NEGOTIATING PLACE: EXPLORATIONS OF IDENTITY AND NATURE IN SELECT NOVELS BY CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN WOMEN WRITERS

by

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This work is dedicated to my father, Hec Wallace (1921-1985), in loving memory.
Thank you, Dad, for fostering in me a love of reading and of nature,
and for always encouraging me to "question deeper."

"Dee," August 1999

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Abstract

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir made the important observation that "Woman" is perceived as an "Other" to "Man," who is taken to be the universal subject or "Self." In addition, working within a dualistic framework, she posited that the concept of "Nature" is also constructed as Other to the Self, in which case, Woman is seen as closer to Nature than Man, while Man is seen as part of the world of Culture. This association of Woman with Nature has, ironically, perhaps, systematically denied women a "place" in the world of Man, as well as a means of expressing this displacement. Many contemporary feminists, most notably the "French feminists" such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, challenge de Beauvoir's solution, which was for women to embrace male subjectivity in order to become an active "subject" while sundering the woman-nature connection. These feminists, as well as certain ecological feminists, suggest that it is the dualistic conceptual framework that is problematic because it allows for the domination and exploitation of women, racial "others," and the non-human world of nature. By demonstrating how the oppositional categories such as man/woman, culture/nature, subject/object and self/other are constructed, primarily through language and figuration, such feminists point to a means for women to challenge long-standing representations of women and nature and, in the process, attain active agency and the ability for self-representation through narrative. Most importantly, they point to an analogy between a dualistic concept of subjectivity and the culture/nature dichotomy, suggesting that any attempt at challenging and reconfiguring subjectivity as a whole must necessarily call into question the function of the culture/nature dichotomy in the displacement of "others." In my thesis, I explore this dynamic through close readings of select novels by contemporary Canadian women writers. Specifically, I examine the representations of non-human nature and landscape in their novels, and the respective characters' engagement with place in order to question how these writers interrogate alterity, subjectivity and the culture/nature dichotomy.

The novels in this study include: Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*, and Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*. Each of these texts is notable for its engagement with place, landscape, and non-human nature in relationship to the human characters portrayed. The three novels in this study depict often intimate engagements with "place," with place encompassing the interaction of the body with the non-human world, and a relational sense of self. Significantly, non-human "nature" and landscape play important roles in these inter-dynamic explorations of self-identity. In their investigations of "identity" and "nature," they take steps towards new imaginings of place and self, in part through deconstructive interrogations of history and the colonial legacy in Canada. The idea of "place" and "self" is integral to these questionings, revealing a concept of both as formed by a multiplicity of discourses and a sense of history that is palimpsestic. In exploring the intersection of subjectivity and the culture/nature dichotomy as it emerges in these texts, I argue that each of these women disrupts the dichotomies of self/other and culture/nature without embracing (white) "male" subjectivity, or continuing a devaluation of non-human "nature." Their texts, in fact, offer a wide range of strategies for disrupting binary oppositions, and, as a result, they recuperate and affirm those terms that have been traditionally associated with "Woman," while, at the same time, destabilizing the fixed categories of "Woman" and "nature."

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Introduction

> Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. (Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" 35)

> In the explorations of memory and place lie unsolved murders; in the multiple dissensions of distance and time, certain conditions prevail. The world admits deserts and islands, but no women. (Aritha Van Herk, *Places Far From Ellesmere*)

The epigraph from Aritha Van Herk's novel, *Places Far From Ellesmere*, points to a compelling dilemma in feminist theory; that is, how the association of woman with nature has (ironically, perhaps) denied woman a "place" in the world, as well as a means of expressing this displacement. This "world" is, however, not truly the "natural" world, but one constructed discursively through such fields as philosophy, history, science, and, importantly, literature. As feminists have pointed out, this world has been constructed largely from the male perspective and has created a false dichotomy between nature and culture, or a "natural world" and a "world of men." Woman, in the latter world, is apprehended as an "Other," and thus is denied the role of active subject and relegated to the realm of the object, or that which is not identifiable with the "Self." This denial of place to women is analogous to the denial of subjectivity to women, which is of significant concern to feminists. The concern with subjectivity stems from interrogations of the gendered subject/object dichotomy where the subject is equal to the "universal male" and the object is regarded as female. As Susan Hekman points out, the roots of the feminist investigation into the subject/object dichotomy lie

in Simone de Beauvoir's observation in *The Second Sex* that the category of "Woman" or "Other" is constructed through social, economic and political forces, while the "Subject," as male, is self-creating and autonomous (Hekman 46). By this reasoning, given the "inferior" status of the "Other," de Beauvoir recommended that women "embrace" masculine subjectivity in order to attain equality with men. Hekman acknowledges the importance of de Beauvoir's observations in that de Beauvoir brought awareness to the means by which women have been subjugated in society and, hence, excluded from "masculine" realms based on the social construction of the female gender. She critiques de Beauvoir's solution, however, on the basis that it amounts to a need for women to become "like men" in order to attain the freedom and authority of the subject, thus forsaking their own sexual identities (46). Also at issue is the seeming failure to recognize that the male gender and, hence, the "subject" itself is likewise a social construct and not a "natural" (male) condition.

De Beauvoir is credited with exposing the woman-nature connection, as well, by illustrating how "nature" is also an "other" (King, "The Ecology of Feminism" 21). As Ynestra King suggests, the domination of nature is necessitated by a view that nature is "other" to the self, "something essentially different from the dominant, to be objectified and subordinated" (21). Just as de Beauvoir advocated the embracing of "male" subjectivity, however, so, too, did she advocate the "severance of the woman-nature connection as a condition of women's liberation" (King 23). Consequently, de Beauvoir's insights reveal an important analogy between a dualistic conception of subjectivity and the culture/nature dichotomy, suggesting that any attempt at challenging and reconfiguring subjectivity as a whole must necessarily call into question the function of the culture/nature dichotomy in the

displacement of "Others." In my thesis, I will explore this dynamic through close readings of Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, Aritha Van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*, and Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*. Specifically, I will examine the representations of non-human nature and landscape in these novels, and the respective characters' engagement with place in order to question how these writers interrogate alterity, subjectivity and the culture/nature dichotomy. As such, I suggest that they are all "re-visionary" novels, in the sense of Adrienne Rich's definition of "re-vision," in their diverse "readings" and "(re)writings" of male-delineated discourses and texts.

Significantly, many feminists who actively challenge the subject/object dichotomy propose a reconceptualization of subjectivity by illustrating how the "subject" is created through language. Such feminists include the "French feminists" Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, who, although notably different in their styles and approaches, all base their criticisms of the construction of the subject in a critique of language, and advocate subversive, radical strategies for women to become active agents through narrative. Cixous articulates this very strongly in the opening paragraph to "The Laugh of the Medusa" when she writes that "[w]oman 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--for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text--as into the world and into history--by her own movement" (245). Here Cixous points to the "erasure" and displacement of women from man's "culture." This is an erasure or "lack" that is "inscribed" into the very language itself, or the "Symbolic" in Jacques Lacan's terms, whose psychoanalytic theories are often the focus of the French feminists' critiques. Luce Irigaray, for

example, challenges and subverts Lacan's psycholinguistic theory that "Woman" is that which is necessarily defined as a "lack" in opposition to the fullness of the male presence as represented by the phallus. In so doing, she explicitly shifts the realm of language from the "Symbolic" to the physical, illustrating how female sexuality and, therefore, female bodies, have been effectively erased in Lacan's conception ("This Sex Which is Not One" 23). Irigaray thus perceives a subversive potential for women to seize the power of language and inscribe themselves through narrative. It is this re-emphasis on narrative that challenges those who would accuse Irigaray of essentialism, for, although a concept of the female "body" features predominantly in her work, she does not define "the body" in fixed or essential terms, nor does she posit a concept of "Woman" that represents a reduction to mere biological essence. For Irigaray, "woman" is possibility, or "virgin territory," "as yet unmarked by them, for them. One who is not yet made woman by and for them. Not yet imprinted with their sex, their language" (Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together" 211). Irigaray writes further that

> we are women from the start. That we don't have to be turned into women by them, labeled by them, made holy and profaned by them. That that has always already happened, without their efforts. And that their history, their stories, constitute the locus of our displacement. It's not that we have a territory of our own; but their fatherland, family, home, discourse, imprison us in enclosed spaces where we cannot keep on moving, living, as ourselves. Their properties are our exile. Their enclosures, the death of our love. Their words, the gag upon our lips. (212)

Irigaray provocatively links images of territory and land with women's bodies and, in so doing, reveals a "blind spot," a potential in the margins or white spaces of the patriarchal text where women can indefinitely envision the limitless possibility of their own existence. Irigaray encourages women to "[s]peak, all the same," noting that "[i]t's our good fortune that your

language isn't formed of a single thread, a single strand or pattern. It comes from everywhere at once....Why only one song, one speech, one text at a time?" (209).

The paradoxically subversive potential of the definition of "Woman" as "lack" is likewise explored by Drucilla Cornell, who suggests that if woman is "lack" and thus lacks meaning, "she can be anything" (87). She goes on to suggest that "[t]he impossibility of absolutely fixing the meaning of woman yields endless transformative possibility. And because of this impossibility we can challenge any theory that supposedly imprisons us in the truth of our difference" (87). Both Irigaray and Cornell point not only to the radical potential of narrative that Cixous proposes; they also point to the formulation of a discursive, pluralistic "self" that disrupts the traditional subject/object dichotomy. This "self" represents a reconfigured "subject-in-process," a term Toril Moi uses to describe Julia Kristeva's concept of subjectivity (16). As Hekman explains, Kristeva posits that subjectivity is created through language, which is a producer of social meaning (53). As a product of discourse (that is, an interplay of language, and social and political ideologies), the subject is conceived by Kristeva in the plural; that is, there is no one subject but many subjects, since the subject may be created differently through different discourses. She decentres the subject so that it no longer retains a position of singular authority, but conceives of it as active and possessing "revolutionary potential" because subjects are able to challenge or deconstruct the discourse that precedes them (Hekman 53-4). This "subject-in-process" or "self," therefore, has the potential for self-representation as a means of challenging those representations constructed by discourses from which women, or more generally, "others," have been largely excluded, or from which they

have been dis-placed. Significantly, such representations would include metaphors that feminize nature and/or that metaphorize the feminine in terms of nature.

Ynestra King suggests that "in taking up ecology feminism necessarily begins to try and understand what it has meant for us as women to be represented as closer to nature than men in a male-dominated culture that defines itself in opposition to nature" ("Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and Nature/Culture Dualism" 118). This is the foundational premise of an ecofeminism that leads to a critique of all forms of representation created through hegemonic discourses, and the effects these representations have on our perceptions of "nature" as well as of "others." Fundamentally, ecofeminism may challenge traditional epistemology and ontology (that is ways of "knowing" and "being"), particularly in a critique of value hierarchies, value dualisms, and the "logic of domination." In her article "The Power and Promise of Ecofeminism," philosopher Karen J. Warren puts forth the notion of a "conceptual framework" that she describes as a "a set of *basic* beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape and reflect how one views oneself and one's world. It is a socially constructed lens through which we perceive ourselves" (127, her emphasis). An "*oppressive conceptual framework*," she writes, "is one that explains, justifies, and maintains relationships of domination and subordination" (128, her emphasis). The logic of domination, value hierarchies and value dualisms are all features of oppressive conceptual frameworks, she argues, that have been used "to establish inferiority and to justify subordination" (129). She writes that "it is the logic of domination, *coupled* with value-hierarchical thinking and value dualisms, which 'justifies' subordination. What is explanatorily basic, then, about the nature of oppressive conceptual frameworks is the logic of domination" (129, her emphasis). Simply stated, "value-

hierarchical thinking" posits that "man" exists at the top of a chain of beings over which he has superiority, with non-human nature at the bottom. "Value dualisms" are those oppositional binarisms such as man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion, white/black, et cetera. In conjunction with value-hierarchical thinking, the first item of these pairs is given superior value over the second; therefore, in terms of the "chain of being," woman is situated beneath man and, hence, closer to nature. "Woman" is also situated in the secondary binary term and so is also linked with nature in opposition to male "culture." The logic of domination, then, works on the assumption that (male) human life is superior to animate and inanimate nature and, that being the case, (male) humans are "morally justified" in subordinating nature (Warren 128). These features, therefore, work in tandem to support a world-view that forms the basis for not only the domination of nature, but for sexism and racism as a well. Warren ultimately suggests that the oppression of peoples based on sex, race and class, for instance, is conceptually linked to domineering attitudes towards nature.

What is significant about ecofeminism, as posited by King and Warren, is that its challenge to dualisms is similar to the challenge to subjectivity outlined above; however, it factors in "nature" as a necessary component of a feminist challenge to oppression based on sex, race, ethnicity, class, age, et cetera, because such domination is "tied conceptually and historically to the domination of nature" (Warren 143). Ecological feminism draws attention to how subordinating attitudes towards people and the land are entwined, thus suggesting that any feminism that does not attend to ecological issues is, in Warren's words, "at best incomplete and at worst simply inadequate" (126). It should be noted, however, that not all approaches labelled "ecofeminist" necessarily seek to disrupt the culture/nature dichotomy, nor do they

necessarily address the problematic of dichotomies as a whole. There are those, for instance, who merely seek to reverse the value hierarchy by privileging nature over culture and, in so doing, reposition "Woman" as superior to "Man" because of her perceived closeness to nature[1]. Feminists such as King, Warren and Val Plumwood, however, are increasingly urging an ecofeminist position that contests value dualisms and, therefore, interrogates the woman-nature association in a way "which neither accepts women's exclusion from reason nor accepts the construction of nature as inferior" (Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 20). Plumwood provocatively suggests, for instance, that the woman-nature association is problematic only insofar as it retains its patriarchal meanings ("Conversations with Gaia" 667).

King posits that one of the goals of what she calls a "social ecological feminism" is "to interpret the historical significance of the fact that women have been positioned at the biological dividing line where the organic emerges into the social. It is for ecofeminism to interpret this fact historically and to make the most of this mediated subjectivity to heal a divided world" (131). What is interesting about this observation is that King positions women in an intermediary space between the "organic" and the "social"; in other words, between "nature" and "culture." Such a strategy is notable in those feminists to whom I refer above, who, in seeking to disrupt the subject/object dichotomy, variously point to the "in-between" dis-placed

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[1] For a detailed discussion of the differences among ecofeminisms, particularly in comparison to the varied positions within feminism as a whole (such as liberal, socialist, cultural, et cetera), see Ynestra King, "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and Nature/Culture Dualism," *Gender, Body, Knowledge*, Eds. A. Jaggar and S. Bordo (London: Routledge UP, 1989) 115-41; as well as Carolyn Merchant's article "Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory" in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, Eds. J. Diamond and G. F. Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books) 1990, 100-5.

positioning of "Woman" as a space that offers a subversively radical potential for women to explore their own selves and create their own identities. The strategies for doing so are as multiple and diverse as the writings and approaches of these feminists themselves, and this diversity is also evident in the novels I have chosen to study in this thesis.

Marlatt, van Herk and Maracle each explore the complexities of self-representation such that they challenge the concept of the traditional, universal (male) subject in literature and history, and, in so doing, push the traditional boundaries of form and content. In addition, each of their texts is notable for its engagement with place, landscape and non-human nature in relationship to the human "characters" they portray. In so doing, these texts engage in deconstructive "readings" that disrupt binarisms such as culture/nature, male/female, mind/body, fact/fiction, reason/emotion and, of course, self/other. These deconstructive readings may be apprehended as a "double movement," an interpretation of deconstruction which Nancy J. Holland notes takes into account its recuperative possibilities for feminist readings:

> [a]long with its critical reading of traditional texts, it offers an affirmation of all that those texts would use hierarchical oppositions to subordinate or exclude--indeterminacy in all its forms, mystery, randomness, chaos, Nature, the body, emotion, absolute difference, infinite deferral and constant substitution--in two words, differance and Woman. By revealing the structure of differance at the base of any claim to truth or essence, deconstruction also says two things about women: they do not exist *as such* in traditional phallogocentric discourse (which is defined, as Rorty suggests, by their necessary exclusion), but they also do not exist outside that discourse as 'women' in any essential or determinate meaning of the term because essence and determinate meanings have gone the way of Man and God. (6)

This sense of deconstruction is congruent with the feminisms outlined above, which, in their seizing of the potential of "Woman's" ironically displaced positioning, challenge rigid definitions of Woman, while maintaining a fluidity and multiplicity of self-definitions. "*Différance*" is Jacques Derrida's term for the endlessly deferred and "differed" meanings that are inherent in a text. By questioning the "truth" of any single representation, deconstructive readings point to the unlimited possibility contained within any text, which Derrida explains as follows:

> a text remains...forever imperceptible. Its laws and its rules are not, however, harbored in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be booked, in the *present*, into anything that could rigorously be called a perception....The dissimulation of the woven texture [of the text] can in any case take centuries to undo its web: a web that envelops a web, undoing the web for centuries; reconstituting it too as an organism, indefinitely regenerating its own tissue behind the cutting trace, the decision of each reading. (63)

This points to the impossibility of "survey[ing] all the threads [of the text] at once" (Derrida 63); thereby acknowledging that difference is necessarily maintained within the text itself, or, indeed, any form of representation. In interrogating the woman-nature connection, especially, I argue that this connection is not repudiated or rejected in these novels, but is both strategically deconstructed and (re)conceptualized through critiques that address the predominant world-view, or conceptual framework, that constructed the association in the first place.

It is relatively common, however, to question such a strategy as potentially "essentializing," that is, the "attribution of a fixed essence to women," as Elizabeth Grosz defines it ("Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism" 47). As Grosz explains, essentialism "refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical

functions that limit the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganization" (48). For instance, while not addressing specifically the woman-nature association as (re)presented in *Ana Historic*, Lola Lemire Tostevin, in her article entitled "Daphne Marlatt: Writing in the Space that is Her Mother's Face," criticizes Marlatt's fascination with the etymology of words and her linking of language to physicality as a desire for a return to origins, to a (maternal) source in which women may imagine a transcendence of the reality of patriarchal oppression and achieve a utopian "dream of a non-oppressive society" (201). Tostevin perceives Marlatt's woman-identified sexual ending to the novel and her style of writing as "vulvalogocentric"; that is, that Marlatt merely replaces the phallus (or "pen as metaphorical penis," as Tostevin describes it) as primary signifier in the code of language Lacan calls the Symbolic with the vulva (which symbolizes a "mouth") (201). Tostevin's critique, however, is mostly based on a reading of the following line she quotes from *Touch to My Tongue*, where Marlatt writes that "in etymology we discover a history of verbal relations (a family tree if you will) that has preceded us and given us the world we live in" (196). Tostevin appears to interpret this quite literally as a desire on Marlatt's part to return to a space that precedes language (Tostevin identifies this with Kristeva's concept of the "semiotic," which is linked to the pre-verbal "mothertongue" and the relational condition of the self before it becomes a "subject" through entrance into the "Symbolic," or language). I, however, interpret this as a desire to uncover the layers of meanings built upon words (linked with Marlatt's peeling away of the layers of history) to discover how the "world" has been constructed through language, and how our perceptions of that world have been influenced by those meanings. As provocatively explored in Marlatt's novel, such meanings are implicated in the construction of the "world" through the binary opposition of "nature" and "culture," a dichotomy Marlatt seeks to disrupt. "World," as

she conceives it, necessarily includes the "natural" world, but, at the same time, by uncovering the construction of "world" through language, she exposes how the idea of "nature" is itself a linguistic construct. As such, she suggests there can be no originary or essential "nature" that somehow exists outside of or prior to our own perceptions of "nature," whether that be human or non-human nature. "Nature," or more specifically, the physical world, insofar as we can conceive of it in a non-representational form, is neutral, and we project our own fears and desires onto it. Such a projection is evident, for instance, in the metaphoric gendering of "nature" as female in much literature. It seems quite ironic that Tostevin begins her article by noting the influence of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception on Marlatt's work, which she defines as "the philosophical position that perception plays a fundamental role in the relation between self and world, self and other, self-knowledge and sexuality, and the embodiment and representation of such topics" (192), but then fails to take into account this influence on Marlatt's conception of the relation between language and the world. Marlatt's interest in etymology, then, lies in an awareness of the malleability of language itself, and in the possibility of discovering the blind-spots or aporias where the manipulation of language may be evidenced, thus revealing how our perceptions of the world have likewise been manipulated.

Environmental philosopher Neil Evernden writes that "[t]he world we see is...revealed against a background of belief, without which it could not appear as it does" (128), suggesting that "we come to occupy the landscape we create" (xii). The texts of Marlatt, van Herk and Maracle that form the basis for this study, each in their own way engage in deconstructive readings of the multiple discourses that have worked to "create" the landscape as we know it, a landscape which is founded upon a logic of domination to the detriment not only of the land

itself, but to human beings, particularly women and racial "others." In their explorations of "identity" and "nature," they take steps towards new imaginings of place and self, in part through deconstructive interrogations of history and the colonial legacy in Canada. The idea of "place" and "self" is integral to these questionings, revealing a concept of both as formed by a multiplicity of discourses and a sense of history that is palimpsestic. Their narratives may be seen as effectively stripping away the layers to reveal what has been effaced or imperfectly erased through "settlement" or colonization. They work to reveal the "blind spots" on the maps, or the gaps where it is evident that the map is a biased and often-times privileged representation of a limited perspective and not the place itself. I chose these novels, therefore, for the diversity of disruptive strategies they employ, as well as for the diversity of perspectives they present.

