of reality change. As each poet wrote one line or phrase of the poem, her 'intended' meaning or reality for this line became

challenged or changed depending on how the other poet viewed it and subsequently added to it. Even as one might have trouble reading the other's handwriting ("what's this? **reed**. r-e-a-d? **r-e-e-d**" 151), the other might feel

that's the end!

no, I don't agree - we haven't done half an hour

otherwise we'll say too much - that makes a nice shape right there

i don't feel finished (153)

Eventually, this disintegrates into "a heated argument" that was "partly occasioned by discomfort with the documenting, partly by issues of communication, and largely by our own very different writing processes"(74). The compelling passion of this collaboration is described as "breathtaking, when thought leaps the gap" between the two individuals (91). Yet this same passion can become mildly disruptive of the collaborative process as the habits and conditioning of individual egos and centrality "vie...when up against the wall"(90).

As one poet wonders "will she see what i mean," she simultaneously reflects "does it matter if it means something else to her?"(90). Marlatt and Warland thus note residual traces of their own ingrained assumptions of "singular, authorial meaning," unmasking and interrogating these assumptions within the ongoing fiction/theory of collaboration. In her review of Two Women in a Birth, Erin Mouré feels that with this admission of disagreement, "the seamlessness of the poetic texts, of the double negative, the fused author, is broken, brakes, breaks, wobbles, tears"(70). She contends that the "veil" of one author is torn apart, that "there are two women here; their presences exceed the unitary "birth"(70). However, Marlatt and Warland have never professed to being one unitary author; indeed, they have insisted on the possibility of collaboration as a reciprocal process, that allows for difference and dynamic change. Through their collaboration they have attempted to disrupt the idea of a central, monologic author, yet their own individual

writing styles, experiences and perceptions have been visible, in one form or another, throughout.

The sidenotes to "Subject to Change" map the course of the disagreement that occurs between Marlatt and Warland. Mouré feels that disruption in the collaborative effort is inevitable "when the individual's need for feedback is denied"(70), yet the sense that I had on reading this was that this disagreement was just as much a part of the collaborative effort as the earlier concurrences. Marlatt and Warland were exploring their own feelings and assumptions concerning the production of poetry, both individually and collaboratively. For two highly individualistic poets, the collaborative process inevitably triggers the culturally-ingrained temptation to feel that the other is "mis-reading" their own material. This notion of mis-reading evolves from a concept of "singular reality" and is deeply connected to the centrality of this notion. The power dynamics strung between what has been socio-culturally imbued and what is now being explored, involve "old habits that die hard"(92). The text notes that this disruptive process "exposed our collaboration to also be a form of mediation"; furthermore, "letting go of the notion of misreading is dependent upon our knowing the difference"(90-92). The conclusion that Marlatt and Warland reach involves imagining a dynamic interplay between subject and object, "so that the object transforms into subject and back again. i being part of (i)t"(93). Again, although the "i" is part of the collaboration, it is still a distinctive part, literally offset by parentheses within "it". With a tongue-in-cheek warning against prescriptiveness ("so far this isn't a very lesbian poem" 79), the collaboration ends with a statement of united plurality and mobility, "we are not the same, not one, sitting side by side, **sam**, together. not is where desire enters...." This "not" space becomes the space for a celebration of difference and lesbian desire as "each the other to each in our reach together" seems a fitting place both for ending and beginning (94).

Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland's Two Women in a Birth both develops and explores the possibilities of lesbian feminist collaboration. Fulfilling aesthetics of women-

identified mutuality and plurality, the text evokes strategies of voice and multiplicity, even as it explores the issues of power structures and 'authorship'. As a primary model of collaboration, the text literally and figuratively probes problematic questions such as the 'ownership' of various pieces and the extent to which 'mutual' creativity rather than simultaneous, yet individual creation occurred. Two Women in a Birth succeeds in exploring how collaborative possibilities can be multiplied and limitations investigated and overcome.

Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland disrupt conventional notions of author-ity through their collaborative works, displacing the singular speaking subject in an ongoing literary conversation of reciprocity. Their poetry sexually/textually inscribes and merges their shared commonalities as lesbian feminists while simultaneously witnessing their differing backgrounds, experiences, and individual positionalities. As fiction/theory, Marlatt and Warland's texts offer themselves to the readers, attempting to further extend the collaborative project, enlarging the "we" to share in the joy of community, legitimation, and acknowledgement of difference. Most importantly, their texts are a living example of how to share these differences within a productive, creative literary project.