The role of perception in all of these novels is very important, for it points to the ways in which all representative constructions of either non-human nature or other human beings are mediated by one's own position in the world. This situating of the self in the world is theorized extensively in phenomenology, which is a philosophy that, beginning with Martin Heidegger, challenges traditional epistemology and ontology by specifically targeting the subject/object and mind/body dichotomy. Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology as a "return to things themselves," which involves a "return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is" (ix). What phenomenology seeks to do, therefore, is acknowledge the primacy of physical experience as a way of knowing

the world, thus challenging the Cartesian *cogito* which posits that we "know" the world solely through our minds, or through reason alone. Importantly, phenomenology emphasizes the integral role of the body in how we experience and come to know the world, and, as such, reconfigures "subjectivity" in corporeal terms[2]. As Elizabeth Grosz explains it, "[i]nsofar as I live the body, it is a phenomenon experienced by me and thus provides the very horizon and perspectival point which places me in the world and makes relations between me, other objects, and other subjects possible....Phenomenological reflection on the body reveals that I am not a subject separated from the world or from others, a mind somehow cut off from matter and space" (86). Significantly, Grosz suggests that

> Merleau-Ponty's work...attempts to take up and utilize the space in between, the 'no-man's land' or gulf separating oppositional terms. This impossible, excluded middle predates and makes possible the binary terms insofar as it precedes and exceeds them, insofar as it is uncontainable in either term. Perception is, as it were, mid-way between mind and body and requires the function of both. (74)

Again, it is an "in between" space that emerges as a radical challenge to the dualistic thinking that Warren suggests is an integral condition of the logic of domination. Grosz suggests that Merleau-Ponty's ideas have relevance to feminism, noting that his

> defiance of and challenge to binary polarizations places his interests close to those of many feminists...His philosophical aims and methods of rendering binary polarization problematic accord quite well with the goals of many feminists--and perhaps most strikingly Luce Irigaray--of making explicit the

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[2] In his book *The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment*, Neil Evernden explores phenomenology in an ecological context, pointing towards the potential of phenomenological methodologies for reconceptualizing our relationship with the "environment," drawing, particularly, on the writings of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

> unspoken assumptions of and debt to femininity and maternity that founds philosophy as we know it. What Merleau-Ponty seems to offer feminists like Irigaray [are]...elements that may augment or enrich feminist theory itself. His emphasis on lived experience and perception, his focus on the body-subject, has resonances with what may arguably be regarded as feminism's major contribution to the production and structure of knowledges--its necessary reliance on lived experience, on experiential acquaintance as a touchstone or criterion of the validity of theoretical postulates. (94)

The role of perception in a reformulation of one's experience of the world and, consequently, one's own self-creation through narrative, features significantly in the novels in this study. Each author explores alternative ways for not only self-representation, but for the representation of the "world" which features in their texts, ways that do not seek to pre-define the self or world, and that self-reflexively acknowledge their own complicity in the (re)creation of new representations through language. Although I acknowledge the influence of a phenomenological perspective in my readings of the texts, it is feminist postulations of the "place between" that I draw on predominantly in order to explore the complex, and often contradictory, relational sense of self that is developed in the novels.

One of the theories explored in relation to Marlatt's *Ana Historic* and Van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*, especially, is Luce Irigaray's concept of the "interval of desire." "Desire," Irigaray writes, "occupies or designates the place of the *interval*. Giving it a permanent definition would amount to suppressing it as desire. Desire demands a sense of attraction: a change in the interval, the displacement of the subject or of the object in their relations of nearness or distance" ("Sexual Difference" 8). Irigaray develops this concept of desire as an infinitely undefinable interval in order to suggest that sexual difference must be recognized in order to attain ethical relations between men and women. Irigaray points out that

Woman has been constructed as a "place" for man that nevertheless allows for her own dis-placement. She writes that the "maternal-feminine remains the place separated from 'its' own place. She is or ceaselessly becomes the place of the other who cannot separate himself from it without her knowing or willing it, she is then threatening because of what she lacks: a 'proper' place" (11). The notion of displacement and the role of the "interval of desire" play out in diverse ways in both Marlatt and Van Herk's texts in particular, as both explore the possibility of finding a place for women that does not merely replicate the dynamic of displacement. The expression of desire is of particular concern to Aritha Van Herk in *Places Far From Ellesmere*, who exposes the irony of the construction of Woman as an object of desire which, nevertheless, disables her from expressing her own desire, or punishes her if she attempts to do so. Irigaray's theory thus helps to illuminate complex movements in these texts in their striving to present sexual difference in a way that is not essentializing. Irigaray writes:

> How can we mark this limit of a place, of place in general, if not through sexual difference? But, in order for an ethics of sexual difference to come into being, we must constitute a possible place for each sex, body, and flesh to inhabit, which presupposes a memory of the past, a hope for the future, memory bridging the present and disconcerting the mirror symmetry that annihilates the difference of identity. (18)

All three novels in this study notably utilize memory and often intimate engagements with "place," with place encompassing the interaction of the body with the non-human world, and a relational sense of self. Significantly, non-human "nature" and landscape play important roles in these inter-dynamic explorations of self-identity.

The theme of "nature" has long been identified as a predominant one in Canadian literature. This perception of Canadian literature is informed, for instance, by early settler accounts of life in the "bush," to which women writers contributed significantly, as well as by literary criticism such as Northrop Frye's "Conclusion to *a Literary History of Canada*," and Margaret Atwood's *Survival: a Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. This style of criticism has come to be known as "thematic," and is a structuralist position that seeks to categorize literature in terms of universal themes and patterns. While this style of literary theory has been extensively criticized, particularly in comparison to post-structuralist approaches, both Frye's and Atwood's (a student of Frye's) observations have greatly influenced the perception of Canadian literature as a whole[3]. Frye and Atwood significantly contributed to the idea that not only Canadian writers, but Canadians themselves have been greatly preoccupied with the "natural world" and their often ambivalent relationship to it, while also suggesting that Canadian literature has mostly developed out of the settler's imagination. In searching for themes in Canadian literature that would mark it as "Canadian," Frye points to the means by which Canada was "civilized," writing that "[c]ivilization in Canada, as elsewhere, has advanced geometrically across the country, throwing down long parallel lines of

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[3] For a detailed summary of this influence, see Marlene Goldman's introduction in *Paths of Desire: Images of Exploration and Mapping in Canadian Women's Writing* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1997), and Helen Buss's essay, "Women and the Garrison Mentality: Pioneer Women Autobiographers and their Relation to the Land," in *Re(Dis)covering Our Foremothers: Nineteenth Century Canadian Women Writers*, Ed. Lorraine McMullen (Ottawa: Ottawa UP, 1990) 123-136. As Buss suggests, the primary problem with the thematic structuralist approach is that "once accepted as the only valid one, [it] misleads and misdirects the act of reading" (125). I point to Frye and Atwood to demonstrate their influence on perceptions about Canadian literature and, in particular, the role of nature in Canadian literature, rather than to situate my own readings in their frameworks, as well as to specifically challenge the centrality of the "settler" imagination in their concept of Canadian literature.

the railways, dividing up the farmlands into chessboards of square-mile sections and concession-line roads. There is little adaptation to nature: in both architecture and arrangement, Canadian cities and villages express rather an arrogant abstraction, the conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it" (72). Frye further notes, however, that

> the conquest of nature has its own perils for the imagination, in a country where the winters are so cold and where conditions of life have so often been bleak and comfortless....I have long been impressed in Canadian poetry by a tone of deep terror in regard to nature....It is not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even the mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest. The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values. (73)

Although Frye does not make the connection, he nevertheless provocatively points to the association of woman and nature and the psychological effect this association has on man, especially, such as Freud expressed in his (in)famous comment that "woman is a dark continent." Although acknowledging the impact the attitude of "conquest" has had on the landscape, as well as its consequences for human beings, Frye's universalized "human" does not account for potential gender differences in the apprehension of "nature," and how this may have influenced the writings of both women and men about their encounters with the landscape. As Marlene Goldman suggests, "[w]hile some women may not have responded to the landscape as men did, the need to determine one's place in the landscape affected men and women alike, and this preoccupation seems to have left its mark on Canadian literary tradition" (9). This statement compellingly gestures towards the question of why women and men may have responded to the landscape differently, for Goldman suggests there is, indeed, a gender difference in perception, even as this seems to be a "universal" theme in Canadian literature.

Atwood picks up the theme of nature in *Survival*, wherein she problematically defines, like Frye, Canadian literature in terms of the European settler tradition. She suggests that Canadian identity as it emerges in the literature she surveys has been shaped as much by the settlers' encounters with nature, as the land and "nation" have been shaped by the settlers. Atwood does make the woman-nature connection, noting that "[n]ature as a woman keeps surfacing all over Canadian literature," notably in literature written by both women and men (200). She suggests that these "patterns literature makes...cannot be avoided. Let us suppose then, that woman is Nature, or Nature is a woman. Obviously the kind of female figures that can be imagined will then depend on what kind of a place you live in--a desert is not the same as a jungle--and also what you think of the kind of place you live in. Some find deserts beautiful and mysterious, others find them hot, sterile and arid" (200). While not explicitly critiquing the attitudes revealed by such metaphors, Atwood does provocatively suggest that

> [n]ature poetry is seldom just about Nature; it is usually about the poet's *attitude* towards the external natural universe. That is, landscapes in poems are often interior landscapes; they are maps of a state of mind. Sometimes the poem conceals this fact and purports to be objective description, sometimes the poem acknowledges and explores the interior landscape it presents. The same tendencies can be present in the descriptive passages of novels or stories with natural settings. (49)

On the reason why nature seems such a prevalent presence in Canadian literature, Atwood writes that "[n]ot surprisingly in a country with such a high ratio of trees, lakes and rocks to people, images from Nature are almost everywhere. Added up, they depict a Nature that is often dead and unanswering or actively hostile to man; or seen, in its gentler spring and summer aspects, unreal" (45). The questions that Atwood raises, then, but does not address here (arguably, these are of concern to Atwood in her own fiction), include: what are the

underlying attitudes about nature evoked in metaphors of woman as nature, or nature as woman, given the problematic of this association that feminists have pointed out; and what attitudes about women and nature have been internalized by the poet or writer so that the "outer" landscape comes to represent the "interior"? It is these unanswered questions that underly my explorations of identity and nature in select novels by Daphne Marlatt, Aritha van Herk and Lee Maracle.

As noted above, both Frye and Atwood devise a "tradition" of Canadian literature, and a concept of Canadian identity and culture, that is centred on the settler experience; thus, the literature they present as "Canadian" is largely Eurocentric and "Anglo-Celtic" as Smaro Kamboureli calls it in her introduction to *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (1). Neither Marlatt, van Herk, nor Maracle fit into this "tradition," however; consequently, their work challenges not only representations of woman and nature, but the concept of a unified national Canadian identity based on a common history of settlement that elides the immigrant experience, as well as that of the First Nations' people who lived here before the arrival of the European colonists. Their work, therefore, may be considered to stem from both the "immigrant" and "indigenous" experiences of Canada, rather than stemming from the "settler" imagination as outlined by Frye and Atwood. Daphne Marlatt, for instance, was a British immigrant from Malaysia (Kamboureli 206), an experience which underlines her novel *Ana Historic,* and which she eloquently explores in so many of her writings. In her essay "Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination," Marlatt provocatively links her immigrant experience with her writing, acknowledging that "i think most of my writing has been a vehicle for entry into what was for me the new place, the new world" (18). She writes compellingly of

an interest in "shifting the experience of distance and dislocation through the use of montage, juxtaposition, superimposing disparate and specific images from several times and places. I want to see the world as multidimensional as possible and ourselves present within it" (24). Aritha Van Herk expresses a similar influence of the immigrant experience on her imagination. While born in Canada, van Herk is the daughter of Dutch immigrants (Kamboureli 421), and this is a fact, she suggests, that had an impact on her sense of "identity" as a child. In "Of Viscera and Vital Questions" she writes that "[a]s an immigrant daughter, poor and *different*, a funny name, funny clothes, funny parents, DP ["Displaced Person"], the kids called me, even if I was born in Canada, branded with a story I had no choice but to regret" (278). This sense of displacement and of rootlessness is one that emerges strongly in *Places Far From Ellesmere* as she explores the meaning of "home." Finally, Lee Maracle is Métis, from North Vancouver (Kamboureli 343), and her writings and beliefs are rooted in her experience as an indigenous woman in Canada. As Kamboureli suggests, many First Nations' authors, including Lee Maracle, write from the experience of "having been systematically denied the right to their places and cultures" (15). As such, Maracle's novel *Ravensong* offers a too often overlooked, even dismissed, but vital perspective on the effects of colonization and settlement on the peoples who already lived on the land that came to be called "Canada." Just as importantly, her novel highlights from a woman's perspective how the logic of domination has operated materially in Canadian society to the detriment of all women as well as her own culture, thereby providing a necessary critique of the matrix of sexism and racism. As such, Maracle's voice joins the many diverse voices emerging in First Nations' literature in Canada, and in the literature of Canada as a whole.

These authors, therefore, compellingly challenge traditional conceptions of Canadian literature and history. As Kamboureli suggests, the history of Canada

> speaks of arrivals and departures, trajectories whose starting points contain, more often than not, conflict. It is a history of the legacy of colonization, but also a history of the 'discovery' of Canada as a new home whose 'newness' constantly calls for the spectre of the past, the nostalgic replay of other geographies. It is also a history of persistent attempts to compose a unified vision of Canadian culture against the reality and cultural understandings of many Canadians, a history that bursts its seams. It is, in other words, a history haunted by dissonance. (1)

This dissonance is evidenced in all of the novels in this study; yet, it is a dissonance that seeks to acknowledge and respect the differences that arise in the gaps between central "official" discourses and experiences from the "margins" and, in the process, disrupt the very notion of centre/margin itself. In an interview with Jennifer Kelly, Lee Maracle states that "Canada means village or community, and I've taken the spirit of that, the spirit of community, the spirit of Canada to heart. I really do love this country" (75). This spirit runs through these texts, providing geographically and culturally diverse perspectives that challenge unified, reductive perceptions of Woman and Nature, of First Nations' peoples, and of the literature and history of Canada.

Chapter One

Lost (Girl) in the Bush: Re-membering the Self in Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*

> There is a pathos of remembering and forgetting. Moving backward in search of something that has been erased, or inscribing it so it shall not be erased. Fretting over repetitions, reproductions, over what has been erased and comes back. A sort of double nature or revolt of nature rising up through language.
> (Luce Irigaray, "Love of the Other," *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 141)

Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* is a novel that engages with "place" on a variety of levels: geographical, historical and metaphysical, while contesting the borders that would separate those levels into discrete categories. Marlatt presents "place" as a palimpsest, exploring a multiplicity of meanings that often seem contradictory, paradoxical and/or ironic, particularly as they relate to representations of "Woman." It is, indeed, Woman who emerges as the strangest paradox of all. In interrogating the absence of women from the pages of "official" recorded "History," Marlatt discovers that the idea of "Woman" is essentially ahistoric; that is, Woman is perceived as existing outside of cultural conceptions of space and time or, in other words, located within "nature" as distinct from "culture." This image of Woman, however, contrasts markedly with the reality of women who are trapped within the confines of the roles (such as wife and mother) socially prescribed for them. Her explorations of this paradox revolve to a great extent around the woman-nature association, which she problematizes significantly by exploring both the positive potential of this connection for women as well as how it has been used against them. As suggested in the introduction, *Ana Historic* is a re-visionary novel, in the sense of Adrienne Rich's definition of "re-vision," for in this novel, Marlatt enters into the old text of History with new "eyes," demonstrating a keen awareness of how one's orientation

in the world profoundly affects one's perception of that world and, consequently, the representations that are created of that world.

In an interview with Brenda Carr, Marlatt discusses the importance of one's conceptual apprehension of the world, which she strongly links with the impact of sexual difference on her writing and poetics. For Marlatt, the fact of being a woman cannot be separated from her identity as a writer because it cannot be separated from her conceptualization of the world. Notably, she grounds this orientation in the body, saying, "there's the notion of body and body rhythms...[and] there's also how you position your self in the world. To enter the world, I mean to really take it on conceptually and feel you have as valid an analysis of what you see going on around you as any man does, is a difficult thing for a woman, perhaps the most difficult leap to make as a woman writer" (99). Prefatory to this observation are her remarks that, "[i]t has been a long journey for me to come into my body, to be centred in, the *subject* of, my desire and not the object of someone else's" (99). In *Ana Historic*, Marlatt explores the connection between language and the construction not only of identity, but of the idea of a world that may support, rather than contain, that sense of self, a "self" which must necessarily be re-membered through a body that is inseparable both from its relationship to place and the relations that take "place" within it. As Neil Evernden suggests, "we come to occupy the landscape we create" (xii), and Marlatt is indeed cautious about the "landscape" she creates in her novel and the use of feminine metaphors which have traditionally been employed to represent it. Marlatt problematizes the metaphorical woman-nature association even while she, at times, both utilizes and seems to valorize it in her writing. Marlatt, however, explores an alternative means of conceptualizing the world in order to contest the nature/culture split, and,

in so doing, restores to "Woman" a place in that world that entails neither a reduction to essence (or biological nature) nor one reducible to a self-same identity with the male subject.

In her exquisite word-play and explorations of the etymology of words, Marlatt exhibits a wariness towards her own use of language, ever alert to the potential danger of constructing static representations that merely reinforce traditional ideas of perceiving the world, ideas that operate within a logic of domination. In an interview with George Bowering in 1979, Marlatt said that the "truth is like a palimpsest--all the layers *at once*, all the levels at once" (43), and it is this challenge to the notion of a fixed and singular "Truth," evidenced particularly by recorded events in the annals of History, that underlies the movement of *Ana Historic*. This movement is not linear; structurally and thematically, *Ana Historic* entails continuous fluctuations in space and time, ever circling through memories of the narrator's childhood and of her mother, memories which are juxtaposed with the "official" voice of History (represented as italicized passages in the text) and Annie's attempts at a novelization of the (a)historic Ana Richard's life, glimpses of which she has uncovered in Vancouver's archives. Annie writes that "a book of interruptions is not a novel" (37), referring to her own attempt at (re)creating Ana's life, a statement that describes Marlatt's own "novel" as well. Marlatt resists the temptation to mimic the unity of History as well as that of the traditional novel in her "re-membering" of the women's lives in *Ana Historic*, a process that may be described as deconstructive in its interrogation of "History." In so doing, she challenges the idea of a "universal history" that is unified and linear, while also blurring the lines between the narrative form of history (fact) and the novel (fiction).

In her introduction to *Gender and the Politics of History,* Joan Wallach Scott writes that deconstruction "undermines the historian's ability to claim neutral mastery or to present any particular story as if it were complete, universal, and objectively determined. Instead, if one grants that meanings are constructed through exclusions, one must acknowledge and take responsibility for the exclusions involved in one's own project" (7). She writes further that deconstruction "undermines claims for an authority based on totalizing explanations, essentialized categories of analysis (be they human nature, race, class, sex, or 'the oppressed'), or synthetic narratives that assume an inherent unity for the past" (8). Scott argues that, in order for women to write history in a fashion that does not merely replicate the strategies of "male" history, women must be attentive to and question historiographical practices and assumptions that have worked to exclude the experiences of women from that history (2). She further advocates a shifting of the "question" of history from one of "origins" (that is, the idea that the "truth" exists in whole form in the past, it merely needs to be "discovered") to one of "process," writing that the

> "emphasis on 'how' ["hierarchies such as those of gender are constructed or legitimized"] suggests a study of processes, not of origins, of multiple rather than single causes, of rhetoric or discourse rather than ideology or consciousness. It does not abandon attention to structures and institutions, but it does insist that we need to understand what these organizations mean in order to understand how they work. (4)

Marlatt concerns herself with numerous levels of "process" in *Ana Historic,* entailing the very sorts of questioning that Scott advocates above. As such, this is truly a "novel" in the sense of novelty, of newness, and of envisioning possibilities beyond the containment or closure of the stories of women's lives traditionally represented by marriage, madness, and/or tragic death

(endings that are notably common in the novels of nineteenth-century women[1]). Annie struggles against such traditional endings for her novel, just as Marlatt does, while at the same time lamenting the reality of such endings, as particularly represented for her in the form of her mother, whose own life paths took her through marriage and "madness." Annie's poignant memories of her mother express a potent grief that streams throughout this novel, for grief does, indeed, seem to be the impetus for Annie's cathartic writing process. It is on the occasion of her mother's death that Annie is compelled to undertake an exploratory journey through her own past and that of Ana Richards, a nineteenth-century British immigrant to Canada. Through these labyrinthine meanderings, Marlatt presents a palimpsestic idea of both history and place that is rich with a tactile sense of memory and a multiplicity of voices and relations. As such, she destabilizes the concept of the universal (male) subject of history and literature through a reconfigured experiential sense of "self."

Above all, *Ana Historic* is a novel about memory, about "re-membering"[2]. It is a novel that embodies a process which is itself an act of (re)embodiment; that is, a writing of a self that is not contained by the world, but comes into being through its embodied relations to

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[1] For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Nancy K. Miller's "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," reprinted in Showalter, Elaine, ed. *The New Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 339-360. Miller provocatively points out, in response to criticisms of George Eliot's endings, in particular, that "the plots of women's literature are not about 'life' and solutions in any therapeutic sense, nor should they be. They are about the plots of literature itself, about the constraints the maxim places on rendering a female life in fiction" (356).