IV

Connecting Conclusions

then what i see us working together reciprocally, then what i see us working at is this subversion of the definitive. running on together (how I love prose), reciprocal in this, that the holes we make in such a definite body leak meaning we splash each other with, not so much working as playing in all this super-fluity, wetting ourselves with delight even, whetting our tongues, a mutual stimulation we aid and abet (entice) in each other.

D. Marlatt and B. Warland, "Reading and Writing Between the Lines"

Feminist literary collaboration exists on a continuum; its parameters are moveable, porous and overlapping, as the concerns of its contributors shift nuances and tone. Erin Mouré, Daphne Marlatt, and Betsy Warland all attempt to disrupt and to re-construct dominant systems of reality through experimental language strategies and collaboration. Having each experienced varying degrees of marginalization through their shared positionalities as lesbians and women, Mouré, Marlatt, and Warland, return to the sites of their social identities for exploration and exposure of dominant ideologies through their poetry. Although there are many links to be found between their poetic styles and aesthetics, their focus on collaborative techniques is most compelling both for its range of deconstruction of perceived author-ial roles and for its open-ended invitation to the reader to become an active participant in the multi-layered collaboration.

Mouré's collaborative efforts are envisioned through her relational poetics that situates itself, guerilla-like, within existing literary genres and socio-cultural spaces. Her positioning within these spaces is a deliberate move to provoke their enlarging and extension for an awareness of difference-accountable politics. Mouré is keenly aware of

the poet's responsibility as a poetic witness to society's injustices, yet she also recognizes the risk of maintaining these structures through unquestioned language. Her poetry repeatedly engages the reader in a significant ongoing dialogue that reconstructs inherited forms of the lyric and the romantic love poem. She also invokes reader involvement through collaborating strategies of inter/intra-textuality and collage aesthetics, which highlight the ongoing conversation within the feminist community and within civic space at large. Mouré's relational poetics foregrounds reciprocity and mutuality, while concurrently pinpointing differences due to privileges of race, class, gender, and/or sexuality. Her specific emphasis on class issues moves in interesting and provocative contradiction with her deliberate refusal of 'easy,' accessible language; her use of language-writing strategies to disrupt dominant assumptions, ensures an intricate manipulation of language at its most basic elements and in its most conventional forms. However, Mouré's poetry is made much less intimidating by her wry humour; the complicitous laughter that her poetry evokes enables a continuum of reader/writer/text collaboration to emerge, one which refuses patriarchal polarities and strictures.

Daphne Marlatt evokes multiple realities through her provocative overlapping and interweaving of elements of language. Her strategies of etymology, punning, revisionary mythmaking, and autobiographical life-writing displace conventional literary forms and expectations. She explores how the self is constituted through experiences, positionalities, and the compounded aspects of memory: word memory, narrative memory, personal memory, and physical memory. Through her language play, she deliberately engages prescribed roles of gender and sexuality, lyrically displacing received myths of mother/daughter relations and re-casting them in more mutual, reciprocal open-ended possibilities. Marlatt's revisionary mythmaking foregrounds a feminist non-linear and cyclical aesthetics and philosophy; displacing expectations of patriarchal closure and "the ending of things," Marlatt's transformative poetics celebrates a continual birth/death/re-birth cycle. This manifests in her poetry as a spiral account of healing into acceptance of

loss and renewal. She layers the meaning of "mother," exploring the overlapping questions of her own mother's life and death and, in the process, re-visions a mythological Mother, embodied within a mothertongue of endless possibilities and pluralities. Marlatt further evokes collaborative resonances between these multiple layers of exploration by inviting her loved one to join her in creative sexual/textual partnership, and extending an invitation to the reader to share the warmth and inclusion of this strategy.

Betsy Warland delves through language roots in order to expose myriad and overlapping weavings of meaning and connotation. Through her language explorations, she engages gender and sexual identities, displacing their prescriptive limitations and highlighting the dynamic plausibilities they possess. Like Mouré and Marlatt, Warland crafts her poetry in order to foreground the carefully strung web of connections that molds social and cultural systems. Re-weaving this texture, she inscribes it with collaborative aesthetics and strategies, multiplying the possibilities for interpretation and feathering its depths with an ethics of inclusion that recognizes difference and mutuality. Like Mouré and Marlatt, Warland courageously merges the personal with the political, situating her private life within the public space of the text and extending this sexual/textual collaboration to the reader. Her texts embody collaboration through their intertextual citations, eulogizing the community of feminists within which she is an active co-participant.

Marlatt and Warland further strive to embody collaboration in their mutual texts, communicating their sexual/textual partnership within a literary forum that celebrates their differences. With their varying emphases on etymology and language punning, they also engender a collaboration between elements of language itself that foregrounds the multiplicity of perceived possible meanings. Their collage aesthetics, which includes genre-crossing and is further hybridized through the praxis of fiction/theory, multiplies the possibilities of representation and articulation. This plurality is profoundly affected by the

recognition and celebration of differences, as they strive to make of their texts an ongoing collaboration that is extended, in turn, to the reader.

As a strategic manoeuvre for disruption of patriarchal hierarchies and binaries, feminist collaboration has many resonating facets, showing multiple and simultaneous sides. The possibility of textually inscribing female identity and lesbian sexuality allows this subjectivity to exist on a continuum where further interplay and meaning production are continually possible, through the active engagement and collaborative implication of the reader. The multiple subversive challenges of lesbian feminist collaboration exist as a critique and an alternative to phallogocentric systems, spinning threads of dynamic relation between languages old and new, mythological structures of thought, and between genres of writing itself. When viewed as a writing in the process of discovery, feminist language strategies remain in constant dynamic collaboration with this writing. They invite a more mutual, dialogic, and productive space for sharing, that avoids reification and prescription through its continual self-interrogation, renewal and change. Feminist literary collaboration is a journey that involves multiple directions, spiralling returns and overlapping concerns and questions; neverending, the maps of this journey are courageously offered to the reader, in an invitation to share the process of ongoing joy in exploration.

held fast by the womeworld...finally present (threshold to dreaming,
creation, spiritual vision) "i too became lost in the net and the boundaries
of myself stretched out for ever" where all points of view converge where
eyes close signalling bodies to trust the turning as we float off the page held
tender & fierce in our terrifying difference

D. Marlatt and B. Warland, Double Negative

O age in which
 words, these words are our
 prayers. These are prayers. These lift us. These. These.
 These wings.

these these

these

these

these

these

these

these lift us...
these (w'ings)

E. Mouré, Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love

Notes

1 It is crucial to note that the strategy of fiction/theory is only one of a number of legitimate strategies in Canadian literary feminisms: as an experimental, deconstructive approach, fiction/theory has provoked much debate for both its usage and its range of definition. For those feminists who feel that patriarchal language systems do not address their lived reality, acknowledging and legitimating their concerns, the need to experiment in language is often a heartfelt strategy for survival. There thus exists a specific type of feminist reader who is compelled by and through experimental writing, finding it both challenging and energizing. As I count myself among this group, I find myself invited to explore the parametres of language writing and its attraction as a feminist collaborative mode.

2 The Book of Jessica is an excellent example of problematic collaboration. Although its two authors, Métis writer Maria Campbell and white actress Linda Griffiths, are both noted on its cover, The Book of Jessica raises many pertinent questions of privilege, appropriation, and authorship.

3 For further discussion of "fiction/theory" or *écriture au féminine*, please see articles such as France Théoret's "Writing in the Feminine," the "Fiction/Theory: Editorial" from Tessera 3, Brossard's "Poetic Politics," Lynn Worsham's "Writing Against Writing," Lianne Moyes "Into the Fray: Literary Studies at the Juncture of Feminist Fiction/Theory," Marianne DeKoven's "Male Signature, Female Aesthetic," Godard's "Writing and Difference," and her "Theorizing Fiction Theory". See also, Neuman and Kambourelli's A Mazing Space and Williamson's Sounding Differences.

4 It is important to note that many critics have viewed *écriture féminine* in a negative light, as it seems to posit an essentially feminine form of writing based on gender and female biological forms. This is nuanced by Cixous' concept of 'bisexualité' which asserts that *écriture féminine* can appeal to those aspects within men and women both,

which are socially and politically construed as "feminine" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 254-260). Such a diversification negates any binomial categorization of male/female by positing interplay and inter-connection in the spaces between the two, and offers a potential for "plural sexualities that multiplies differences" (Gelfand 48). For further discussion of this question please see DeKoven and Diana Fuss' Essentially Speaking (Routledge 1989).