[2] Interestingly, according to the *Oxford Concise Dictionary*, "ana" is both a noun meaning a collection of "anecdotes, literary gossip, about a person," as well as a prefix which may indicate "back," as in *anamnesis*, which means "recollection." Both senses of this word are important to this novel.

and within it. It is Annie's multiple acts of "re-membering" that constitute the narrative of the novel, which is itself a palimpsest of inter-related stories about three women: Annie, herself, her mother, Ina; and Ana. Among the many things that link these stories together is the geographical place of Vancouver and the immigrant's experience of coming to Canada, contrasted through the experiences of each of these women. Marlatt's (and Annie's) writing, in an autobiographical form, of Ana's immigrant experiences, places this novel within a tradition of women's writing in Canada. Much of early "Canadian" literature includes the autobiographical accounts of the women settlers who arrived here with their fathers or husbands, accounts which deal extensively with these women's perceptions of the "wilderness" of Canada, and their attempts to both come to terms with it and learn how to live within it. Ana notably defies this tradition in that she is portrayed as an immigrant to an established settlement rather than a settler herself, in addition to being a widow, and is, therefore, unaccompanied by a man. Annie's depictions of Ana's experiences and journal writing, however, do bear similarities to the settler women's writings. Perhaps best known is Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush*, but women such as Helen Buss are actively working to retrieve many of the accounts which have been "lost" over time and, accordingly, firmly recovering for these women a place in the developing tradition of Canadian literature, as well as engaging in the feminist project of valuing women's autobiographical writings as an important contribution to the tradition not only of women's literature, but literature as a whole[3]. Referring specifically to

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[3] See especially *Re(Dis)covering Our Foremothers: Nineteenth Century Canadian Women Writers*, edited by Lorraine McMullen, and Helen Buss's *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English*. Daphne Marlatt, many of whose works are actively autobiographical, is one of the feminists who is concerned with the valuing of autobiography, an issue that appears consistently in her critical writings, as well. In addition, *Ana Historic* may be taken as an example of a blurring of genres between fiction and autobiography, and fiction and history.

the writers she has herself studied, Helen Buss observes that they "react to the strangeness of the Canadian landscape by merging their own identity, in some imaginative way, with the new land. They arrive at this point in two ways: through a relationship with significant others and through some creative activity that discovers each woman's unique relation to the land" ("Women and the Garrison Mentality" 126). Buss further writes that "I have found that an imaginative identification of self-development with the experience of the land is always present in Canadian women's autobiographical writing through the nineteenth century and into our own" (131)[4]. This connection of identity with a relationship to the land or to one's surroundings is one that Marlatt explores extensively in *Ana Historic*, particularly in the fictionalized autobiographical writings of Ana, and in Annie's writing of her own memories, writings that strikingly parallel one another.

Notably, both Annie and Ana discover a sense of belonging in Canada, largely through their identification with nature and their shared passion for writing, while Ina, whom Annie poignantly portrays as suffering from manic-depressive disorder, is never able to identify with the "new land" in which she finds herself. Annie does, however, discover that Ina attempted writing as well, recalling the scribbler Ina kept hidden under her bed in which she wrote "family stories for *The Reader's Digest*, 'Laughter is the Best Medicine,' stories that lost their humour in description, faded away in proper sentences" (20). Sadly, Annie identifies these stories with Ina's compulsive redecorating of the house, with the notion that "to fix up a home

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[4] Interestingly, Buss cites both Marlatt and Aritha van Herk as contemporary writers who are part of this tradition; however, while she discusses Marlatt's autobiographical work, and notes the inter-relational roles of autobiography and history in *Ana Historic*, she does not explore the connections between the novel and the tradition of writing she herself studies.

is fixing up yourself" (26), revealing Ina's inability to distinguish her-self from her roles as mother and housewife. Her body and her husband's house become indistinguishable to her, and both must be continuously "fixed up" to "keep up appearances." Canada remains, to Ina, a cold, rainy place where the people "don't know how to speak proper English" (17); her ideas of culture and civilization are rooted in England and her memories of the "tropics," the colonial British place where she grew up. In Canada, Annie observes, "the walls closed in on you, picture windows that never opened, doors that stayed shut against the cold. none of the openness of that stone house in the tropics...we exchanged this for Canada and lost our place in the tropics, which was not truly ours and where we had no rightful place" (136). Annie perceives Ina as a multiply dis-placed woman who has never truly belonged, or found true belonging, in any place, either as a colonist, as an immigrant, or as a woman. Following her husband to the "new world," Ina attempts to find meaning in the place "carved" out for her in the home; yet, as Annie poignantly discovers, home is a place that is, in fact, "no place" for a woman, for it both contains and constrains her, forcing her to fulfill idealized roles and expectations that are imposed on her. Ina, she perceives, is a victim of "fate," which she describes as "that path that led to marriage or death, no other fork in the trail" (99). In Ana and Annie, however, Marlatt explores the possibilities of finding oneself and a sense of belonging through a full, multi-sensual identification with place. Significantly, this sense of "belonging" entails the re-membering of a self that is "at home" in one's own body in order to feel one has a "place" in the world, something Ina was never able to accomplish.

Annie's memories of the past are notably visceral, reliant as much, if not more, on a range of bodily senses rather than sight, suggesting a distrust of the distorting effects of pure

visual imagery. This distrust is connected with the "look," as Marlatt terms it, or the "male gaze," a form of dehumanizing and fragmenting perception and objectification, or "dis-memberment," of women's bodies:

> now i'm remembering. not dis- but re-membering. putting things back together, the things that have been split off, set aside. what did it mean to leave behind that body aroused by the feel of hot wind, ecstatic with the smell of sage, so excited i could barely contain myself as we left pines and high-blue eagle sky, and broke into the arid insect country of the Okanagan with its jumping butterflies, its smell, familiar as apricots, our mouths full of sweet pulp, bare legs sticky with it, hot and itchy against each other, against the pelt of the dog, his rank dogday smell as we rode the turns of the road down into summer, real summer on our skin--do you remember? how could you not? (51)

These sensuous descriptions, appealing to the senses of touch, smell and taste, convey a fullness and multi-dimensionality more evocative of actual experience than would the use of pure visual imagery which, in contrast, would appear as flat as the page on which it is written or as flat as a photographic image. This passage is, indeed, followed by a reference to "photographs to remind us" (51), in which she describes only what her mother was wearing, the expressions on their faces and the "invisibility" of her father, who, as picture-taker, wields the "look" identifiable with the eye/I of the camera. Pointing to how the male gaze creates anxiety, Annie writes in a preceding passage of her developing self-consciousness with her father during adolescence, observing, significantly in a switch from first- to third-person, that "she will blush as he looks at her and turn away, sure that he noticed, that he sees how she has become a woman (almost), even another (the other) woman in the house" (50). Annie protests the use of photographs as a form of memory, however, by writing:

> it's not *that* i want to remember, how we looked or thought we ought to look, learning so fast this other looked-at image of ourselves. but how it felt to be

> alone unseen in the bushes of the canyon, pursuing those strange butterflies that folded themselves into grasshoppers whenever they stopped still, or lying face down in the dank smell of sand, unable to swim, hearing Jan and Marta's shouts splash into thin air, hearing wind rustle high in the cottonwood trees which did not bleed but, rooted to one spot, streamed into sky as i streamed too, feeling my dark insides, liquid now and leaving me, trickle into the sand--and i jumped up, scared, had i left a stain? would it show? the new worries being a woman meant. (52)

This "stream" of consciousness writing embodies the "streaming" of the trees which metamorphoses into a consciousness of her own bodily "streaming" in menstruation, like the metamorphosis of the butterfly into the shape of a grasshopper (the butterfly, notably, is a symbol of metamorphosis itself). It should be noted that the choice of "stream" interestingly problematizes the idea of menstruation as a "period," a connotation suggested by the rootedness of the tree, where a period is the end of a sentence or a full stop. In this case, it is the "period" of childhood; again, she challenges the notion of the linearity of time which history categorizes in terms of ages. The implication of "sentence," too, connotes a fixed period of time served, normally as a form of imprisonment, with the use of photographs as evidence, perhaps, to "sentence" the child to the "period" of Womanhood. This reflects Annie's ambivalence about exploring her "past" memories, and the fears she must face in the process, as well as a fear of getting "lost" in history by confronting her "Lost Girl." Marlatt takes this up in a later section of the novel, suggesting a *l'écriture feminine* in which blood is a form of ink which allows her to "[write] the period that arrives at no full stop" (90). Here Marlatt invokes Hélène Cixous's idea in "The Laugh of the Medusa" that a resistant writing of the "self" is a writing of the "body," that writing is a form of embodiment in which women need to engage in order to resist being contained by externally produced representations. Continuing in the vein of metamorphosis, Annie's memory continues to "stream" to a re-memberance that "i

was slimming into another shape, finding a waist, gaining curves, attaining the sort of grace i was meant to have as a body marked *woman's"* (52). Marlatt makes numerous connections in these passages, most notably marking a tension between visceral and visual imagery and memory, which she relates to the passage from childhood to "womanhood"; that is, to the process of becoming a woman. This emphasis on process destabilizes the nature of the "look" that dis-members women and transforms them all into a unified ideal of Woman, as symbolized by the photograph which "freezes" time. For Marlatt, memory is movement, and this is reflected in the notion of "re-membering" as an act of (re)embodiment of a "past" self that comes into being through a very physical, corporeal engagement with place.

Annie associates childhood with a kind of freedom in the body and laments its loss through a narrative (re)construction of her "Lost Girl," a name she chooses in defiance of the fact that there were only Lost Boys in Never-Never Land and the only girl, "Wendy...had to mother them all, mother or nurse" (11). This Lost Girl "did not feel separated or split" (12), and was adventurous and unfearful of bears and the woods in which they dwell:

> our bodies were ours as far as we knew and we knew what we liked, laughing exhausted and sweaty in our fort or wiping bloody knees with leaves and creek water. without history we squatted in needle droppings to pee, flung our bodies through the trees--we would have swung on vine maples. always we imagined we were the first ones there, the first trespassers--
>
> *if you go down in the woods today you'd better go in disguise.* it was bears' territory we entered, or cedars'. it was the land of skunk cabbage. it was ours and no one human, no man preceded us. (19)

In these passages, Annie invokes the phantom of ahistoricity which is embedded in the title of the novel itself, as revealed by a simple manipulation of the letters, which significantly retains

the capital letter in a noteworthy place: *An aHistoric,* with Ana, herself, representing the "phantom." Annie identifies the state of being outside of History, and thus outside of time and culture, with being in nature and with being a woman; as Annie notes, females are not "human" because they are not "man." These passages also echo a previous section where Annie uses feminine imagery to describe the space in the woods that was unclaimed "territory"; that is, in differentiation from "those woods the boys on the rest of the block had claimed as theirs" (12). As such, this was a place where she and her sisters felt safe, but notably do not claim or mark as their own; they are, instead, marked by it. (Arguably, "peeing" in "needle droppings" could be interpreted as territorialism, but Marlatt, I think, intends this image to suggest the perception of the female as non-human, or animal.) Annie describes it as

> that part she and her sisters called the Old Wood, moulted and softened with years of needle drift, tea brown and the cedar stump hollow in the middle where they nestled in a womb, exchanging what if's, digging further with their fingers, sniffing the odour of tree matter become a stain upon their hands like dried blood. (12)

Leaves stained with the blood of skinned knees echoes the "tree matter" that stains "their hands like dried blood," images which, in turn, are later echoed in the "streaming" of the trees Annie associates with the streaming of her menstrual blood. Given this feminization of nature and Annie's sense of the freedom of this childhood self who "flung [her body] through the trees," Marlatt seems to verge on a romanticization of nature and the feminine, notably with an emphasis on the maternal, which uncritically equates liberation with a return to "nature." This is a stance which, as discussed in the introduction, could be interpreted as an essentializing position. Marlatt, however, problematizes the associations she makes between the female and nature, deliberately invoking them in order to deconstruct them and subsequently rescue both

the figure of woman and nature from the destructive consequences of the patriarchal ideologies she critiques throughout the novel.

The sensuality of the above-quoted descriptions and of her summertime memories suggests a quality of spirit whose loss fills the adult Annie with an ache of wanting. This is a spirit she recognizes her "Lost Girl" as having, but, paradoxically, it is a spirit that is lost through its identification with the male and, specifically, with boys. The girl-Annie is called a "tomboy": "the male of the species plus boy. double masculine, as if girl were completely erased. a girl, especially a young girl, who behaves like a spirited boy--as if only boys could be spirited" (13). As well, those things she loved to do were identified with "boy" things which girls weren't "allowed to do," such as "escape the house, 'home-free'--not home, but free in the woods to run, nameless in the split-second manoeuvre of deadfalls, bush blinds, ghost stumps glowing in the twilight. spirit(ed), filled with it, the world of what was other than us" (13). The childhood Annie is thus taught that the woods are the boys' domain and that "spirit" is a quality only boys (should) possess. Yet this "spirit" and the boys' play in the woods are associated with the destructiveness of war: "what if the boys came down from their fort in the Green Wood with slingshots and air gun?" (12). This spirit is also associated with the activity of the men who work in the woods "building powerlines and clearing land for subdivision" (12): "what if the boys...what if the men tried to bulldoze their woods?" (12). It is not this kind of spirit that Annie wishes to recover for herself, and she struggles with its masculine associations and male-delineated boundaries. It is the sensual, almost erotic timbre with which the adult Annie imbues her memories that distinguishes her desire for a lost "spirit"

(representing both a quality of being and the ghost of her Lost Girl who, indeed, embodies that spirit) as one which is undefined and uncontained by the male perspective or perception.

This ghostly spirit that haunts the pages of *Ana Historic* is evocative of Audre Lorde's conception of the "erotic," which Lorde defines as "an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our loving, our work, our lives" (55). Lorde writes further that it is "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings" (54). It is in the recognition of those feelings that "we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within" (58). Most significantly, the erotic operates in a "between" space that connects one to both a sense of self and to the other without erasing difference. Lorde identifies the erotic with "the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, [which] forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference" (56). This erotic spirit is also evocative of Irigaray's "interval of desire" that challenges the subject/object dichotomy without erasing sexual difference. The erotic is notably felt and expressed through the body in all creative contexts, and it is the need to embody her own experience in narrative and express her own multiplicitous desires in the living of her life that leads to Annie's dissatisfaction with History as it has been recorded, and how it operates as a discourse which effectively erases women's experience.

This dissatisfaction is expressed through her desire to write Ana Richard's life, to "flesh out" the facts of her life as they are presented in the archives: "'*[t]he first piano on the south side of Burrard Inlet was one which was ... sold to Mrs. Richards, school teacher, who lived in a little three-room cottage back of the Hastings Mill schoolhouse, and afterwards married Ben Springer*'" (48). Writing Ana's life seems to represent to Annie a means by which she can find her own way out of the "cultural labyrinth" (24) in which she finds herself; hence, Ana's journals are filled with echoes of Annie's own memories. Ana's engagement with place, for instance, with the new home she has come to as an immigrant, an "outsider," is focused especially on her interactions with nature (in the bush), as well as her relations with the other women who live there. The sections dealing with Ana's forays into the woods dovetail with Annie's memories of her spirited Lost Girl and her desire, as an adult, to recapture a sense of wholeness within her body and her world. Many of these journal entries are of Ana's experiences while walking in the woods where she demonstrates a keen awareness of her surroundings and a shift from a visual perception, where she notes the differences of the landscape in comparison to England, to a multi-sensual one that resonates with a sense of belonging:

> She could walk forever on an afternoon like this--let down her hair, feel her skin expand beyond the confines of her clothes. She wanted to kick off her boots, dance the well-being of her soul at home, for once, in her skin.
>
> If only she could write it down, as if the words might make a place she could re-enter when she felt the need, when she forgot--what it was like to feel this complete. (40)

Ana's desire to (re)create her experience of the place, and not just a description of it, through language expresses Annie's desire to do the same; that is, to create a place, through writing, for Ana's experience, as well as that of her mother, Ina's, and her own.

Through Ana, Annie explores the possibility of textually embodying the erotic spirit, which she identifies most strongly with a place that is in nature:

> [Ana] would walk to her spot in the woods where she could write in the midst of all this plenty undisturbed. Except by birds, the rustling of wings, an occasional snap that made her lift her head. Still, if she wrote outdoors the words might gather on the page with this thick being she could feel between things, undisturbed. (41)

This relational sense of self is one Annie finds difficult to express in language, a frustration that reveals itself through her inability to write Ana's words without "Ana" editing those words. The doubts she ascribes to Ana reflect her own multiplicitous fears about writing and, through writing, making visible the bodily experience of her-self that would again make it subject to the "look" which makes her so paradoxically "self-conscious" as an adolescent, most notably in relation to her father. In connection with writing, the paternalistic aspect of the gaze is implicated in Annie's fear of her husband Richard's response to her "scribbling," to the anticipation that her narrative will be dismissed because it is not "history," which, according to Richard, is "built on a groundwork of fact" (134), nor is it even recognizable as a cohesive "story": "but this is nothing, i imagine him saying. meaning unreadable, because this nothing is a place he doesn't recognize, cut loose from history and its relentless progress towards some end. this is undefined territory, unaccountable. and so on edge" (81). Writing from the "margins," Annie fears, will merely keep this "history" marginal, and, hence, still

unrecognized. Through Ana, Annie recalls the complexity of the fears and desires that she encounters in her own writing and re-membering process: "i lean over her shoulder as she tries, as she doubts: why write at all? why not leave the place as wordless as she finds it? because there is 'into--' what? frightening preposition. into the unspoken urge of a body insisting itself in the word" (46). This also reflects a fear of imposing her-self on Ana, of appropriating Ana's life into words of her own making that would, in effect, replicate the voice of History in determining the "proper" place of Woman. She is wary of filling Ana's "gap," of constructing a place through language that ends up containing her in the container of her body, which would result in a repetition of the domination of women based on a biological essence. As Zoe suggests to Annie, "the real history of women...is unwritten because it runs through our bodies: we give birth to each other" (131). This, however, is an idea that runs the risk of being interpreted literally and used against women once again. At the same time, Annie is afraid of that gap, of the gaping hole of women's absence, relating it to the gap of her-self and a profound sensation of both "lack" and "want," which she understands to be the same thing. Annie writes that

> i don't want history's voice. i want...something is wanting in me. and it all goes blank on a word. want. what does it mean, to be lacking? empty. wanton. vanish. vacant, vacuum, evacuate. all these empty words except for wanton (lacking discipline, lewd). a word for the wild. for the gap i keep coming to. i keep pointing out to you, Ina, as if it could somehow have stopped your dying. your going. gone. (49)

It is the movement of grief (a "moving" experience, which suggests the expression of emotion, such as being "moved" to tears) which precipitates Annie's voyage of re-membering and, significantly, it is the death of her mother that lies at the heart of this grief. In this passage, again written in a kind of stream-of-consciousness, Annie makes a connection with Woman as

"lack" in the language and her absence in the pages of History with her own ache of loss and sensation of "want." The place of Woman is an empty one, Annie realizes, and Woman is herself an empty place or "container."

The concept of woman as a container, significantly an empty container that represents her "lack," is one explored and challenged extensively by Luce Irigaray. Irigaray's work on this topic encompasses a broad range of psychoanalytic and philosophical interrogations. Irigaray, in fact, traces the origins of the concept of woman as container to Aristotle. Tina Chanter points out, for instance, that "[f]or Irigaray the illusion that metaphysics has not managed to dispel since Aristotle is that woman has the status of a container, an external covering, a kind of envelope for man" (151). Irigaray also makes a connection between Plato's cave and woman's womb, suggesting that "the myth of the cave" may be "read...as a metaphor of the inner space, of the den, the womb or *hystera*" ("Plato's *Hystera*" 243). Notably, Marlatt's Annie explores the etymology of "vagina," discovering, to her dissatisfaction, that it comes from the French *vagin*, meaning "sheath":

> 'vagina,' you said was the word for that part of our bodies we had to keep clean....it sounded so royal, regina, vagina, so foreign a word for something that was simply there, warm to touch, nice to rub...looking it up in French i was astonished to discover it was masculine. le vagin. there must be some mistake, i thought, not knowing its history, a word for sheath, the cover of a sword. it wasn't a sword that i was promised. (63)

Marlatt, like Irigaray, challenges the conception of woman as "container" by consistently shifting "focus" to the fluid "reality" of women through her recurring images of and references to menstrual blood. In the section entitled "Volume-Fluidity" in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray associates the male desire to contain woman with a fear of fluids, most

notably blood and milk (the fluids of the mother), but also his own sperm, saliva, tears, et cetera, because this leakage represents a threat to the self-contained, autonomous body-subject (237). Irigaray's particular focus in this essay is on the figure of the mother, and Margaret Whitford nicely summarizes Irigaray's observations that "the dominant fantasy of the mother...is as a *volume*, a 'receptacle for the (re)production of sameness' and the 'support of (re)production--particularly discourse--in all its forms.' But man needs to represent her as a *closed* volume, a container, his desire is to immobilize her, keep her under his control, in his possession, even in his house. He needs to believe that the container belongs to him" (Whitford 28). Significant to a reading of Marlatt's critique of containment is Irigaray's focus on the paradoxical dis/placement and dis/memberment of Woman:

> woman has not yet taken (a) place. The 'not yet' probably corresponds to a *system of hysterical fantasy* but/and it acknowledges a *historical condition*. Woman is still the place, the whole of the place in which she cannot take possession of herself as such....She is never here and now because it is she who sets up that eternal elsewhere from which the 'subject' continues to draw his reserves, his re-sources, though without being able to recognize them/her. She is not uprooted from matter, from the earth, but yet, but still, she is already scattered into *x* number of places that are never gathered together into anything she knows of herself, and these remain the basis of (re)production--particularly of discourse--in all its forms. (227)

In this passage, Irigaray describes a reification of Woman as an ahistoric object located outside of cultural time and space, a place where she, paradoxically, cannot locate herself. Further, Irigaray's description of Woman as a being whose pieces are scattered connects with Annie's desire to "re-member" and, in the process, gather the pieces together into something she can know of herself. In so doing, Annie is repeatedly drawn to the borders which demarcate her as Woman, to the dark, enclosed space of the teak wardrobe, which was "big enough to hide Frankenstein" (90), and which symbolically represents to Annie the container of her fears.

In the novel, Marlatt provocatively explores the idea of woman as both container and as that which must be contained by establishing a connection between women and trees. This link is contiguous with Annie's lesson that "history is the real story the city fathers tell of the only important events in the world. a tale of their exploits hacked out against a silent backdrop of trees, of wooden masses" (28). Numerous interpolations of the "voice" of History in the novel deal with the lumber industry in early Vancouver (or Gastown, as it was called then), and much of the history presented is related to the men's activities in this industry, which reflects their perception of the trees as resources to be exploited ("they can't see the forest for the trees," Marlatt suggests). The first such instance is notably juxtaposed with the passages of Annie's childhood discussed above:

> '*Douglas fir and red cedar are the principal trees. Of these, the former--named after David Douglas, a well-known botanist--is the staple timber of commerce. Average trees grow 150 feet high, clear of limbs, with a diameter of 5 to 6 feet. The wood has great strength and is largely used for shipbuilding, bridge work, fencing, railway ties, and furniture. As a pulp-making tree the fir is valuable. Its bark makes a good fuel.*' (14)

This description points to the complicity of naming in the human-centred reification process which transforms living things into objects for use (which thereby denies them inherent value simply in virtue of being living things). Neil Evernden notes, quoting John Fowles, that "according to Fowles, 'even the simplest knowledge of names and habits of flowers or trees starts [the] distinguishing and individuating process, and removes us a step from total reality toward anthropocentrism; that is, it acts mentally as an equivalent of the camera's view-finder" (37). This observation interestingly links up with Marlatt's apprehension of the camera as symbolic of the male gaze, which is implicit in the object-ification of women, as well as suggesting that reification is inherently linked with perception and one's orientation in the

world. Evernden further observes that "if we are to ask what aspects of reality are diminished through this prejudice, we must temporarily suspend our belief in a world of separate things" (38). It is this willing suspension that Marlatt works to articulate in the novel in order to write that which has been omitted or cleared from History's pages without replicating the same kind of object-ification process.

Marlatt's concerns may be identified as both feminist and ecological, something which is important to bear in mind when apprehending her representations of woman and nature. In her interview with Brenda Carr, Marlatt exhibits an awareness of the concerns and work of ecofeminism, and links these concerns with the development of her own poetics, as influenced by the Black Mountain poets (who include, among others, Duncan, Olson and Creely, as well as Gary Snyder, who is well known for his ecological poetry). She states that

> I think the ecological aspect of this poetic is very strong. The twinning of the language field, how you move within that, and what your response-ability is in each case--that was a very important contribution. Now we have the notion of eco-feminism and the sense that women take responsibility for what's happening in strip-mining, in the clear-cutting of forests, the polluting of our waters--this sense that women are no longer confined to the old archetypes of enclosure within a domestic space....But this [eco-activism] is happening because at last we see ourselves in responsible relation to what surrounds us, and we feel an urge to act or to write in that large relational context we're embedded in. (100)

In *Ana Historic*, Marlatt makes a strong analogy between the exploitation of trees and the exploitation of women's bodies, thus reinforcing the underlying "ecofeminist" concerns in the narrative. Annie's response to the historical passage on the usefulness of trees indicates an interpretation of "limbs" in a bodily context. She writes, "clear of limbs? of extras, of asides. tree as a straight line, a stick. there for the taking" (14). This line prefaces a description of

Ana standing "straight as any tree (o that Victorian sensibility--backbone, Madam, backbone!) [she] wasn't there for the taking. i imagine her slim in whalebone at the ship's rail as it turns with the wind, giving her her first view of what would become home as she imagined it, imagining herself free of history. there is a story here" (14). Marlatt's bodily metaphor extends here also to bone, to the whalebone used in corsets. In so doing, she draws yet another ecological connection; in this case, it is to the whale hunts which were exercised to the point of the whales' extinction. The connections Marlatt evokes are paradoxically diverse; she associates women with endangered species (both whales and trees) while also pointing to their own complicity in this endangerment, a move which both rescues women from the role of victim, while also exploring the question of limited choices. Bone corsets, for instance, were a form of containment of the female body, worn to present an appealing shape, presumably to make one attractive to the opposite sex. Whale-hunting also ties in with the usefulness of trees for shipbuilding, ships which enable the capitalist enterprise that is the motivation behind the exploitation.

Ana's appearance at the rail of a ship sailing into Vancouver's harbour is somewhat ironic in the context, for Annie later observes that it is men who ride ships "into the pages of history. the winning names. the nameless women who are vessels in their destiny....ride into history as stars on board the mute matter of being wife and mother--ahistoric, muddled in the mundane, incessantly repeating, their names 'writ in water.'" (121). This passage, interpolated with a lengthy section on the birth of a baby, points to the apprehension of woman as a vessel, who fulfills her "manifest destiny" through pregnancy and childbirth. Marlatt cleverly begins that section with a ship's "manifest," that is, a list of its freight or commodities, weaving

further the thread in the novel dealing with the commodification of bodies that is a result of the capitalist economy that begins with the awareness of the "look." Annie writes that "from children maintaining a sugar economy we grew into somebody else's 'sugar,' 'honey.' we stopped scribbling and started inking initials on our hands, our arms, on scraps of paper, giving ourselves away. the new economy we traded in was one based on the value of our bodies" (82). The section on childbirth, with its juxtapositions of boat-racing and ships' manifests, also points to the economy of the "look" as "the look of the agent (active) directed at (directing) the object of acquisition....the look of a man who has boarded ship to leave the trace, the mark of his being there), who would see evidence everywhere of his power..." (114). Marlatt, here, makes an analogy between the male marking of territory, which consists of the clearing of woods, and the pregnant woman as the "ship" who bears his mark, illustrating woman as both container and contained. Ana at the ship's railing, then, is meant to be seen as both riding her "manifest" destiny, and as part of the ship's manifest. Consequently, although Annie strives to see and present Ana as "free of history," she nevertheless struggles with the constraints imposed by History and with the reality of women's lives within that History. Again and again she comes up against the fact that woman's place has also been "hacked out of a silent backdrop of trees." In order to (re)write women's (his)story (Ana's, her mother's, and her own, with the implicit desire to change her own "destiny"), she must first recognize that "history [is] the story of dominance. mastery. the bold line of it" (25). (Male) History is not a story of curves, nor a curvilinear story. She, therefore, must first free Ana, indeed all the "Ana's," of their confining, straightening whalebone corsets and open up the space beyond the clearings without felling any more trees.

Marlatt opens up the possibility of a women's history, of a place where women's stories may be told and heard, by first exploring the place of women within History, defining this interstitial space as "hystery, the excision of women (who do not act but are acted upon)" (88). From this play on words she makes the connection to "hysterectomy, the excision of wombs and ovaries by repression, by mechanical compression, by ice, by the knife. because we were 'wrong' from the start, our physiology faulty, preoccupied as we are with the things of the flesh. spiritless--except for our rages--'going off the deep end'" (88). Marlatt derives this definition from an historical account which records that

> *[m]echanical devices were invented for compressing ovaries or for packing them in ice. In Germany, Hegar (1830-1914) and Friederich (1525-82) were using even more radical methods, including ovarectomy and cauterization of the clitoris. The source of hysteria was still, as in Plato's time, sought in the matrix of the female body, upon which surgical attacks were unleashed.* (89)

Taking a (blank) page from her mother's "book," Annie poignantly explores this conception of "hystery" through memories of her mother, whose own hysterectomy was part of her treatment for manic-depressive disorder, which Annie links with the nineteenth-century perception and treatment of "hysteria." Annie's memories are painfully inflected with her mother's voice, her mother's "truths," which reveal a deep paranoia about how her mother believed she was perceived. Ina believes, for instance, that the neighbours talk about her behind her back, calling her a "bad wife" and a "rotten mother" (88). This paranoia is also revealed in Ina's belief in "the conspiracies of doctors out to cause you pain, to punish you for being a bad girl (gone bad--infected by your body)" (88). As a result, Annie remembers that "they removed your uterus, they pulled your rotten teeth, they put electrodes on your misbehaving brain" (88). Marlatt poignantly connects this "management" of the woman's body with the management of

trees as resources. In a section recounting the effects of these treatments on Ina, Annie writes: "taking out the dead wood. pruning back the unproductive. it was all a matter of husbandry, the careful management of resources. for everybody's good, of course. a matter of course (by definition)" (147). Here Marlatt plays on the multiple connotations of "matter" as solid earth (the stuff of which Woman is made) and the Latin *mater*, meaning mother. Additionally, "course" suggests a race track (recalling the boat-racing passages interpolated in the birth section), as well as the straight line of progress. Women's "hystery," Marlatt suggests, has been "written" at the expense of women's bodies, which have been object-ified and dis-membered, and this "hystery" is most painfully recounted in Annie's memories of Ina's many sufferings. Ina suffers for not "belonging," and is, tragically, perceived by Annie to be punished for that inability. This inability is, nevertheless, Ina's "destiny."

Glen Lowry reads Ina as "a version of 'the other' who exists outside the realm of meaning, and who is unable to fit the confines of her body as it is imagined in phallogocentric bourgeois society" (88). He goes on to point out, quoting from Marlatt, that '[Ina] is victim to "'women's trouble.' the body that defeats the self. *the* body, not even *your* body. split off. schizophrenic, suffering hysteric malfunction" (Marlatt 89, qtd in Lowry 88). While this is essentially an astute observation, I suggest that it requires rewording to reflect that it is not precisely "her" body which Ina cannot fit, but *the* body (the implication of which he seems to overlook in the passage he quotes); that is, it is *Woman's* body as it is imagined, which opens up this interpretation to the idea that Ina's body (and significantly the *mother's* body) is perceived as "unfit." This is a subtle distinction, but it helps to shift the emphasis to Marlatt's investigation of the importance of the effects of perception on a woman's sense of self, and the

disjunction between the cultural image and her experience of her own body, rather than women's efforts to "fit" into the container (indeed, be the container) created for them. Annie's efforts to re-member her-self are focused on this disjunction; indeed, she suggests that all women are perceived through the lens of the distorting cultural camera as Woman, whether or not they may actually "fit" into the current fashionable notion of the Ideal Woman. While conceptualizations of this "Ideal Woman" have shifted over time, Marlatt suggests, not without irony, that the metaphysical concept of "Woman" is actually ahistoric. Notably, in the full passage from which Lowry quotes, and the passage which precedes it, Marlatt invokes Annie's Lost Girl, conflating the grammatical subject to "the child," so that it is unclear as to whether she is referring to Ina or to Annie. The description of a child "with serious eyes and a delicate mouth, about to be sent away from home to boarding school" (89) would seem to refer to Ina, but in response to Annie's question "where did that child go?" she writes:

> that child, one with her body. not yet riven, not split into two--the self and the body that betrays the self. bleeding, leaking, growing lumps, getting pregnant, having abortions and miscarriages. all the bad timing, off days, things that weren't supposed to happen. 'female complaints,' in a hushed voice. 'women's trouble.' the body that defeats the self. *the* body, not even *your* body. split off, schizophrenic, suffering hysteric malfunction. all of this *contained* [my emphasis], unspoken, but sounded in the shame with which you handed me my first box of pads.... (89)

For a moment, "that child" is Annie as she has re-membered herself, the free-spirited Lost Girl, until it is clear that she is again referring to her mother. Once more, Marlatt points to the transitional phase, the "period" between childhood and adulthood, as the demarcation of containment, of a coming into a sexuality that is reduced to reproductive capability and identifiable with a coming into women's "hystery." It is strikingly also a sexuality that is

perceived as shameful, that must be hidden (contained) and repressed, spoken of only in hushed voices, if at all[5].

The transition from girl to woman may be identified as a passage from "subject" to "object," for Marlatt explores the paradox of the girl-child's sense of freedom which stems from an un-self-conscious sense of her body/self as a part of the world, to the loss of that sense of freedom through a coming into a self-conscious awareness of her body in the process of becoming a woman. Marlatt identifies this object-ification with the fixing, pornographic gaze of the camera (as wielded by men), and the beginnings of a sexual "identity" that is not locatable in her own sense of her (female) body, but, rather, is defined through the mediating look of the desiring subject, that is, the male. This is consistent with Elizabeth Grosz's suggestion that "[w]omen's bodies do not develop their adult forms with reference to their newly awakened sexual capacities, for these are dramatically overcoded with the resonances of

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[5] As an example of the inter-dynamic tensions, or paradoxes and ironies that exist in this novel, which problematize attempts at either/or readings, Annie recuperates the sanitary pad from a symbol of shame to one of joyous creativity, evocative of Lorde's conception of the "erotic," writing, "there is still even now the innate pleasure of seeing on a fresh white pad the first marks of red, bright red when the bleeding's at its peak. innate because of a childish astonishment, *i made that*! the mark of myself, my inscription in blood. I'm here. scribbling again" (90). Here Marlatt again associates the erotic with the un-self-consciousness of childhood. In her essay, "Musing with Mothertongue," Marlatt explores fully the possibilities of a *l'écriture feminine* that is not contained, nor containable, within a phallogocentric idea of language. She perceives of language as a "body," pointing to the physicality of writing, of the need to "write the body," while outlining her frustration at the constraints of a (male) language and the (male) tradition of literature: "where are the poems that celebrate the soft letting-go the flow of menstrual blood is as it leaves her body? how can the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority, subject through verb to object, convey the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated cycles her body knows?" (12) This essay anticipates her work in *Ana Historic*, both in its underlying concerns and style of writing. It also links her feminist thought with Julia Kristeva (whom she quotes in the essay) and Luce Irigaray's concept of *l'écriture feminine* and her own writing style in "When Our Lips Speak Together," in particular.

motherhood" (*Volatile Bodies* 205). According to Grosz, the development of breasts and the onset of menses are markers, not of a girl's coming into her own sexuality (in comparison with boys, whose "first issuing forth of sperm, the onset of nocturnal emissions, signals coming manhood for the boy, the sexual pleasures and encounters fantasized and yet to come" (205)), but of preparation for the reproductive role of motherhood; thus, female "[p]uberty is not figured as the coming of a self-chosen sexual maturity but as the signal of immanent reproductive capacities" (205). Grosz focuses especially on menstruation as the symbolic end to (the period of) "childhood," while further noting that it is a process which ironically returns the body to the excesses of infancy, to the uncontrollability of the body's natural, cleansing functions, "indicat[ing] an out-of-control status that she was led to believe ends with childhood" (205). Grosz elaborates, in a passage which compellingly corresponds with Irigaray's observation that Woman is perceived to exist outside of time and space, that

> [t]he idea of soiling oneself, of dirt, of the very dirt produced by the body itself, staining the subject, is a 'normal' condition of infancy, but in the case of the maturing woman it is a mark or stain of her future status, the impulsion into a future of a past that she thought she had left behind. This necessarily marks womanhood, whatever else it may mean for particular women, as outside itself, outside its time (the time of a self-contained adulthood) and place (the place definitively within its own skin, as a self-identical being), and thus a paradoxical entity, on the very border between infancy and adulthood, nature and culture, subject and object, rational being and irrational animal. (205)

Yet it is these border places, these places *between* the binary oppositions Grosz cites, with which Annie (and by extension, Marlatt) is fascinated, with a kind of abject, uncanny horror. She is drawn to them again and again (as especially narratively represented by the recurring symbol of the wardrobe), for these places represent to her the disjunction between her memory of her childhood phenomenal self, and the reality of her life as a woman who has fulfilled her

"manifest destiny" as wife and mother. Rather than feel fulfilled, however, she feels contained and enclosed inside these spaces, locked into cultural definitions of space and time. In other words, she recognizes that she has come to occupy the "place" of the constructed social image of Woman, that place that has been cleared for her, just as the woods are cleared in the name of a civilizing progress, but not without a sense of a loss of the "freedom" she experienced as a girl. Marlatt, however, as noted, undercuts the potential romanticization of the childhood state, which is connected with a positive identification with nature, by recognizing that the "natural" processes that mark the entry of girls into womanhood are preceded by a socialization that is intended to help ease the transition, primarily through the instilling of fears about the body and "nature" (in both senses of biology and the environment).

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous recalls men's cautions to women in their efforts to contain them, writing: "Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark. You're afraid. Don't move, you might fall. Most of all, don't go into the forest. And so we have internalized the horror of the dark" (248). These statements echo Ina's warnings to Annie which Annie identifies as part of her indoctrination into the world of women. As Annie comes to realize, however, the instilling of fears about the forest, bears and men amounted to anxiety about the female body (notably the forest is referred to as "the bush," a term used by Canadian settlers. Its repeated use in *Ana Historic* is no doubt meant as an implied euphemism for the female sex):

> i want to talk to you. (now? now when it's too late?) i want to say something. tell you something about the bush and what you were afraid of, what i escaped to: anonymous territory where names faded to a tiny hubbub, lost in all that other noise--the soughing, sighing of bodies, the cracks and chirps, odd rustles, something like breath escaping, something inhuman i slipped through. in

> communion with trees, following the migratory routes of bugs, the pathways of water, the warning sounds of birds, i was native, i was the child who grew up with wolves, original lost girl, elusive, vanished from the world of men ...
>
> but you, a woman, walked with the possibility of being seen, ambushed in the sudden arms of bears or men. 'never go into the woods with a man,' you said, 'and don't go into the woods alone.' (18)

While Ina's fears seem directed at men and an association of men with nature (the woods and bears), it becomes clear to Annie that her mother's fears are of what men might do to women (in the bush); thus, Ina's fears are exposed as anxieties about the "look," about women's bodies as objects of male desire. This connection of fear with men and nature is parallelled in Ana's experiences in the woods, and the fears whose origins Ana must ultimately question:

> And now she was leaving it [the woods], she let the quiet grow around her, clung to it, letting go of the wariness that always gripped her when she walked this mile alone. What was she afraid of? Not the deer, who were as startled as she. Not bears or cougar--she had never seen them, though stories abounded. Madmen then? Drunken seamen, Indians running amok? (96)

This litany of sources suggests an indoctrination into a fear of the "unknown," but which Ana's own experiences actually contest. For instance, in her encounter with two Siwash men, it is clear that her fear is fuelled by the stories the townspeople have told her, which effectively skew her perception (41). Her fears, it is suggested, are based not on her experiences in the woods themselves, but on the stories of others which construct phantom menaces and serve to create anxiety over what could happen. Likewise, the only bear that Ana sees is "Black's bear" (an ironic play on "Black bear"), an animal who is "sad and rather mangy squatting in the refuse of its own droppings with a chain around its neck," and which Ana observes "wasn't tame but dying" (103). Ana likens it to "a child sitting on the floor with imaginary blocks, invisible letters. Except that its eyes were the eyes of a beast--immeasurably sad" (103). In

this context, the bear symbolizes the cruelty inherent in man's attempts to "tame" nature and the debilitating effects of confinement. The desire to confine those things perceived as wild therefore reflects more on anthropocentrism, that is, a human-centred perception of the world which posits nature as dangerous and threatening, than on the actual danger wild animals may pose to humans when allowed to exist in their own environment (and notably provided they themselves do not feel threatened by humans). This perception is echoed in Annie's depiction of bears not as wild, dangerous animals, but as scavengers who raid their garbage cans at night; she notes, however, that there was "something canny in them, resistant to attempts to scare them off, looking over their shoulders with contempt, four-footed men in shaggy suits intent on a meal" (18). Marlatt's use of the word "canny" to describe the bears/men implies an interesting distinction between male and female positionings with(in) or towards nature, particularly in contrast to her Lost Girl's experience of "the bush." For in a dualistic style of perception, if men are "canny," then women must be "uncanny."

Cixous's observation above echoes Freud's comment that Woman is a "dark continent," but it also points to his discussion of "the uncanny," or *unheimlich*, in his essay of the same name. The "uncanny," as Freud defines it, is that which arouses feelings of dread and horror, but which, at the same time, evokes a feeling of familiarity. By presenting a lengthy investigation into the etymology of the German word, Freud concludes that, given its seemingly contradictory connotations of "homely," and that which "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" (225), the uncanny represents the recurrence of the repressed (241). He writes, "for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through

the process of repression" (241). His examples of the uncanny contain two significant items which relate to women such that Woman (and specifically her sexuality) may be perceived as "uncanny." One is the fear of being buried alive, which Freud notes would have its roots in "intra-uterine existence," that is, in memories of being in the mother's womb (244). The second is his comment that "neurotic men often declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs" (245). He explains this by observing that "[t]his *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning....whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'this place is familiar to me, I've been here before,' we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body" (245). The "uncanny" underlies much of the tension in *Ana Historic* between traditional representations of Woman and Annie's own struggles to make sense of her relationship to these representations through an examination of her relationship with her mother, primarily. As Marlene Goldman notes, "[g]iven Marlatt's aim to subvert the symbolic frame that guarantees masculine privilege, it is not surprising that, in *Ana Historic*, there is a concerted effort to move toward what Freud has characterized as 'uncanny'" (126)[6]. Yet, just as Irigaray critiques men's representations of women as solid ground (or matter), proposing fluidity as a radical alternative, so Marlatt investigates the "uncanny" with the aim of disrupting its association with women's sexuality by exploring, through Annie, what might be "uncanny"

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[6] Goldman discusses the "uncanny" in this novel at some length, citing instances of each of the examples Freud outlines in his essay and interpreting Marlatt's use in conjunction with Nancy Chodorow's theory of a woman's psychology. She also acknowledges Kristeva's abject, but does not explore this fully, referring to her theory only in a footnote referring to a secondary source who cites Kristeva in relation to the representation of "monstrous figures" (Goldman, 229).

about women *for* women. In other words, if men find women's "sex" uncanny, how do women themselves perceive their own sex?

Marlatt's emphasis on fluids, on menstrual blood, in particular, in relation to women's experience is also suggestive of Kristeva's notion of the "abject," which additionally fits with Marlatt's positioning of the female between subject and object (that is, in the transitional space between girl and Woman), for Kristeva defines the abject as "neither subject nor object," *(Powers of Horror* 1) and the state of abjection as "a border...[and] above all ambiguity" (9). Like the uncanny, the abject embodies a form of horror, of revulsion at that which is "improper" or "unclean," such as "an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung" (2), particularly in response to the (fluid) excesses of the body. Unlike the uncanny, however, it is a more profound horror, elicited not by familiarity, but by difference, by a recognition of that which is not the (contained) self or that which threatens the integrity of the self, or the sealed "body-subject" as Irigaray terms it. Kristeva writes that abjection (the state of being "abject") is "[e]ssentially different from 'uncanniness,' more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin, nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (5). In relation to Kristeva's abject, Elizabeth Grosz points out that "[b]ody fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside (this is what death implies), to the perilous divisions between the body's inside and its outside. They affront a subject's aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity" (194). Grosz's description of the physical-metaphorical movement to alterity that occurs in female puberty thus forms a "corporeal" link between Irigaray's critique of the perception of woman as container, and Kristeva's conception of the abject.