5 For a more complete discussion of the aesthetics of contemporary responses to the lyric, please consult Aleshire's "Defense of the Lyric," the lyric entry in New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, Lyric texts and Lyric Consciousness, Perloff's "Postmodernism and the Impasse of Lyric," and Friedman's "Craving Stories."

6 This point is shared by poets other than those who identify as Language poets, such as Forché herself and those who work with a poetry of testimony or witness, lifewriting and autobiography, work writing and other investments which are fundamentally based on the desire to raise awareness of or to enact political change.

7 Please see Barthes, Walker, Miller, Kaplan, and Phelan's Identity Politics (chapter seven), along with Burke's The Death and Return of the Author.

8 As Selden and Widdowson point out, the term "French feminist criticism" is problematic for several reasons. Primarily, it denotes a national categorization which does not truly encompass the range of writers and theorists operating within this discourse. Secondly, it "seems to exclude feminist critical output from anywhere else," particularly Third World contributors. Lastly, it "reifies too simple a binary opposition suppressing at once the vast diversity of practises within both [the Anglo-American and French] movements, the recognition by many critics of the problems and possibilities of both schools and the fact...that interaction and interchange are precisely the dynamic engine of feminist criticism"(213). However, as the term itself has been widely accepted, for the purposes of this paper, I will continue to use it, with the express understanding that it is necessary to point out its problematic implications.

9 Although this quotation has a separatist slant, I use it as an example of what I believe feminists are turning away from, as they attempt to negotiate socio-political freedom from patriarchal constraints. This includes the possibility of basing this "personal freedom," as the OED defines autonomy, on further nuances of gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality.

10 It is necessary to acknowledge that there are definite non-feminist precursors to the concept of genre-crossing texts and practices. Barthes wrote that the text "cannot be contained in a hierarchy, even in a simple division of genres," for to do so places limits on its ability to communicate(1007). He also spoke of the plurality of meanings that are possible within a text as "the very plural of meaning: an irreducible (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing"(1007).

11 There are a number of women writers who do not identify with these strategies, and may actually resent their tendencies to homogenize feminist literary strategies. Please see Paulette Jiles' "Third Force Feminism."

12 There is an ongoing debate within feminist circles concerning feminist theory and its main concentration on deconstructing language. Much of the debate centres around the concept of theoretical discourse (often mistakenly conflated with 'academic' discourse) as practical and accessible to a larger feminist activist community. Jane Casey criticizes academic discourse, not because it is "too intellectual or too theoretical, but rather [because] the highly specialized language they use precludes the possibility for dialogue among a wide base of feminist readers". Pamela Banting speaks to this in "S(m)other Tongue," when she notes that Casey mistakenly assumes that "the vocabulary of theory can always be translated into less complex, less exclusionary, less educated, less theoretical terms...What is this, to use Jane's word, "authentic" target language into and through which the, by implication, inauthentic source language of theoretical research should be translated and disseminated?"(171-172). Please see Mouré and Bronwen

Wallace's Two Women Talking for an important, yet unresolved discussion of this issue, as well as articles such as Colin Morton's "Let's do keep going!," Rhea Tregebov's "Corrections and Re/Visions," Kambourelli's "Theory: Beauty or Beast" and Banting's "(S)mother Tongue?".

13 I find it intriguing that in regard to Mouré's argument for the preposition as "the woman's sign," (essentialist connotations aside), Marlatt has deliberately and provocatively excluded the preposition from the title of her text How Hug A Stone.

14 Mouré speaks to issues of class in her review of Marlatt and Warland's collaborative Two Women in a Birth. She criticizes them for what she feels is the creation of a privileged "utopic space...because it is not all classes of women that can turn from the intrusion and pain of the world"(70). This seems to be a contradiction, as she has earlier exemplified the cause of work writing that "every job has importance"(see 15, below). Mouré does not seem to take into account the years of developing and work that entered into this collection of texts by both Marlatt and Warland. The intertextual citations, the dialogues and collaborative techniques are marks of Marlatt and Warland's commitment to each other and to the feminist community at large, to develop and expand feminist efforts; they should not be criticized (in this fashion) for their attempts. In effect, it would seem that Mouré is criticizing their "utopic" space for the "luxury" of writing to and for each other and for courageously attempting to share this space with their audience.