While Goldman suggests that Marlatt moves *towards* the uncanny in her novel, I interpret it as a movement *through* the uncanny which leads Annie to a sense of her-self as abject and, hence, unrecognizable. Her descriptions of the woods in which her spirit-ed Lost Girl seeks escape from the confinement of the home ("woman's place") are peppered with Gothic allusions such as "deadfalls" and "ghost stumps glowing in the twilight." The Lost Girl is "spirit(ed), filled with it, the world of what was other than us" (13). This world is distinguishable from that of the boys and men who also occupy the woods (in their clearings), but it is not quite a female world, either, since it is "other than us" (the girls). It is, rather, highly suggestive of a *super*-natural world, something somehow different from nature while at the same time embodying the natural world. What Annie is, in effect, describing is her sense of an experiential, relational self in that world, with a heightened perception that comes from truly feeling a part of it, yet not indistinguishable from it, a sense that she wishes to (re)discover as an adult. Her Lost Girl is but one of the "ghostly" presences that haunts this novel, like the imprint of erased words upon a page. Also present is Ana, the phantom from the past, and the mother, Ina, recently dead. Ghosts may be interpreted as beings who are trapped between the worlds of the living and the dead (or a state of being and not-being). Ghosts are not themselves abject, but, as Kristeva notes in her essay "Might Not Universality Be...Our Own Foreignness?," the "fear of death dictates an ambivalent attitude: we imagine ourselves surviving (religions promise immortality), but death just the same remains the survivor's enemy....Apparitions and ghosts represent that ambiguity and fill with uncanny strangeness our confrontations with the image of death" (185). Annie's fear is not so much a literal fear of death as an end to existence, per se, but of "death" of the self as represented by both the erasure of women's experience from the pages of History, and the loss of her own sense of her-

self (the un-self-conscious state she attributes to her Lost Girl). Kristeva writes that "[i]t is...not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (*Powers of Horror* 4). This description accounts for the ambivalence that Annie feels in her search for "self," for in identifying Woman (and recognizing herself as Woman) through her ghosts, Annie must come to terms with her recognition of womanhood as an abject state, one that threatens her own sense of order and belief in the world as she knows it, including her own belief, albeit ambivalent, in History.

Annie grapples with the desire to write women's history in a way that will address their "lack" in male history, but worries that this will merely reinforce that lack and keep women on the "margins" of the world. The "voice" of History continues to tempt her with its promise of a solid foundation: "come back, history calls, to the solid ground of fact. . .you don't want to fall off the edge of the world" (111). At the same time, once she becomes aware of the loss of women through this ordering process (the "missing persons in all [the] rubble" of History (134), suggesting that its "solid foundation" is an illusion), and her own losses as symbolized by her Lost Girl, she can no longer remain content to operate within that place allotted her. By recognizing her abjection and facing her fears, Annie anticipates the empowering potential of the abject state that enables her to take a step towards escaping the borders which confine her, and it is significant that she begins from a literal sense of loss, that is, in response to the death of her mother. Kristeva writes that

> [t]he abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being. There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want*

> on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. (*Powers of Horror* 5)

Annie confronts her "self" in the wardrobe and discovers that her life has been founded on a profound loss that, as discussed previously, leaves her wanting. She discovers that *she* is Frankenstein, or, at least, identifies with him, the doctor who dis-membered the body of a woman he himself had created (that is, the monster's bride), but who also created life through the re-memberment of body parts. The answer to the question that begins the novel "Who's There?" is "me," but Annie must first discover who "me" is, and she does this by exploring all those other "I's": "i want to answer her who's there? not Ana or Ina, those transparent covers. Ana Richards Richard's Anna. fooling myself on the other side of history as if it were a line dividing the real from the unreal. Annie / Ana--arose by any other name, whole wardrobes of names guarding the limitations--we rise above them. Annie isn't Richard's or even Springer's" (152). The identification with Frankenstein, both as the doctor and the monstrous creation who comes to be known by the name of his creator ("a man's name for man's fear of the wild, the uncontrolled" (142)), is a temporary one, reflective of Annie's process of moving through the uncanny to the abject in order to imagine a place beyond abjection where she can re-member and thus (re)create her-self. For, as she writes, the fear she inevitably confronts in the wardrobe "isn't even Frankenstein but a nameless part i know. terror has to do with the trembling that takes you out of yourself" (142). What is most "monstrous," Annie discovers, is that this state of abjection is accomplished through a social conditioning that is culturally reinforced through the mother-daughter relationship.

Annie notes that mothers "repeat history," and visit upon their daughters "the sins of the mothers. hating our bodies as if they had betrayed us" (62), suggesting, further, that the

stories of women "are hidden from us by fear. your fear i inherited, mother dear" (79). Yet, while Annie notes the complicity of mothers (specifically, of her own mother, Ina) in the patriarchal conditioning of girls, she identifies the "inheritance" of "mother to daughter to mother" as a "cultural labyrinth" (24), suggesting a circular passage with no clear origin where mothers were once daughters or "Lost Girls," too. In an imaginary conversation with her mother, Anne responds to Ina's question that "i suppose you see me as the monster hidden at the heart of [the labyrinth]?," with "there *is* a monster, there is something monstrous here, but it's not you" (24), thereby refusing to lay the blame on her (the) mother, despite her profound ambivalence towards their relationship. What emerges from her investigation of the mother-daughter relationship is an awareness of containment within prescribed roles, and the "monstrous lie" of "woman's place," which she identifies with the supposed safety and security of the home (24). The "lines" between "woman's place" and woman as place (that is, as cleared empty space and a "vessel" to be filled) are blurred in this novel, and it is by contesting the idea of Woman as a container to be contained that Marlatt most problematizes the woman-nature connection. Yet, even while Annie feels herself to be lost in a maze, the symbol of the labyrinth is an important one which suggests a containment that is not, in fact, total, for labyrinths have both openings and exits, but these need not be marked, as such, with their connotations of "beginnings" and "endings." And so Marlatt "ends" this novel by "reading us into the page ahead," into a "place" always yet-to-be written; a "place" rich with the "luxury of being" (153).

In *Ana Historic*, Daphne Marlatt investigates the multiple forms of dis-placement experienced by women in conjunction with an intensely diverse engagement with the multiple meanings of "place" itself. From the particular dis-placement of the immigrant woman, to the

gaps in the text of History, and the concept of Woman as gap or "lack" herself, Marlatt provocatively explores the subversive potential of the place that exists between value dualisms such as subject and object, self and other, culture and nature, male and female, and time and space, and from which the "truth" of these dualisms may be challenged. This labyrinthine journey takes her through the uncanny to the "in-between" place of the abject, where Marlatt discovers the radical, empowering possibility of its threat to identity, borders and order. Through a negotiation of the abject, Marlatt (and Annie) arrives at a "place" that is neither subject nor object as traditionally conceived, but is a relational sense of self that is open to multiple configurations of sexuality and identity. This negotation occurs through Ana (An-a), who figures between Ina (I-na), identifed with the mother, and Annie (An-I); Ana thus represents an openness of possibility but, at the same time, serves to highlight the constraints of an (a)historical identity.

Marlatt's achievements in this novel embody Hélène Cixous's observation that "[b]y writing her 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 ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (250). Marlatt's work is likewise imbued with the spirit of Annie's "Lost Girl," the spirit that she locates in the transitional phase between girl and Woman, another "place between" that may be identified as Lorde's "erotic," where differences are bridged through a sharing of joy without capitalizing on the "other" or erasing difference. The "erotic" also represents a place where the social conditioning of the female may be contested and "dismembered" in a transformative re-membering from abjection to an experiential sense of self. Importantly, Marlatt conceives for Annie the possibility of a

lesbian relationship as a place to fully explore her long repressed sexuality and desires, and so fully express her erotic spirit in the "interval of desire." In keeping with the "spirit" of the nineteenth-century novel, Marlatt opts for an ending that Annie could conceive but not actually write for Ana, but which she significantly recognizes as a possible alternative for contemporary women.

Chapter Two

Mapping the Unmappable: Geographical Expressions of Self in Aritha Van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*

> The six scattered provinces had yet to unite in a great national endeavour or to glimpse anything remotely resembling a Canadian dream; but both were taking shape. The endeavour would be the building of the Pacific railway; the dream would be the filling up of the empty spaces and the dawn of a new Canada. (Pierre Berton, *The National Dream: The Great Railway 1871-1881*, 13)

> Until this great work is completed, our Dominion is little more than a 'geographical expression.' (Sir John A. MacDonald, qtd. in Berton)

> Is desire escape
> from the self or rest
> lessly to re
> invent it? (Mary di Michele, "What is Desire?")

As suggested by popular historian/journalist Pierre Berton, the building of a railway that would unite east (Quebec) to west (British Columbia), while crossing over the vast, sparsely settled, "empty spaces" of the prairies, historically symbolizes Canada's "national dream," a political dream of a unified nationhood and, consequently, a unifying national identity. Yet, in Aritha van Herk's "geografictione," which she spells with an "e" ending to signify the feminine, trains and rails are symbols of death. Given the association with Anna Karenina in this book, and the reading of the Russian novel that features in the culminating "exploration of site" at Ellesmere Island, this symbolism is, perhaps, understandable, as Tolstoy's novel ends with Anna's death by train. Despite the focus on a reading of the novel *Anna Karenin* in the final section (and the occasional ghostly visitation by Anna herself in previous sections), however, *Places Far From Ellesmere* is decidedly a Canadian text, intimately concerned with the "geographical expression" of Canadian places in relationship with a Canadian woman. By linking trains with

death, with Anna, significantly, representing the "link" itself, van Herk implicitly draws on the Canadian association of the railway with national identity in order to critique the notion of "identity" at the level of the "self."

Van Herk's explorations of self-identity through an engagement with significant places challenge the concept of a unified, autonomous self, or universal "subject," that exists outside of relations with place and with others. This is a "self" that is paradoxically fixed in "place," yet transcendant, and whose borders are decidedly "male/lineated," in van Herk's words (88). Trains in this book and, more pointedly, the iron bars of the tracks, represent the imposition of a socio-cultural order, represented by the "hammering" of the landscape and of Woman into "metal bar[s]" (121), to form an overlaying grid of knowledge and representation whose delineations are clearly masculine, since it was males (the Canadian politicians, or "founding fathers" with their colonial patrilineage; and Tolstoy, representing a male literary tradition) who authored these texts. In her interrogation of male/lineated texts and discourses, Van Herk explicitly utilizes the woman-nature association, most obviously by designating Ellesmere "woman as island," to expose their underlying logic of domination. Van Herk's critique of the ordering principles informing grid-work (including the laying of railways and the drawing of maps) identifies these principles as a form of sexual violation, for Anna, she suggests, is ultimately punished for her sexuality. Van Herk observes: "Not Vronsky who does Anna in but Tolstoy, he the peasant who severs/penetrates her with the iron, a symbolic but obviously sexual attack: exactly as Tolstoy annihilates Anna for her sexual nature" (119). Iron-ically, perhaps, "iron" may also be read as connotative of domesticity, and a symbol of woman's "proper" place in the home. Van Herk problematizes the concept of "home" extensively in this

book; home, also, is associated with death. Anna is punished by sexual effacement for being an iron-y in herself, that is, a woman constructed as a sexual object of desire by and for men, yet who must not express her own sexuality or desires. Van Herk construes Anna as representative of all women in this respect, writing:

> You know at least a hundred Annas, stranded in fictional love affairs written by men who do not know that Ellesmere exists. Come to that, women are all Annas, caught or not, Annas sweating their way from one day to the next. They know the wars within their orbits, between children and husbands and lovers, need and desire and the desperate necessities of symmetry, how they will be always and forever culpable, exiled for their visceras, eviscerated for their exiles. (83)

Consequently, *Places Far From Ellesmere* is an exploration of desire: of desire in a landscape (representing both bodies of land and of women), and the long repressed desires of women. In a supplementary essay to the book, entitled "The Map's Temptation or the Search for a Secret Book," van Herk writes that what she "sought to map, in the writing act resulting in *Places Far From Ellesmere*, was grief, my woman's grief" (130). She writes that she "fled to Ellesmere as an unmapped map, a space in which I could engage with a terrible and heart-stopping grief. My grief was for the endless procession of female characters who were permitted no cartography of their own, tempted into death by their malleable mappability, their killability" (135). Her geografictione enacts a "new cartography," in van Herk's words, that embodies or em-books a defiantly radical and subversive exploration of the erotics of space and the mapping of place, and an elegy inspired by the movement of grief for the multiple murders of women caught beneath the wheels of trains and in the lines of maps.

Positioning herself as an "explorer" in her own geografictione, a term laden with negative colonial connotations, van Herk is compelled to distinguish between "exploration" and "discovery." She associates the former with archaeological "readings" of landscapes through the uncovering of stones and fossils (98), while "discovery" is linked with sitings (with the implied homonymic "sightings" [1]) and namings. She notes that Ellesmere Island was "discovered" by William Baffin in 1616: "sighted...(how: from the shore/with a telescope/from his ship?)" (98). Here, van Herk invokes the distancing of vision which enables one to name a place (or thing) without truly knowing what it is that one is naming, without having a relationship with the place itself. As discussed in relation to *Ana Historic*, this kind of distanced vision, like the "eye" of the camera, is complicit in the reification of the land as well as the objectification of human beings. Like Marlatt, van Herk explicitly links this kind of vision with the "male gaze," which turns that which is gazed upon into an object of desire. This is a stance that can only be maintained through distance, both Marlatt and van Herk suggest, which, therefore, precludes the development of a reciprocal relationship wherein the inherent value of the "other" is recognized and appreciated. "Ellesmere," van Herk notes, was subsequently named (and subsequently transformed into a place on the map) after the Earl of Ellesmere, for no discernible reason except that she wonders if he gave them money: "What did they read on those ice-bound shores that suggested the island should be named for him? And was their reading correct? Is it an Ellesmere, or something else, some other name that other beings spoke? There must be another name, somewhere, if one only had the eyes to read it" (97). Ellesmere was, she suggests, "[h]ard to configure as an island at first" when Baffin

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[1] In her essay "The Map's Temptation" Van Herk confirms that she is punning on "sight" in her use of "site" (129).

first "sighted" it. It was not until the nineteenth century that Ellesmere was "[e]xplored, not discovered," and she notes further that "[f]orty-two hundred years ago hunting bands roamed beside the inlets and fjords of Hazen Plateau. They had a name for Ellesmere, you are sure of that" (98). Van Herk points to the transformation of space into significant (signified) place through naming, noting naming as both a negative and positive practice depending on context and the situatedness of the one doing the naming.

Naming is identifiably negative as a colonizing practice that effaces the land's character, as well as the language of the peoples who live there, with the subsequent effacement of the peoples themselves through the ambiguous assignment of irrelevant names; that is, names that have no relationship to the place itself. Since the names of places are recorded on maps, naming and map-making are both complicit in the inscription of an/other's perspective on the land and the peoples who inhabit it. Maps, as tools of power in the European expansion to the "New World," in effect both figuratively "captured" the land (thus reinforcing the literal act of discovery) and inscribed the European perspective onto it. In "Deconstructing the Map," historian of cartography J. B. Harley notes that maps are not "neutral" or objective representations (if, indeed, any "representation" can be said to be truly objective--an assumption which van Herk explicitly critiques), and, as such, he points to the "social consequences of cartographic practices" (9). Such "social consequences" have included the historical colonization of "foreign" lands by representatives of European countries, which included the colonization of the peoples who inhabited those lands. Environmental philosophers Mora Campbell and Eric Higgs note that "the capacity to draw lines on a representative surface reflects the ability to ignore political realties of the colonized" (6). They

further suggests that, for colonists, "the extension of the map was the extension of power; possession was the act of representation" (6). The inscription of the European perspective with marks of "possession," was reinforced by the (re)naming of places and is, therefore, suggestive of the power of language in likewise constructing identities that are nevertheless independent of what is actually represented, resulting in a "confusion of the map with the territory."[2] As Harley suggests, "[w]hile the map is never the reality...it helps to create a different reality. Once embedded in the published text the lines on the map acquire an authority that may be hard to dislodge. Maps are authoritarian images" (14). It is the authority of the map that van Herk challenges; indeed, she challenges the authority of any representation which seeks to map and name the world or "others" and present it as "truth."

Van Herk suggests a positive association of naming, however, which arises from a people's inhabitation of and engagement with a place, in what may be called a "self-naming." It is an active engagement with place that is suggested by van Herk's "archaeological readings," a "multi-layered" or palimpsestic kind of reading that she acknowledges she derives from Foucault (Rocard 88). This concept of a palimpsestic reading is similar to Marlatt's deconstructive readings of "History" and language, in that it seeks to peel away layers of discourse and "meaning" in order to expose the "blind spots," or that which has been imperfectly erased and written over. Van Herk terms this style of reading "un/reading," a

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[2] I borrow the phrase "confusing the map with the territory" from Campbell's and Higgs's fascinating essay entitled "Confusing the Map with the Territory: An Examination of the Legacy of Landscape Representation." This is a re-phrasing of Alfred Korzybski's oft quoted observation that "a map is not the territory it represents," which van Herk alludes to in her essay "The Map's Temptation" (132).

recurrent word in her book, which she defines as "the act of dismantling a text past all its previous readings and writings" ("In Visible Ink" 4), and as "a means of interrogating, not simply re-reading the text, re-discovering it, finding it again, but also in the un-reading making the text your own and looking at the process of both its writing and its reading. So that you are not looking only at content, but at process, always process" (Rocard 87). In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, van Herk as explorer (as opposed to narrator--she is not telling a story, but en-acting multiple narratives) un/reads not only the novel *Anna Karenin*, but places as well: places which hold significance for her as sites where she has lived or does live; places she has called "home," a term that, as noted, is also associated with death and grief. In the process of these "explorations on site" she explores herself, or, as she puts it, is reciprocally explored:

> Home and grief readily matriculate one another, tabulate a similar space....I wanted, in an effort to comfort my writerly grief, and with a geografictional tonality, to map with words those places I once dared to call home. At the same time, I knew that I could refuse the epistemic classification of cartography by posing them as sites of exploration, hence unfixed, unmappable places. Sites of exploration are not explorable (and consequently colonizable) spaces but spaces that seek to explore, themselves continuous fictions proposing the fluidity of an imaginary place. ("The Map's Temptation" 130)

These un/readings entail an engagement with place, and, consequently, self, that informs her attempts at re-presenting them geografictionally in a way that does not name or define them, but in the emergence of "names" reflects the perspective of an inhabitant. By resisting the temptation of an illusory mimesis that the map seems to offer, van Herk, in turn, refuses to replicate the colonizing act in which mapping is implicated. Her archaeological un/readings seek to unravel the network of representations, or what Foucault calls the "episteme of Western culture" (75), that forms the discursive "grid" of knowledge which orders the world through

categorizations based on a distanced, so-called "objective" view of the world (Foucault xx). She finds an opportunity for a resistance to these categorizations in Foucault's analysis of the "'reciprocal bond, between imagination and resemblance'" (Foucault 71, qtd in Van Herk, "The Map's Temptation" 129). Foucault suggests that "without imagination, there would be no resemblance between things" (Foucault 69), thus pointing to imagination as an intermediary space between any form of representation and that which is it seeks to represent. She explains that "[e]very writer grapples with the urgency of transforming reality into a sign; I confess to a terrible need, like Don Quixote, to read the world in order to prove a story. But of course, the written world and external things or feelings refuse to resemble one another, and the writer is left to reconcile the terrible implacabilities of resemblance and the imagination" ("The Map's Temptation" 129). The "imaginary place" to which she alludes above ultimately leads to the acknowledgement that any form of mapping, or textual representation of a place, can ultimately only be imaginary, deriving, as it does, from the imagination. While this may be a source of frustration for writers who seek to transform their experience into language in a way that resembles that experience as closely as possible, it also points to the subversive potential of disrupting possessive, colonizing representations.

The space of the imagination is an important concept for a writer who notes that she sought to "configure a book that could act as a map" in the writing of *Places Far From Ellesmere* ("The Map's Temptation" 129), suggesting an affiliation between the map and the book as a form of text. She observes, however, that they are "not interchangeable, except perhaps as versions of disguise for noetic representation, palimpsests of idea and its transgressive space, subversion built into text, the lubricity of content and expression" ("The

Map's Temptation" 129). Here Van Herk anticipates the radical potential that lies within the map itself, or, indeed, any form of representation. "So unsettled is the nature of representational space," she writes, "that it is as contingent as tectonics, as imprecise as the air that an address pretends to contain" ("The Map's Temptation" 131). In this essay and in *Places Far From Ellesmere*, van Herk explores the idea that a mapping of place is ultimately impossible, that it cannot truly "capture" the multi-dimensional dynamics of the place. Van Herk, consequently, transforms the map into an imaginary place, "embodying" this place as Ellesmere Island, which she imagines as Woman (as an "Anna"). As such, she challenges hegemonic representations not only of landscape but of the idea of "Woman," by mapping herself from the ever shifting space of the imagination in a "place" that allows for the full exploration of desire. The problematic she compellingly explores in this book, then, is how to map desire without "killing" it; that is, to bring it into being without changing its indefinable qualities and without ultimately portraying it through an "object of desire." In other words, how does one "map" desire without "projecting" (that is, with the sense of a cartographic projection which entails a necessary mathematical distortion of the land) one's desire upon that which the map seeks to represent, without turning desire, itself, into an object? In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, van Herk utilizes a reconfigured concept of mapping to explore desire as a reciprocal movement that resists the objectification of an "other" while allowing for the full expression of a desiring self. By employing the map form, van Herk is able to deconstruct the overlaid epistemic grids from within the space she denotes as imaginary, thereby challenging the illusive power of the map as an episteme which carries and entrenches a specific form of knowledge that has both enforced and continues to reinforce the logic of domination.

The subversive potential for deconstructive readings of maps is noted by Harley, who suggests that "[d]econstruction urges us to read between the lines of the map--'in the margins of the text'--and through its tropes discover the silences and contradictions that challenge the apparent honesty of the image. We begin to learn that cartographic facts are only facts within a specific cultural perspective" (3). Harley shifts the map and the cartographic enterprise from their supposed scientific territory to the realm of cultural artifact, thus illustrating how they function to replicate and reinforce cultural and societal attitudes, values and beliefs. Similarly, José Rabasa advocates deconstructive readings of maps which pay attention to the "margins of the text," employing such a technique in his allegorical reading of Mercator's seventeenth-century *Atlas*. Rabasa observes that "since the totality of the world can never be apprehended as such in a cartographic objectification, maps have significance only with a subjective reconstitution of the fragments. The *Atlas* stands out as an ironic allegorization of this blind spot inherent in a cartographical enterprise" (186). Rabasa, notably, apprehends the *Atlas* as a palimpsest, writing that "[t]he transposition of the image of the palimpsest becomes an illuminative metaphor for understanding geography as a series of erasures and overwritings that have transformed the world" (181). The recognition of such "erasures" or "blind spots," Rabasa suggests, allows for a "source of hope for the reconstitution or reinvention of the world from native points of view" (181), thereby pointing to the positive potential of deconstruction. Incorporating a feminist point of view, Marlene Goldman, in her study of Canadian women writers' use of images of mapping and exploration, suggests that women writers use this strategy to expose the connections between mapping practices and both the oppression of women and the construction of gendered identities. She writes that the "figures of mapping and exploration...portray both women's position within a set of traditional discourses and

attempts to chart alternative representations of female identity" (6). Van Herk utilizes the subversive potential of mapping as a strategy to disrupt traditional representations of landscapes and places and, in the process, disrupt the writings and readings of women by male authors. Before she can "escape," however, to what she refers as the "tabula rasa" of Ellesmere, Anna's island of "absence" (77), and its unmappability, Van Herk's explorations take her through the already-mapped places of her life to determine how they have been imprinted on her memory, and reciprocally imprinted on her-self.

The question that underlies these explorations "on site" is, again, the problematic of "discovery," of the first siting/sighting of place and its subsequent naming: "Discovery. What to call the first moment a place lodges in your memory. What to call the first moment place emplaces itself in naming" (86). Van Herk ultimately wants to resist such fixations and definitions, and instead create a moving map that is more like a film screening across space-time than a static photographic image. This process is implicated in her grief, and in the desire to represent the movement of emotion, particularly in her exploration of Edberg, which was "always there, an initial seeing that you don't remember" (86). In returning to Edberg, she discovers that it is a dying town, dying, possibly, because of the loss of the train ("no town without a train/no train without a town" (19)), and the "progress" of civilisation: "Who's done it? Collapsed this careful edifice, this dreaming? The telephone? the car? the road? airplanes? weather? Can you permit it to remain upright (on its tired feet laced into farmer's boots), or will it fall flat onto its high-fronted face?" (34). Edberg represents a form of death by train, resulting from the train's desertion of the place, but also from the desertion of its inhabitants; thus, van Herk's grief over its dying is complicated by feelings of guilt for her own complicity

in its "murder." Consequently, van Herk struggles with the desire to keep Edberg ironically "alive" by fixing it in her memory, in a "dream geography" of her own making. It is, after all, "[h]ome...An asylum for your origins, your launchings and departures, the derivations of your dream geographies. Where you invented destinations. Always and unrelentingly (home) even after it is too late to be or to revert to (home), even after it pre/occupies the past tense" (13). In this section, entitled "Edberg, coppice of desire and return," she explores a tension between her adolescent desire to leave, and the illusive security of "home," of origins which hold a magnetic attraction. The death of Edberg suggests a death of self because Edberg "claims you, insists on a reference, influence, empreinte" (15). Her body is imprinted with Edberg, this town which shaped her growing--not an "origin," in fact, but a seeding; Edberg represents the "continuous grounding" of the "place in the person, the person in the place" (37)-- and led to her inevitable departure: "Edberg has carved itself into the cleft above your mouth. Your nose has an Edberg slope to it, your eyes Edberg's hills. This is your self-geography, the way you were discovered/uncovered in Edberg's reading of your fiction" (37). Returning to Edberg means facing the inevitability of its and her own death, and herein lies the "temptation of the map"; that is, to fix this place in her memory, or re-member this place into a being of the past, in order to stop its dying:

> You cup your hands to hold it in, breath deep. You want to command it into everlasting place like a horse or a dog, a patient animal. You look away: it moves, un/reads itself again, a sly alteration leaving you puzzled, and groping for reassurement. You check with other originals, try to compare your grainy photographs with theirs....Impossible: their versions negate yours. (38)

As van Herk "discovers," no one map can represent this town; its constant shifting ultimately defies or defers all possible readings.

Edberg is a paradox; its dying signifies not an ending, but painful reformations that, nevertheless, are also signs of growth. She remembers her own "growing pains" in this "place of origins, of forbiddens and transgressions, of absence and remains" (39), a place that allowed for the subversive rupture of containment. Her adolescent self, forbidden to go to dances because they were "dangerous," nonetheless found ways to escape this "training" in the exquisite territory of desire; desire made all the more tantalizing for its forbiddenness. In Edberg's multiplicity of paradox, its palimpsest, van Herk glimpses the possibility of Ellesmere as a place with no trains that is ultimately unmappable, as a "desert of desire" (105): "Everywhere is here. Your frozen dreams from the time when you stepped neatly down this sidewalk, your itchy palms from longing to be touched, your un/read stories. Edberg is an Ellesmere, an island shrouded in the wet snow of summer, with muskoxen waiting for their coats to grow" (36). She un/reads Edberg, and in the un/reading "discovers" it as an imaginary place, discovers that her reading of it can only be imaginary: "Edberg: this place, this village and its environs. A fiction of geography/geography of fiction: coming together in people and landscape and the harboured designations of fickle memory. Invented: textual: un/read: the hieroglyphic secrets of the past. Come home" (40). Edberg resists en-gravement, although its graveyard lures van Herk with its offer of a "place to stay, settle down, send roots," a place to retire and "lapse quietly into the deep breathing of forget" (39). Edberg, however, ultimately offers van Herk the possibility of resistant readings and writings of those places which would seek to contain her desire and shape her into an iron bar.

Calgary is, in many ways, an opposite and mirror image of Edberg, a place that becomes (is named) "home" for the adult van Herk. It is a thriving city as opposed to a dying

town, although it, too, found a place on the "map" because of the railway: "[Calgary] is a CPR town, would've died otherwise" (59). Calgary, also, is a paradox. It is a "growing graveyard" cast in stone, but whose "denizens" are transient "desert nomads" (66): everyone pretends to be from somewhere else, not here" (72). Like nomads, they are constantly moving, resisting settlement: "to live here you must move, although the stones demand stillness, and the grass demands its own growing. Home is a movement, a quick tug at itself and it packs up. Call yourself a taxi and consult a map. A blur. And these discreet defections Calgary's denizens" (69). It is this sense of movement that appeals to van Herk; Calgary is a place that represents transience, that houses transients; it is a settlement founded on "restlessness":

> Begun by the oldest occupation, the nomadic herding of grazing animals. Ranchers unsettled, the cattle themselves moving, always moving, their cattle kingdom a transported and elegiac shuffle. With the endless arrival of the CPR, a cadence established and ingrained. Restlessness, an historic restlessness, following the backs of beasts. Sleep on the ground, ride again in the morning. This companion of settlement. Here, this place. (68)

Calgary, then, seems to be a place of no origins, not even truly a place of destination or endings, despite the association with graveyards and her decision that "home is here and death too is allowed" (62), for "[t]here aren't enough graveyards here, people go away to die: their bones go elsewhere" (59). Yet, for all the pretense of movement within its walls and the "denizens" who deny their origins and, consequently, an originary identity (in their rootlessness they are still somehow unified in their restlessness), Calgary is not a place of desire, a place where desire can be freed and freely expressed:

> You fail to believe that others can read the passion within you. You pretend not to see theirs. Who dares to confess to feeling, to anger, to rage, to joy. Not here. Stay calm, keep moving, don't look up. Above you hang the boomtown

> ghosts, half-finished buildings, struts and ceilings with gaping floors. The skeletons within your skins. You are those ghosts, con/ and de/struction, full of sites and demolition. (69)

Calgary's restlessness is contrasted with its stony reserve and repression of emotion in the face of the "ghosts" of its past, which serve as reminders of past transients/present transience. It is "erotic in intent" but that is ultimately a "lie" (67), and "sex is too playful for Jericho [as] two of the pieces of the puzzle might connect" (73). This city is an "acrostic of place" (72), with the streets and place names forming a crossword of languaged settlement where words are forced into straight lines, and letters are boxed off in a semiotic grid to form a container for desire and for lust. Should there be a "coition," van Herk suggests, then "all the interlocking bridges...[would be] unnecessary--all the trails...overruled, all 3000 kilometres of paved road bypassed in a flyover of lust, for once, lust" (73). "You need practice in the geography of lust," van Herk writes, glimpsing this possibility in the spaces between the quadrants of Calgary, but inevitably discovering that here she is a minotaur, "a clumsy bawling beast in the centre of a web of thread, a cat's cradle of encapturement" (73). Despite its light-filled labyrinths and "ghostly vaginas" (72), Calgary is not a place that will allow van Herk to express desire or to map her grief; yet it does inspire an interrogation of the meaning of "home."

"Habitué, hooked, a citizen of. Within this enclosure (Calgary) the city a centre of spokes, empenned. (What does home mean?) Spearpoints found in plowed fields east of the city (12 000 years old). Teepee rings, medicine wheels, effigies: Blackfoot, Sarcee, Stoney" (66). In exploring the meaning(s) of home, van Herk gestures towards Calgary's (and

Canada's) colonial legacy, exposing Calgary as truly a place of dis-placed persons, a place built on the graves of the Native peoples who first lived on the land; who were, it should be noted, historically displaced by the building of the railway. Calgary's presents citizens, including its Native population, are "habitués" rather than inhabitants, however; the names of Calgary's places reveal the colonial legacy and the palimpsestic erasure of previous names, peoples and land emblematized by an en-gravement in stone:

> Queens Park remote and placid above the city, high sticking its way through Cambrian Heights. Heights for the depths, creamatoriumed over the spread city, those acres of rough prairie grass cut into hay mows, grass edging over the stones flattened against the ground, ears back, names disappearing into the foxtail and broom. Taken over, named effacement--gophers and rabbits alert and unrestricted, the acres and acres of henges stoning themselves up the hills (no, coulees). (59)

Calgary, while appealing for the anonymity it affords van Herk, and the origin-less restlessness of its denizens, nevertheless represents the problematic aspects of effaced identity; that is, of an identity that is effaced by external forces. Thus "home" is a place of death and settlement; yet, as van Herk suggests, the past cannot remain buried: "it's been said before: archaeologies are (in)formed by those who (in)vent them. Graves are for their visitors. Residents beware. And stories will work their way to the surface, no matter how buried and buried again" (58). This archaeological reading of "home" again points to a double meaning in its association with death; that is, it may also be interpreted as a place of change. There are stories buried in Calgary, but they are not van Herk's, nor are they Anna Karenina's. Calgary, however, points to the possibility of one's own stories "rising up" to disrupt the masks of maps and train tracks.

While both Edberg and Calgary are representative of "home" to van Herk, the former an alluring geografictione that haunts her dreams with its elusive promise of origins, and the latter a seductive destination which nevertheless holds the promise of transience, Edmonton represents a transitional place between homes. Even death is merely a transition in Edmonton because of its lack of a public cemetery: "Edmonton funereal, where death is enacted but never finished" (52). The self in Edmonton, she notes, is "caught between origins and destinations: body and cemetery" (52). Edmonton is a city of "long division," split into north and south by the traversal of the North Saskatchewan River, just as, for van Herk, it "is the city that will divide you from the country, that will wean you from Edberg, its wide streets and narrow alleys leading toward seduction. This is the quandary you face, your problem in long division: north/south" (43). The split to which she refers is not, however, just between rural and urban. These directions are designated according to the city divisions, with north being the place of "business/pleasure" and south the place of "government/learning" (43), and these designations will linger, becoming more apparent in Ellesmere as a contrast particularly between a place of pleasure and desire, and a place of education and socialization where she learns a dualistic style of thinking (on Ellesmere, she will ask "[i]s it possible to read her [Anna] in the south, from the south? In that blindly south-faced reading is it possible to read at all?" 113). It is in Edmonton where van Herk attends university and falls in love with knowledge, with "the insect legs of entomology,....the zealous musings of philosophy, the incessant novels of literature" (46). Edmonton represents a division of self, a training period in rationality and objectivity, coinciding with a self-chosen repression of desire, a redirection of viscerality to a voluptuously vicarious enjoyment of books: "While others divide and swyve, hunt life partners and missionary intent, you read, entext yourself a city of pages, their sybarite answers" (53).

"Edmonton," she writes, "is a reading, an act of text, an open book" (47), and "[t]hrough the maze of your books you try to read this place, this once-fort, Hudson's Bay Company stronghold, this ferried and rivered city. How to cross from one side to the other?" (52). Van Herk suggests that, while looking for lovers in the pages of literature in her love-affairs with books, she discovers instead the male/lineations of the textual world that dis-places women through effacement or murder, and the divided city of Edmonton serves as a reminder of the division of self that will occur there as a result of the readings and writings of men.

Patrocinio Schweickart calls learning to read and consequently think like men (that is, through an education in male-authored texts) a process of "immasculation," noting that it "does not impart virile power to the woman reader. On the contrary, it doubles her oppression" (271). Quoting Judith Fetterly, she writes further that the woman reader "suffers 'not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly, the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male--to be universal--...is to be *not female*'" (271, her emphasis). Edmonton is the place where van Herk will read *Anna Karenin*, but she does not acknowledge this until she gets to Ellesmere; she does not seem to remember this until she re-reads it there and recalls the novels she read in her Russian Literature course: "A male course, now that you look at it, a very male course, and you must have gone too far, gotten carried away, *Anna Karenin* not on the list for Russian 320, you invented the necessity to read her yourself. Despite Tolstoy. Looking for an image of woman, even one scripted by him" (81). As van Herk discovers, however, this image of woman is a conflictual one for the woman reader,

because it is of a woman who is punished for desire. While on Ellesmere she remembers that her first engagement with Tolstoy's novel occurred in Edmonton; however, it is not her actual first reading of it that she remembers, but the anticipation of that reading, a culmination, it seems, of her education in Edmonton: "[y]ou have not yet read *Anna Karenin*, but she is waiting to be read, to remind you of what to expect of books, of love affairs and their killings" (51). Despite its designation as a "place between," Edmonton affords little space for imagination, being a city of sharply divided binaries--north/south, rational/irrational, thought/emotion, mind/body--that van Herk understands to be gendered divisions. There are no trains in Edmonton for, as van Herk notes, "the CPR line went south to Calgary" (45), but it is notable for being the "terminus of the CP telegraph line" (44), which is but another form of grid that allows, significantly, for communication. Instead of freight and people, however, these lines transport language [3], and van Herk learns that words can be as murderous as railway tracks. Yet here van Herk glimpses the possibility of the blank page in that slim imaginary place afforded by Edmonton's "long division," of the subversive potential of text for de(con)structing itself. Despite the omnipresent coldness that permeates van Herk's accounts of Edmonton, she recalls the place as "sites of seduction and rage" where she encountered the "baffling problem of an eternal long division of the self, this Edmonton, still glazed with ice, pretends to be another place than it pretends to be" (53). It is not an "Ellesmere," but it, nevertheless, serves as "training" for that elusive island, and the possibility of un/reading that lies in all readings.

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[3] It is interesting that this section contains interjections of "official history," much like Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, and is more notable for being the only section in the book which contains such documentation; thus structurally "representing" a division between van Herk's autobiographical account and records of the city's past.

In Edmonton, Ellesmere is but an ephemeral geographical dream, not yet named, but beckoning, nevertheless, as a new cartography: "The world at large and Edmonton its stagnation point: how to get from this place farther, how to reach the reaches of the world, and maybe Russia. Are seductions to Arctic Islands possible? Do they read themselves a future, a presence on a map?" (49) Van Herk anticipates the seductive allure that Ellesmere will hold for her, attracted magnetically, it seems, to the north, where she may escape those southerly "places far from Ellesmere." "Ellesmere" sounds uncannily like "elsewhere," and in setting her "sites" on this place through a resistant un/reading of those places of originary writings, van Herk seems to embody Kristeva's stranger or "foreigner," a figure whom Kristeva suggests exists within each of us, employing this concept to disrupt the self/other dichotomy that operates to either universalize the "other" to a mirror identity with the "self," or to dismiss the "other" on the basis of an irreconcilable difference as something irrevocably "alien." In either case, the "other" is made invisible, punished for its difference. As Kristeva explains, the "foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners" ("Might Not Universality" 192); thus, she acknowledges that we are all "others" even as we retain a sense of self undiminished and unthreatened by the existence of an "other." The foreigner is one whose "origin certainly haunts him, for better and for worse, but it is indeed *elsewhere* that he has set his hopes, that his struggles take place, that his life holds together today. *Elsewhere* versus the origin, and even *nowhere* versus the roots" (29, her emphasis). The foreigner, Kristeva explains, does not belong "to any place, any time, any love. A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance. The space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plane in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping" ("Toccata" 7). This concept of movement is prevalent in van Herk's book, in the

restlessness she describes within herself and in the transitory nature of the places she inhabits. In all of the sites explored in the book, van Herk is a "foreigner" in Kristeva's sense; consequently, her "readings" of these places, and her reading of Anna Karenina (both the novel and the character) are informed by this feeling of transience which both allows for identification with "others" (because we are all "others"), as well as respect for the ever-shifting differences between them.

Kristeva's foreigner bears striking similarities to van Herk's definition of "Canadian," which again points to the sub-text of national identity that runs through her book: "Canadian: a global immigrant dreaming of the future, not conqueror but supplicant, outcast, exile, artist; creator of both past and point of arrival. The *act* of immigration has been omitted, deliberately excluded as an embarrassing part of our lack of definition. After all, it is journey, travel, movement, no *place* to it, maybe no purpose either, only longing and a continuous coming" (qtd in Kamboureli, *Making a Difference* 421). This emphasis on travel and movement highlights van Herk's status as "explorer" in her own book, and the sense that she is only visiting even those places she inhabits, whether as a reader of a Russian novel, or a camper in the national park on Ellesmere Island; consequently, her focus is on her engagement with these places and the novel, on acts of "un/reading" that resist possessing or colonizing that which is read, but which highlight the self-reflexivity of all reading acts. As Smaro Kamboureli points out, *Places Far From Ellesmere* "reflects van Herk's relentless testing of the boundaries of fiction and criticism, her inclination to locate herself in places where there is friction between reality and imagination, objectivity and subjectivity, present and past" (421). Van Herk calls this blurring of the boundaries between criticism and fiction "ficto-criticism," which

Kamboureli describes as "writing as reading, as a self-reflexive act" (421). By highlighting the self-reflexivity of all acts of reading and writing, van Herk also undercuts the utopian characteristics of the imaginary place of Ellesmere as a potential place for the rescue of "murdered" women, for this Ellesmere is a place that remains an elusive "elsewhere" where the desire of the self can be expressed in its excess, and not an ideal "nowhere" brought into being. As Coral Ann Howells observes, "Ellesmere is both a specific location and a fictive space, a 'geografictione' as van Herk describes it, being a borderline site between reality and utopia, an exuberant discursive space for feminist exploration" (115).

Luce Irigaray defines "elsewhere" as a place of "female pleasure" ("The Power of Discourse" 77) or desire, with desire "occup[ying] or designat[ing] the place of the *interval*" ("Sexual Difference" 8). As discussed in the introduction, Irigaray suggests that desire is undefinable and works to "displace" the subject and object "in their relations of nearness and distance" (8). Ellesmere "represents" to van Herk a landscape of desire, an unmappable (hence undefinable) place which she would nevertheless seek to explore in a new cartographic process that is relational, and which subsequently decentres the privileging perspective of the "I" (van Herk resists this "I" in her book by consistently addressing her-self in the second person as "you"). In an interview with Hilda Kirkwood, van Herks states that she "look[s] at maps as a kind of beautiful labyrinth. They are a way of telling us where we are in relation to other things in the world" (86). She also acknowledges, however, somewhat ironically, that maps are not "made for us (women)....We [referring to a metaphysical "human" tendency] think of things in terms of centres. Not where we are in relation to other things. Finding yourself on a map is like finding yourself anywhere. We're always holding them up and saying

'where are we now'?" (86). Here van Herk points to a tension between the potential of relational readings of maps that are inherent in the map itself, and the tendency to read them from a centering perspective. A relational reading, she hints, would entail the displacement of the subject from its distancing linear perspective on the object, as Irigaray proposes. This is a reading made possible by women, perhaps, because they are already dis-placed and marginal in terms of these discourses. By designating Ellesmere as a woman-island, an image cartographically represented on the cover of her book, van Herk proffers a literal reading of the well-known line "no man is an island." Ellesmere, as an imaginary dream geography is, indeed, a "no-man's land," an "elsewhere," unpossessed and unmarked by the European (male) perspective, inscribed, indeed, by no perspective but that of the indifferent and "stubborn" muskoxen who seem "unsociable" but "strangely moving," and who resist having their picture taken, resist being framed or fixed in the eye of the camera (129). Despite its naming in the seventeenth century and its exploration in the nineteenth, Ellesmere, by virtue of its remoteness, its existence on the extreme marginal north of Canada, has resisted delineation by trains and remains largely unmapped and uncolonized, largely because of the perception of the arctic landscape and climate as inhospitable. By experiencing Ellesmere as a place of desire, van Herk seizes the power implied by the "interval," or the imaginary place of the blank page. Van Herk, in fact, refers to Ellesmere as a "tabula rasa," an "awayness so thoroughly truant you have cut all connexion to places far from Ellesmere," and which allows for her to "rescue" Anna Karenina from what van Herk calls her "paginated presence" (77); thus offering "Anna" alternatives through an alternative feminist reading of the novel in which she is contained. While van Herk explores the subversive of the "blank page" of Ellesmere, however, just as Marlatt problematizes the romanticization of nature and the feminine by invoking such

metaphors in her own novel, so, too, does van Herk disrupt the concept of the north as a *tabula rasa*, even while she initially seems to reinscribe it.