15 Much of Mouré's earlier writing (Empire, York Street, Wanted Alive, and Domestic Fuel) was characterised as work writing because her class concerns were contiguous with Tom Wayman's aesthetic of work writing, "...that every job has importance in society and that whoever does that work is an expert concerning the value of this work and how this work affects individual and community existence. Therefore each of us has the right to speak out and be listened to, irrespective of financial status"(1995, 164). However, I believe Mouré's burgeoning lesbian feminist viewpoint has diversified her concerns, leading her beyond the "point of view" of work writing. For

example, Wayman exposes his rather narrow, heterosexist assumptions, stating that "consumerism and the subjects of love, death and nature are all safe subjects which will not shake up the social fabric"(1995, 168). Mouré's sexual/textual explorations have led her far beyond and through these assumptions. Wayman writes that the consensus at "After the Shift," (following the Split Shift Colloquium on work writing of 1986) was that "work writing is essentially a point of view affecting whatever an author writes: the belief in work's importance because of its effect on our lives"(165). However, although Mouré certainly validates this, her emphasis has now shifted to include the importance of how daily life is filtered through perceptions of gender, and perhaps most particularly, sexuality.

16 Please see Louis Montrose's "New Historicisms" for a discussion of "subversion/containment" which probes the problematics of ideology and resistance. Montrose feels the terms have become too "widely established" without the critical questioning that should accompany them: "the binary logic of subversion-containment produces a closed conceptual structure of reciprocally defining and dependent terms, terms that are complementary and mutually complicit"(402). I feel there is still a strong argument to be made for the need to rigidly question both form and content, surface and subtext, as any one of these risks becoming reified within dominant expectations, thus maintaining dominant hierarchies of power and complicity. None of these can ever be totally implicated in dominant forms of containment, as indicated by Foucault's argument for multiple sites of power and its Siamese twin, resistance. Power itself would thus seem to exist on a continuum of "variable configuration, intensity, and effectiveness," and thus must be exposed and interrogated whenever possible (403).

17 For further discussion of the lyric apostrophe, please see Brenda Carr's "Genre Theory and the Impasse of Lyric?" and Jonathan Culler's "Apostrophe" and "Changes in the Study of the Lyric."

18 Please see Chapter 1, sections i and ii of this thesis for an overview of postmodernist aims, as exemplified by the objectives of Language writers and French feminists.

19 Williamson compares the cross-genre format of fiction/theory, which creates dialogue within Marlatt's text "in direct and indirect ways," with Mouré's "The Acts" which, she says "reflects on and interrupts the poetry of "Pure Reason"(177). However, Mouré's "The Acts" is not simply a "prose section" in separation from the poems, but Mouré's poetic aesthetic; "Pure Reason" is incorporated within her fiction/theory arguments, and is not a separate poem. "The Acts" "reflects on" Mouré's writing strategies, working simultaneously as footnotes and glossary, and alternative prose section. Within its own structure, it begins as a theoretical exposition, but gradually writes its way into prose-poem format. As Mouré herself notes, "at the end of writing they'd started to turn back into poems anyway; that's when I knew I was finished writing "The Acts"("Can't We Talk About..." 79).

20 This would seem to be in sharp contrast to Mouré. Please see the epigraph to Chapter II.

21 Yet, this mapping is left open: the text has no published page numbers, and I have had to rely on the helpful graffiti of an earlier library-borrower in order to cite these poems by page reference. This highlights quite interesting elements of active reader involvement with the text and palimpsestic over-writing.

22 The title itself has several layers of possible meaning. It is a direct quote from the poem "coming into Port Pirie"(Double Negative 88), which exposes heterosexist patriarchal assumptions,

negative feminine space

walking into the diner

"are you ladies alone"

"no"

"we're together"

.....

two women in a birth (DN 20-21)

The title also suggests the pro-creativity of giving birth to a text (and displaces assumptions of individual "mothering"), this particular text being the first to which they have both openly ascribed their names. The lesbian sexual/textual overtones are also implicit throughout the poems which speak of this exploration of their relationship through various puns on the words 'birth' and 'berth'.

23 The reader understands it to be Warland who makes the observation, as the text notes that it is "D" who noisily knocks a chair over as she "gets up to see". Warland then wryly observes the Marlatt would "be great at bird watching!".

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