Susan Gubar suggests that "female authors exploit [the blank page] to expose how woman has been defined symbolically in the patriarchy as a tabula rasa, a lack, a negation, and absence" (305). Her reading of Isak Dinesen's short story "The Blank Page" leads Gubar to observe that "blankness here is an act of defiance, a dangerous and risky refusal to certify purity" (305). The blank page is not "a sign of innocence or parity or passivity, the blank page is a mysterious but potent act of resistance" (305). As Gubar points out, in Dinesen's story the presence of blood on the sheets displayed in the nuns' gallery is read as a sign of a bride's sexual innocence, while at the same time retaining a double meaning as a sign of corruption, particularly of seduction and initiation into the territory of sexual desire (although this is the "land" of the male and not the female). In contrast, the blank sheet offers up the possibility of multiple readings (305), remaining, therefore, a perpetual mystery with endlessly deferred and differed meaning(s), a symbol of sexual difference that shifts the terms of margin and text[4].

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[4] While Gubar acknowledges the subversive symbolic potential of the blank page for female authors, she also seeks to recuperate women from the symbolic patriarchal *tabula rasa* by suggesting that "no woman is a blank page: every woman is author of the page and author of the page's author," linking women's "ultimate creativity" with reproduction (procreativity) and the production of "essentials," which she lists as "children, food, cloth" (306), further expressing the "blank place" of woman as "a female inner space, [that] represents readiness for inspiration and creation, the self conceived and dedicated to its own potential divinity" (307). Gubar also associates the space of female creativity with a matrilineal oral storytelling tradition (drawing from the storytelling figure in Dinesen's story) that "exist[ed] before man-made books" (306), and thus exists outside of male culture. This is a problematic distinction that retains the culture/nature dichotomy without interrogating its underlying presumptions. It does not open up a space for women's *writing*, particularly as a challenge to the centrality of the male-as-author (subject) or the masculine delineations of written literature. Gubar seems to want to rescue women from the role of passivity by emphasizing "procreativity" as an active

Likewise, van Herk shifts the terms of the map, decentering the lined territory with the "unmarked" margins. Historically, however, the margins of maps were rarely unmarked, for cartographers once designated unknown, uncharted lands and waters on maps with fanciful drawings of monsters, and it is this "monstrous" territory where van Herk, the "minotaur" of Calgary, "discovers" a place where she can fully explore the (female) erotics of space. By shifting the terms of the map in this fashion, she performs a deconstructive "double movement" by disrupting hierarchical binarisms through a recuperation and affirmation of those terms that have been traditionally associated with Woman. In so doing, she also subverts her own designation of "Ellesmere" as a *tabula rasa* by reconfiguring it as a palimpsest that has already been inscribed in multiple ways and which, consequently, may be un/read.

Ellesmere is for van Herk a "desert island," a place of escape for exiled Annas who are punished for their desert-ions through dis-placement by train : "she is placed on that train by Tolstoy, and you know that he uses trains to displace her" (133). "Annas carry the weight of Siberia," van Herk writes, "even if they are not sent there" (126). Kristeva equates exile with a crossing of borders, with a "shattering of repression" that is linked with sexual desire ("Toccata and Fugue for the Foreigner"30), noting, as well, that "[e]xile always involves a shattering of

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force, yet she still interprets "inspiration" in the Platonic sense of "breath of the Gods," or, in the example she uses, of God who "inspires" Mary with the "Incarnate Word" through impregnation (307). Gubar ultimately does not shift the centre or the margins, but problematically maintains women in a place outside of male culture. By focusing on the blank sheet as a visual symbol (more of an artist's canvas than a writer's blank page), and stressing the orality of the story within a written story, Gubar overlooks the implied textuality of the image of the sheet as truly a blank page upon which words may be endlessly inscribed and erased in a palimpsestic process. Thus, while she gestures towards the subversive possibility of deconstructive readings, her own interpretation does not follow in that direction.

the former body" (30). This suggestion of dis-memberment is echoed in van Herk's self-reflexive un/reading process which culminates in a reading of a novel that writes a woman who cannot be allowed the full expression of her desires, whether for reading, writing or sexual passion. Ellesmere represents this exile, an island which van Herk perceives as an "absence, a hesitation where you can pretend there are no telephones in the world, no newspapers, no banks, no books. You are only a body, here in this Arctic desert, this fecund island. Lungs, fingers, a stomach, legs and feet" (77). Ellesmere, she writes, is "the place to read about love, to take readings on love, on passion: this thinly naked, perpetually frozen world" (90), for "[t]he heart can live through a desert island, a Siberia. And also Ellesmere" (83). Ellesmere offers possibilities for an un/reading of *Anna Karenin* and, in the process, an un/reading of her-self, far from places far from Ellesmere where that self is too divided and entangled in the grid of male/lineated properties to allow for un/readings. As van Herk writes, "[w]hat you are unreading here on Ellesmere is not so much an Anna in love or an Anna in misguided passion, but an Anna in imagination, unwilling to limit herself to the role of mournfully wrongful victim and adulteress. Anna's fear is her fear that imagination will end, she will be destitute" (137). This fear of the death of imagination which van Herk attributes to Anna reflects her own writerly fears of containment within socially prescribed "fictions" for the woman writer, and women in general. She seeks to write about grief, but is told by Rudy Wiebe, a former teacher, that "'[w]omen write only out of their viscera.' The word viscera in his mouth scornful and repellent, plump with blood and bread" (80). It is for this reason that Wiebe insists women will never be "GREAT writers," because "they do not set themselves great subjects" like the subject of "war and peace" (80). Consequently, he recommends she take Tolstoy's novel of the same name to Ellesmere. In defiance, van Herk chooses *Anna Karenin* instead,

precipitating a reading that acknowledges that "the viscera of men [are] larger and more dangerous [than those of women], hidden as they are in an inflated sense of themselves centring the subject of greatness" (81). Ellesmere offers a landscape that will allow the expression of van Herk's "viscera," of her grief and desire, through the creation of a moving map of emotion. Ellesmere seduces van Herk with its "languid body" that "wait[s] finally to float into a geografictione, like Anna waiting so long backstage on the yet-to-arrive, the interminably delayed train" (87). But there are "no trains on Ellesmere" (87), and "Ellesmere is no one's mistress" (139); it is a book that is "unpossessible" in which she reads "a passionate woman floating in the arctic ocean beyond the reach of all interference, all authors and bookings" (139). Here she determines that "[y]ou must live up to your fictions, all there is to it; you must help yourself achieve geografictiones of the soul, moments of erasure only available in fiction and on desert islands" (87).

As van Herk reads the unfolding seduction of Anna Karenina, so is she simultaneously seduced by Ellesmere, her mappings of her engagement with this place often breathtakingly erotic, her encounters with it like a lovers' tryst. Crossing the treacherous Abbé River, van Herk writes that "[f]or a moment, transfixed in the swirling middle, you want to sink to your knees, submerge in this passionately shaped water rolling down from the perpetual glaciers of the Arctic....On the other side, you are triumphant, ecstatic, the afterglow of the water's engulfment like the wash of an orgasm" (100). The pleasure of Ellesmere is the pleasure of the in-between, or Irigaray's interval of desire, intertwined as her enjoyment of the land is with her reading of Anna's story. This weaving together is reflected in her reading of the landscape itself and her very physical engagement with both land and book:

> You are caught between Anna and Ellesmere. Walking this landscape, indifferent, beyond beauty, toward the remote seat of the glacier you want to reach....Ellesmere teaches pleasure, the pleasure of oblivion, pleasure endorsed, its door thrown wide....This is pleasure: escape, water, wind, air, rocks, the lake still frozen in the distance behind you, the potential of glacial ice and snow, of always reading an eternal book, of Anna reading this book you are in, this book of the north, un/read because mysterious, this female desert island and its secret reasons and desires. (130)

Here, the love of books van Herk found in Edmonton is interwoven with this love of place; the place itself is a book in which van Herk is herself a character, simultaneously written by the place she is reading. It is a book configured as a map where she can find herself in relation to other places and things in the world. This form of coition, denied in Calgary, is expressed, too, in the joyful yellow arctic poppies which she associates with writing:

> Their slender, hairy stems bend to the ink inside their yellow cups, bright against the grey-green ground. Small wells of ink inside their stems, their cups, as if they are flowers of writing, writing themselves strewn over Ellesmere. Their tiny burstings an opening shout, again and again. Elegant in the wind, blown and torn, ragged and buttery, with none of the haughty breeding of southern glasshouse blooms. (106)

The poppies become an emblem of *jouissance*, of the bodily bliss of writing, in a scene van Herk would have written "if this were a novel" (107):

> you would spend the afternoon picking them, picking them, hours and hours of gathering enough to strew, to cover thickly the bed, the sleeping bag, the pallet fit for a middle-heighted, middle-weighted woman to recline, and when you do, lie together, those flowers pressed against your skin will stain it with their Arctic ink, a bluish-black, the blood of perma-frost. A bed of Arctic poppies on Ellesmere, and a lover to read their ink. (107)

This focus on the plant life on Ellesmere, as well as her notations of the animal life on Ellesmere, also disrupt the concept of the north as an empty white space, and through these

descriptions van Herk undermines her own designation of Ellesmere as a *tabula rasa*. The ink-filled poppies are a provocative image suggesting that Ellesmere is a land that has already been written upon, as van Herk suggests in her observation that the indigenous peoples of Ellesmere must have their own name for this arctic island. Her acknowledgement of this, as well as her reference to the village of Resolute, indicates that van Herk does recognize that Ellesmere is not a blank slate upon which no history has been written. As suggested in the previous discussion of naming, however, van Herk draws an interesting distinction between the "history" of the engagement of a people with the land and the "history" of European discovery. As Shirley Neuman suggests, "Van Herk's metaphor of Ellesmere as tabula rasa foregrounds the fact that her contestation is specifically of the misogyny of European fictions and its derivatives in settler cultures" (225). Additionally, while the Inuit inhabitants of Ellesmere are notably absent from this book, van Herk does make clear that she is camping in a national park and not travelling through Inuit settlements. In a passage that follows from the above quotation, she writes: "Lake Hazen is a National Park (official) and you pick no flowers, only dream them as a passion for your reading" (107). This "passion" is, indeed, wonderfully expressed through her engagement with the very vital landscape of Ellesmere, and her associations of the novel's characters with aspects of this erotic space.

Anna, for instance, is associated with the provocative poppies, appearing dressed in "brilliant yellow," the poppy being "so much less proper than the wifely blue harebells" (106). In this linking of an en-texted woman with the abandon of a wild arctic flower, van Herk frees Woman from the containment of the male novel form through a corporeal writing, thereby

allowing for escape into a landscape where one can fall in love, where van Herk does fall in love, notably, with her-self, a self that is not divorced from the experience of the body:

> You must free her from the constraints of the novel she has been imprisoned in, shake her loose from the pages of her own story so that she can float over the landscape here in this landscape of a woman, this northern body, waiting to fall in love. You are in love with Ellesmere. You are in love with your hiking boots, with the ache in the small of your back, with your battered pack. When you turn your hand over and look at it, you are choked with love for your own frail body, the way it bends and moves, its muscles, its quiet aging, the lines it draws on itself. It takes its own reading, quietly, while you take its story for granted. (113)

Seduction and the expression of love, passion and desire are dangerous things for a woman, however, and Anna's story is already scripted to end with death. Even in the passionate embrace of the icy waters of the river, van Herk's thoughts turn to death, imagining drowning, where the body is numbed and smoothed like a tumbled stone, as preferable to the "instant violence of trains" (100). As a result of her engagement with this place, van Herk, as she does in Edberg and Calgary, begins to imagine Ellesmere as a "home," and starts to "search out possible sites for [her] future grave" (140).

Ellesmere, however, even in death, offers an escape from the punitive measures found in novels and symmetrically divided cities. Death here, as hinted elsewhere, is envisioned as a form of rebirth into an identity or identities that are constantly shifting and rearranging like the arctic islands themselves, of which Ellesmere is but one piece of the jigsaw that is "mesmerizing, its slow wash and float, its conundrum melting and reappearance" (88). Van Herk's identification with Anna is an identification with her-self, with a woman who reads too much and is "condemned" for it: for distracting her from "domestic duties"; from making "her

want to understand herself, read herself rather than live heedlessly between girlhood and courtship and wife-hood and motherhood and eternal domesticity. Anna's desire to be her own text emblematic of her desire for control. She will not be read except she be un/read, and only love or the passionate reader can do that for her" (131). The love van Herk experiences on Ellesmere is a love of place intermingled with a love of her body, of her-self, the possibility of which she glimpses in places far from Ellesmere but which ultimately eludes expression. It is the place itself which frees her into this love, a love that is also clearly expressed in a passion for writing and reading, and a desire to imagine powerful emotions in a mapping that does not capture them, but opens them to a multitude of readings in the book called "Ellesmere":

> Free here of the graspings of most of [ ]man's impositions, his history or fiction or implacable des/scribement, [wo]men either real or invented. You can walk, sleep, read, within this pristine novel, waiting to be read, pleasure yourself in its open spine. This geografictione, this Ellesmere. You have read farther than there are pages, travelled farther than there are fictions. You are seduced, a lost woman, reading from within the fiction of all lost/damned/condemned/free women. Knowing that this story, all that is written, can be un/read, uninscribed. The word are stirred, mixed, like pieces of a jigsaw, broken up into their separate shapes and the whole picture lost, left to be reconstructed by another, a different hand. (113)

Ellesmere is a place which offers the space for these kinds of readings; as van Herk suggests, "reading is a new act here, not introverted and possessive but exploratory, the text a new body of self, the self a new reading of place" (113). "Ellesmere," as imaginary place, as an island for deserting women, is resistant to the gaze which names and shadows women into a formal destiny, like Vronsky's gaze which signals Anna's discovery in Tolstoy's novel (95). Yet Vronsky also signals Anna's awakening sexuality and desire, for he "embodies textual opportunity for Anna. Merging her life with his, she reads more and more. She knows that her

life as fiction will end, but her reading is constant, she is source, text and the reading act itself" (136). Anna ultimately defies Tolstoy in van Herk's un/reading, for Anna's reading is a "front for the Anna writing her own passionate involvement with her own story" (137). "When Tolstoy is not looking," van Herk suggests, "Anna is writing herself" (137). Ultimately, van Herk frees Anna from her status as an object of desire who is read by others, to one who reads and writes her-self into being, just as van Herk writes her own self into being in *Places Far From Ellesmere*.

Van Herk's work highlights the solitary experience of reading and the isolation of the writer, particularly that of the woman writer, perhaps, who is faced with a literary tradition that has been largely dominated by the male writer and the male/lineated perspective. Her reading of *Anna Karenin* on Ellesmere is so physically and mentally engaging to her that her travelling companion, Bob, becomes largely invisible, existing on the periphery of her vision and experiences (although, just as Anna "reads more and more" because of Vronsky, Bob seems to unselfishly "free" van Herk to read). It is Anna and Princess Myagky with whom van Herk primarily relates, who appear as part of the landscape of Ellesmere with which van Herk also feels a strong relationship. In so doing, she both displaces the male tradition of exploration and explorer narratives by situating herself as an "explorer" in her book, while also situating herself in the tradition of her foremothers, those Canadian women who wrote journals and autobiographical accounts of their engagement with the unfamiliar landscape of Canada. As discussed in chapter one, Helen Buss suggests that, through writing, such women develop a sense of self-identity that is intimately intertwined with their engagement with the land and their relationships with "significant others" (Buss 126). In van Herk's case, these "significant

others" include the women in the novel with whom she identifies, rather than her husband; thus, she resists defining herself through her relationship with a man in keeping with her strategy of disrupting the "male/lineated" definitions of landscape and of Woman, as represented, especially, by the female characters of male-authored novels. This is a strategy that is also evident in Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, as especially evidenced by Annie's writing of Ana's self-development in Canada through her engagement with the land and with the women of the settlement, although what Annie actually learns of Ana through the "official" facts of the archives is that she was married to Ben Springer. Just as Marlatt problematizes the notion of history as a linear record of significant events, which, in a woman's life, amounts to marriage, motherhood, and death, so, too, does van Herk resist portraying her-self through a record of events. In the Edmonton section, she records the significant "facts" of her life in a brief paragraph, writing: "Six years engaged in long division, and without having ever put down your book, you are degreed, married, authored, even public and published, and out of there" (53). Interestingly, van Herk resists defining herself in either "male" or "female" historical terms, for in the writing of her self that emerges in the "explorations of site" in her book, she does not elaborate on either the "private" details of her courtship and subsequent marriage or on her "public" accomplishments. As such, the writing of self in *Places Far From Ellesmere* emerges from an "in-between" place that disrupts gendered expectations of the "subjects" of history and literature and, in the process, contests the boundaries of genres and "male" and "female" styles and subjects of writing.

Places Far From Ellesmere is a provocatively written book that defies traditional definitions of the novel and the map, and challenges how we traditionally think of place and

identity. In particular, van Herk is concerned with uncovering, through archaeological "un/readings," the underlying ordering principles that have constructed these definitions and, in the process, expose them as fictions. "Fiction" is not divorced from fact, however, for van Herk demonstrates that all representations emerge from the place of the imagination which transforms the territory into a map that, for all its claims to objectivity, can only be a "subjective" account, or a "lie" of the land. In her "geografictione," however, she displaces both subject and object, portraying place as an engagement with self, and self as an engagement with place so that the two have meaning only in relation to each other. Both Ellesmere Island and Anna occupy this ever-shifting site of difference, which van Herk significantly imagines as a place where desire may be freed and freely expressed, giving her-self, especially, corporeality through an identification and engagement with the landscape. Van Herk utilizes the woman-nature connection affirmatively, but in the process disrupts the culture/nature dichotomy by intermingling nature with cultural acts of language in such a way that the distinction between them becomes meaningless. That is, she exposes "nature" itself as a linguistically constructed concept and, consequently, presents a concept of self that is ultimately unmappable in its ever-shifting identities. In so doing, she draws on the subversive potential of the in-between place that Irigaray calls the "interval of desire," bringing this "site" into existence as an imaginary "elsewhere" that arises from her reading process while camping on Ellesmere Island. This place does not represent a dream of utopia, however, for, as Shirley Neuman suggests: "No feminist utopia for all its invocation of Ellesmere as tabula rasa, the 'site' in which the 'explorations' of this autobiographical narrative take place is, as one of the directive epigraphs announces, the Foucauldian discursive 'space of multiple dissensions; a set of different oppositions whose levels and roles must be described.' That is, the 'discursive site'

of *Places Far from Ellesmere* is, above all else, contestatory" (230). Neuman points to contradictions in this book that can be initially disturbing, but which must be carefully considered in light of van Herk's often subtle deconstructive "double movements." At times she seems to unproblematically invoke traditional representational strategies and generic conventions, such as the north as tabula rasa, and a utopian, romantic "escape" to pristine nature; yet, by contesting the very nature of representation itself, she implicitly disrupts these strategies. Like Marlatt, van Herk invokes problematic metaphors in order to deconstruct them in a way that leaves all readings (including her own) open to further deconstruction. Like the stones of Calgary that will rise to the surface no matter how often they are buried, van Herk suggests that the construction of walls, fences and railway tracks as a means of imposing order and keeping the "wild" things out can only fail, for the stories of dis-placed persons will inevitably find their way through the cracks in the grids, surfacing like dandelions or arctic poppies from the earth beneath the iron.

Chapter Three

Bridging Difference: Healing the Split Self in Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*

> Story is meant to be spoken--that has not changed. The written becomes the spoken whether by hands or mouth, the spoken enters the heart, the heart turns over, Earth is renewed. (Beth Brant, "To Be or Not to Be Has Never Been the Question," 82)

> "Death is transformative," Raven said to earth from the depths of the ocean. The sound rolled out, amplifying slowly. Earth heard Raven speak. She paid no attention to the words; she let the compelling power of them play with her sensual self. Her insides turned, a hot burning sensation flitted about the stone of her. Earth turned, folded in on herself, a shock of heat shot through her. It changed her surface, the very atmosphere surrounding her changed. The air was electric. (Lee Maracle, *Ravensong*, 85)

Lee Maracle's novel, *Ravensong*, is a melody of interwoven voices revealing complex and diverse attitudes about nature, culture, gender, and the power of language. It is a novel that illuminates storytelling (and thus narrative) as a potentially transformative and healing force for the individual, for the community, for Canadian society as a whole, and, especially, for women. Maracle's exploration of the disjunction between a Native perspective on the relationship of people with the land and the perspective of white Canadians is deeply insightful and often disturbing. In her critique of the white society in the novel, Maracle draws compelling connections between the attitude towards the land and towards people, and the subsequent treatment of both. As such, she exposes the dynamic of the logic of domination as it reverberates through people's lives at the personal level and, most tragically, in the lives of women. As noted in the introduction, the logic of domination creates a world-view that forms the basis not only for the domination of nature, but for sexism and racism as well, and Maracle's novel provides an essential perspective on the complex intersection of sex and race as it functions for the basis of discrimination and oppression. It is primarily through Stacey that

this perspective is explored, a complex character who straddles the two cultures featured in *Ravensong*, and who draws comparisons, often unfairly, between her people and those of "white town." Academically educated with and by white people, born and raised in a Native village, Stacey, on the threshold of leaving home to attend university, is faced with the challenge of reconciling the ambivalence she feels towards both cultures. She is a "split self," who views the white people from the "Indian" perspective ("Indian" is the term with which Stacey's people identify in the novel), while trying to view her own people from the white perspective. In so doing, she ultimately defies the sense of "oneness" that she knows is vital to healing the split within herself and, by extension, between these two cultures. "Oneness" is a term Stacey uses often to indicate a harmony with others that stems from a sense of harmony within oneself. It does not erase difference, but acknowledges and respects both the commonalities and differences between people. She often finds herself on the bridge (literally and metaphorically as a place where she seems to come closest to this kind of oneness); yet, she is somehow unable to fully recognize that she herself is a bridge not only between these two cultures, but between the generations of her own people, linking a traditional past with an uncertain future while straddling the swift current of a changing present. *Ravensong*, however, is not just Stacey's story; it is a story of a people struggling to come to terms with a new grief in a long line of griefs. Stacey's challenge, and thereby the challenge of both societies, is not, after all, to achieve a reconciliation between the two peoples, which implies that difference(s) must be somehow overcome, but a recognition of the potential of the bridge itself (the "arc," Stacey notes, is "the strongest shape in nature" (40)). With this concept of a bridge, Maracle points to the possibility inherent in the state of "between-ness," where difference is not eradicated or erased but recognized and respected. This bridge, she suggests, may span the differences not only between cultures and races, but between the sexes as well.

In *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh T. Minh-ha writes that "[t]he understanding of difference is a shared responsibility, which requires a minimum of willingness to reach out to the unknown" (85). This observation may be said to form the crux of *Ravensong* as revealed not only by the physical separation of the two peoples, but by the attitudes towards the "other" expressed by the characters. There is very little willingness on either side of the bridge to "reach out to the unknown" and this is the source of multiple tensions of misunderstanding that often lead to a paralysing silence within Stacey's village:

> Everyone cudgelled themselves with the dilemma of getting the people out of the houses to immerse themselves in the transformation of the world of the others. For a hundred years now every attempt had met with little success. The ban against their ways had been lifted for four years now, still the people behaved as though they would have no part of the others' world. Their silence was accompanied by a strange paralysis. (44)

It is Raven, the symbolic "trickster" figure in the novel, who gives a "bird's-eye view" of the larger situation; through "Raven's" voice, the novel's storytellers succinctly summarize both the causes and the dangers of continued isolation for their people [1]:

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[1] While acknowledging that Raven is a trickster figure in this novel, with a "plan" to "trick" her people to "come out of their houses" (the plan being the 'flu epidemic), Maracle explains the spiritual complexity of this cultural symbol in an interview with Jennifer Kelly. Maracle notes that "Raven" is, in her culture, "the transformer, or the harbinger of transformation....Our culture is a culture that looks upon life as constant spiritual growth and social transformation" (74). As the "harbinger of social transformation," Marlatt explains, "Raven sings when the world itself is amiss" (85). "What Raven does when she sings is tell us that it's time, that the time is coming and to listen to what's going on in a whole bunch of different ways--listen to it spiritually; listen to it emotionally; listen to it intellectually; listen to it physically; listen to what's going on--listen to it socially, and personally, and in family ways" (86). Here Maracle points to the inter-relational dynamic of storytelling; that is, that the transformative and healing power of story lies not simply in the storyteller/author, nor in the narrative itself, but arises through an active, engaged listening (or reading). Much of the tension in *Ravensong* stems from the inability, particularly of Stacey, to hear "Raven's song."

> She knew they stayed confined to their villages for false reasons: segregation between the others and her own people had as much to do with how her own felt about the others, as it had to do with how the others felt about the villagers. Raven saw the future threatened by the parochial refusal of her own people to shape the future of their homeland. Somewhere in the fold between dark and light her people had given up, retreated to their houses in their raggedy villages and withdrawn into their imagined confinement. She had to drive them out, bring them across the bridge. (43)

Maracle explores this separationist view extensively in the novel, primarily through the characters of Momma and Stacey. Momma, especially, seems to represent the villagers in this respect, giving voice to a hatred of the "others" which often contains chilling echoes of the attitudes of white people towards the "natives." "They aren't human," is how Momma once describes them to Stacey, for instance (93). Stacey recognizes, however, that "[t]he epidemic had made Momma steely in her unforgiveness of these people. They had watched a people die." (193). Stacey further observes that

> [o]ne day they would all pay for watching a people die. Stacey knew it was unforgiveable....In a crisis everyone [in the village] pitched in. Not so with these people. They moved about their lives, mowed their lawns, weeded their gardens as though the fate of life outside their matchbox homes had nothing to do with them. Still, Stacey thought Momma was awfully hard on them. (193)

Stacey, more familiar with "their" ways, and having grappled with many questions about their behaviour, has begun to understand that the apathy of the white people, which leads to this seemingly inhumane stance, is a factor of their culture which also has dire consequences for them themselves, as evidenced by the suicide of her classmate, Polly.

The question of suicide is a strong undercurrent in this novel, being the catalyst for the story within the "novel" *Ravensong*. While the fact of Polly's death absorbs Stacey for much of the novel itself, it is revealed in the epilogue that it is the suicide of Stacey's nephew (Celia's

son Jimmy) that leads to the telling of the story that becomes *Ravensong*, a story told in response to Stacey's son Jacob's question about the death of his cousin. It is a death that defies understanding, just as Polly's death defies Stacey's understanding twenty-five years earlier. Stacey's thoughts about Polly, and her struggle to understand how anyone could take her or his own life, spin a multi-hued thread in this story, one that weaves together many diverse and often paradoxical strands. Stacey's confrontation with this conundrum is made even more poignant by the devastating 'flu epidemic, which contrasts the voluntary relinquishing of life with the struggle for life in which the villagers engage. Explored at the level of the local and personal, this contrast nevertheless assumes a larger significance in symbolizing the disjunction between the world-views of the Native peoples and the white Canadians, for in her struggle to understand the question of suicide, Stacey ultimately is faced with the question of how a people could watch others die, or, more painfully, *allow* them to die without intervening in some way.

Maracle portrays Stacey apprehending and grappling with the deaths of Polly and of her villagers and, by extension, with the problem of the cultural disparity between white and Indian, through her often intense and intimate awareness of and engagement with nature. In so doing, Maracle links death-bringing disease with the colonization of "Canada" by European settlers, which tragically displaced Stacey's people both through death and segregation. This "history" is poignantly portrayed in the novel through Celia's disturbing visions, which notably reveal the role of women in the tragedy who are infected through sexual contact with white men. The diseased erosion of their way of life is reflected in the erosion of the land and the sickening of the trees, which is itself likened to a sickening of the spirit. As Stacey observes, "[m]aybe the epidemics destroyed their ability to maintain the levels of effort it took to survive in the way they always had. One less person meant that much less effort could be spent

tending trees who gave up sweetener only with great effort. There were no longer enough villagers who could spare the time to tend sickening trees. They would have to find the money to purchase sugar from the store in town" (141). Capitalism, too, is "poison" to her people's way of life, just as the refined sugar used by white people is considered poison by Momma, who makes Stacey, as a child, spit out a candy given to her by a kindly old white woman, saying, "'Crazy old woman feeding kids poison'" (48)[2]. Jeannette Armstrong likewise links the "disease of man" with the diseased earth, which, in turn, is experienced as a disease of the spirit, and provocatively suggests that:

> The sickness of us as human beings has become evident in the destruction of the world, in the destruction of the atmosphere and other life forms, and our rivers, and our lakes! And it's *not* a natural occurrence, it's not a natural outgrowth. And what I see happening is the disease of man, not a disease of the Earth! It's a disease of our spirit, a disease that's killing us. (Lutz 31)

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[2] Maracle, in the 1990 preface to her autobiography *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, expresses a profound concern with environmental "disease" or exploitation cultivated by capitalist interests, which she perceives as a kind of economic colonization. Interestingly, she also associates the abuse of the land with that of language, pointing to the abuse of the power of language itself as complicit in the violent reification of nature. She writes that "[Canada] is a battered country. The land is scarred with extraction in the interest of corporate imperialism. The language is battered: battered in the interest of sanctioning the scarring of the land in the interest of profit. Strip-mining, uranium production, gas and oil extraction, mega hydro projects, clearcutting, over-fishing, chemical disfiguring of the soil, tampering with foodstuffs are all carried out in the interest of profit. All are referred to as progress and development. Potato chips and processed cheese, that is what advanced civilization amounts to. We know development means to nurture, to grow, and extraction for profit is not nurturing and neither are potato chips and processed cheese." (7) For Maracle, the abuse of language is a violation of the "sacred" (suggesting that both language and land are entwined with the human spirit): "For us language is sacred. Words represent the accumulated knowledge, the progression of thought of any people. To distort meaning, understanding, in the interest of pacifying a whole population in the face of massive rape and exploitation, is the worst kind of violence" (7). Sugar, as emblematic of a processed food, becomes a powerful multi-layered signifier of disease in this context.

It is from this concept of the oneness of the human spirit with the land that Stacey's explorations of the differences between Native and white perspectives on death are generated, differences made most apparent to her by their respective relationship to "nature." Yet, as suggested by the symbolism of the bridge and its resemblance to the "arc" in nature, this place of the widest gulf and deepest chasm between Native peoples and whites holds, perhaps, the most promise of a significant link across the "unknown."

Stacey's ambivalence towards both her own people and the people of "white town" is often expressed through visual comparisons between the living conditions of the two, particularly as revealed in their physical surroundings. The "manicured" lawns and weeded gardens of white town inspire an envy in Stacey, which announces itself in the form of resentment towards her own stony, sandy yard that "consisted of the odd bit of comfrey interspersed with dandelions and pigweed" (31). The only plant cultivated by her mother and many of the other women in the village is mint, which Stacey notes "looks like a weed. Cultivating it seemed so ridiculous" (31). The cultivation of mint represents an interesting dilemma, for although it can grow like a "weed" in ideal conditions, that is, in a moist, rich soil, the plants in the villagers' yards must be carefully tended and watered frequently in order to flourish because the earth there is not fertile enough to support its growth without intervention. Mint, in this context, may be read as a symbol of the fight for life in a place where the plant's roots cannot obtain enough sustenance for survival on its own, thus representing the people of the village and, more generally, the traditions that keep them "in their houses," or voluntarily segregated from the others. The mint may also be seen as a symbol for the "rootlessness" that Stacey eventually determines leads to Polly's suicide, particularly as representative of the lack of nurturing support that Polly receives from her family and community. It is, therefore,

significant (and heart-rending) that the mint dies shortly after the drought begins. Stacey's attitude towards the mint at this point is representative of her ambivalence about being "Indian," with all the colonist baggage that term connotes, because she consistently (dis)places herself outside of her community by trying to "see" from within the "others'" perspective.

Despite Stacey's attraction to the "exquisite floral gardens and lawn patterns of white town," she cannot help but notice that their order is obtained through diligent weeding, and these "weeds," the "comfrey root, dandelion, plantain and mullein," that the white people throw out are, for her people, medicinal plants that will be vital in the battle with the 'flu epidemic, as well as food for their tables. Once the epidemic has a strong hold on the village, Stacey will courageously ask for these "weeds" from Mrs. Snowden's garden (and just as courageously choose silence in answer to Mrs. S.'s questioning look) (72); however, at this time, just following Polly's humiliation at school but preceding her suicide, Stacey finds her comparison of her own people's yards with those of white town leading to thoughts of Polly and the way that Polly is treated by her own community. Gaining insight from the act of weeding and the means of disposal of those weeds, which are "tossed of a heap to disappear in a strong black garbage bag out of sight from the public" (31), Stacey concludes that Polly is herself a "weed," "a young seductive woman whom no one wanted to see anymore" (33). By linking Polly with the easily disposable weeds, Stacey begins to grasp that in this "neat little throw-away world" (33) the attitude towards nature necessarily extends to people, as well, an insight that is rooted in the holistic world-view of her own people, in which human beings are not distinguished from non-human nature. It is the white people's perspective, compounded by a method of dealing with "problems" by simply making them invisible, that not only allowed for the colonists to "hide" the Native peoples away in reservations and, in the context of the novel,

allows them to die by not offering medical assistance, but also allows them to dis-place their own. This is true especially of women, as will become clearer to Stacey in a burgeoning feminist awareness; that is, an awareness of the cross-cultural differences between women's and men's positions in both societies, an awareness that allows her to "see" white women differently from white men. This awareness is significantly fostered through contact with Judy, a white woman living in her village. Thus Maracle suggests that Polly's "disposability" is strongly linked to gender, pointing to an awareness of the woman-nature problematic as it exists in "white" society. Yet even while Stacey is able to apprehend this from the holistic perspective of her people, she remains caught in a kind of either/or way of thinking that marks the influence of her "white" education, for while it strikes her as "pathetically funny that these people should invest so much time in throwing living creatures away when they were still perfectly good" (amusing, that is, until she makes the connection with Polly), "[s]he paid no attention to the paradox of emotions spawned inside her by her resentment toward her mother for nurturing weeds and her recognition of the pathos of white folks discarding wild food growing" (32). This is a paradox which she resists exploring until she is shamed by Rena, one of the village women, for her comparison of white people with the villagers.

Stacey's "obsession," as she puts it, with the differences between white town and the village is disruptively challenged when Stacey shares this compulsion with Rena. Rena's response, "Why compare us to them?" (115), compels Stacey to try to untangle the paradoxes she has avoided throughout the story. By limiting her vision to but one side, Stacey believes that she can find the answer to the dilemmas she is faced with, but it is this kind of thinking which deafens her to "Raven's song," and, consequently, keeps her from apprehending that there is no one truth, no simple answer, but many possible explanations. The repercussions of

this tendency in Stacey are perhaps most poignantly revealed in its effect on her relationship with her mother who, like Rena, appeals to Stacey to not judge her according to the "laws" of white people (102). Stacey's silent response to her mother's revelation that Ned is Stacey's father (as well as the father of her siblings) is heartbreaking to Momma, who interprets it as a distance between them which she cannot comprehend how to bridge without "burden[ing] her daughter with guilt on top of the tale of paternity that was no longer acceptable to anyone in the village" (103). Momma's story becomes trenchantly linked in Stacey's mind with the shame that led Polly to suicide and the shame that Carol feels over her parents' divorce (in relation to her mother, in particular), creating a tension between Stacey's understanding of her people's "Law" and the morality of the people of white town. Earlier in the narrative, Stacey considers that Polly was ultimately punished for an indiscretion that was somehow worse than committing a crime, for breaking with a "moral code" that "no human could possibly follow," but which allowed for the establishment of a "judgement system based not on whether or not you actually lived within the moral code, but whether or not you could deceive people into thinking you lived by this code" (64). In contrast, Stacey recalls the village Speaker Dominic's understanding of her people's laws, which "lived inside...[and] were to be obeyed at all times regardless of the circumstances" (64). Obeyance of these laws "kept [Dominic] on a trail of gentle social affection" (64), Stacey observes, thereby grasping the significant social responsibility these laws entailed for her people.

Stacey vacillates between understanding her mother's position and questioning her mother's "morality" when Stacey is caught in her own indiscretion, that is, of going into the hills with Rena and Judy without having sought permission and without the attendance of a chaperone: "She would get herself into trouble one day with her disregard for propriety and

authority--law, Momma had called it. Her understanding of this law confused her. What made it so important to be chaperoned if, as a wife, her momma could spend time with her husband's brother and not cause a stir of conscience inside herself? Where was the sense of morality?" (125) Stacey seems unaware when she slips into the "other's" mode of thinking, until she makes connections from her own perspective that give a sense of understanding, while highlighting the disparity between the two outlooks. Recognizing the similarity between her mother and Polly allows her to come to terms with her dilemma surrounding both: "she figured out why she was so obsessed with Polly. Polly and Momma were the same woman--good-hearted and passionate. In the white world her momma would have perished" (106). Carol also inadvertently helps bring Stacey to a self-awareness of what judging her mother by the moral standards of the others truly means; in this case, it is a morality rooted in religion:

> It was a sin to lust, a sin to divorce, a sin to want to be loved if you were a woman. Carol's mom had dared to want to be loved and Carol was ashamed on her behalf.
>
> This meant Stacey's mother had no virtue. She was sinful. (132)

By associating her mother with the displaced white women (who are displaced through death and divorce), Stacey arrives at the realization of how Momma would be judged according to the others' laws. This shakes Stacey to her roots, just as Rena's confrontational question makes Stacey recognize "the humiliation of realizing she was being unfair to herself and her family" (116) by drawing comparisons between them and white people, comparisons that could have no hope of being just or justifiable. Significantly, Stacey can only respond to Rena through silence, for she can find in language, in the "sacred words," no excuse or explanation for her behaviour: "She had to say something, but words in broken phrases whipped around so fast without stopping or falling into order that she just sat there dumb. Her words made so

little sense now" (116). Here, as in many other instances in this novel, silence becomes potent with unspoken meaning, with meaning that is, at the same time, both unspeakable (with the sense of horror that term connotes) and impossible to adequately put into words. Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the differend (*le différend*) may be usefully employed to give insight into the complexity of this kind of silence, for it encapsulates both the sense of unspeakability and of meanings left unspoken. Additionally, Lytoard frames his discussion of the differend in terms of justice, which speaks to the complex tension between the villagers' "Law" and white people's sense of "morality" which Stacey grapples with in relation to Polly's suicide and, in particular, as it relates to women's sexuality.

Lyotard's explanation of the differend which is most significant to a discussion of *Ravensong* is as follows:

> The unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be. This state includes silence, which is a negative phrase, but it also calls upon phrases which are in principle possible. This state is signaled by what one ordinarily calls a feeling: 'One cannot find the words,' etc. A lot of searching must be done to find new rules for forming and linking phrases that are able to express the differend disclosed by the feeling, unless one wants this differend to be smothered right away in a litigation and for the alarm sounded by the feeling to have been useless. What is at stake in a literature, in a philosophy, in a politics perhaps, is to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them. ("No. 22," 13)

The differend represents an in-between place in language that, most significantly, is suggestive of endlessly differed and deferred meanings (like Derrida's *différance)*. The differend indicates a conflict between irreducible, heterogeneous genres of discourses, and is expressed as a phrase, or numerous phrases, which form a link between other phrases (like a bridge). It is, nevertheless, a phrase that does not come into being, but is representative of possibility, of

the left-overs or remainders of the phrase that is chosen as a link (which helps explain how "silence" can be considered a phrase in itself). Dawne McCance explains this by suggesting that "le différend suggests the excess or remainder of signification" (154), while Bill Readings further elaborates that "several linkages are possible, but only one can happen at a time. A multiplicity of genres [that is, heterogenous discourses] offer a multiplicity of linkages, and to choose one is to suppress all others" (117). It is the "suppressed others" or excess links that exist solely as potential that constitute the differend. Lyotard also points to a difference between a "litigation" and a "differend," signalling an ethical context that is important for the context of the novel, as well as for understanding what Lyotard means by "bear[ing] witness to the differend." Readings explains that a

> litigation is a dispute that takes place according to a single and determinant rule of judgment. A differend...is a dispute between at least two radically heterogenous or incommensurable language games, where no one rule can be invoked in terms of which to pass judgment, since that rule necessarily belongs to one language or the other. In a litigation, the accuser and the accused speak the 'same language' as it were, recognize the same law. In a differend, they speak two radically different idiolects. (118)

Problems arise, however, when one tries to judge the other in terms of one's own rules or laws without recognizing the disparity between them, that is, as if it were a litigation where both understand and comply with one set of laws. Such judgement enforces one law at the expense of another, rendering invisible the other's situation and point of view. As Lyotard explains,

> [a]s distinguished from a litigation, a differend...would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments. One side's legitimacy does not imply the other's lack of legitimacy. However, applying a single rule of judgment to both in order to settle their differend as though it were merely a litigation would wrong (at least) one of them (and both of them if neither side admits this rule). Damages result from an injury which is inflicted upon the rules of a genre of discourse but which is reparable according to those rules. A

> wrong results from the fact that the rules of the genre of discourse by which one judges are not those of the judged genre or genres of discourse. (xi)

By rendering the other "invisible" in this way, the other's means of testifying to the wrong done is significantly removed, creating a paradox wherein if the other can speak and prove the "damage" done, then it does not constitute a "wrong"; thus, judgement can only attend to the damage and the other is still wronged: "A wrong is a damage accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage. This is the case if the victim is deprived of life, or of all his or her liberties, or of the freedom to make his or her ideas or opinions public, or simply of the right to testify to the damage, or even more simply if the testifying phrase is itself deprived of authority" (Lyotard 5). In *Ravensong*, the differend most often represents the disparity between the Native peoples and the white Canadians, who ultimately do not speak the same "language"; given that most of the villagers do speak English, however, it is not a question of a difference between a Native language and English, but of their respective experiences and world-views. Lyotard's theory of the differend, then, seems to suggest a means of accounting for the ability of "white town" to ironically "watch" (ironic, because in fact it enables them to simply not "see") the Native villagers die without feeling compelled to assume some sort of responsibility (or response-ability, perhaps) for those deaths. In their segregation from each other on opposite ends of the bridge, the two cultures in this novel are at a loss to successfully communicate with each other, and suffer poignant losses as a result.

The reciprocal silence between Stacey and Mrs. S. in response to Stacey's request for the weeds is an example of a "differend" where each stands firmly on her respective side of the bridge, unable to form a significant link that would span their different positions in terms of the 'flu epidemic. Mrs. S.'s silence implies a fear of facing the "unknown," of that which is

rendered invisible to her on the other side of the bridge, while Stacey recognizes there are no words to fully express the tragedy underlying her request for the plants, given that she, herself, has not been "marked" by that tragedy. She is not ill herself, for instance, and she cannot speak the wrongs of the dead: "Mrs. S.'s face got a little strained at Stacey's insistence on the weeds, but she was mildly apprehensive about the answer she might get if she queried Stacey again about what she needed them for, so she kept quiet. Stacey read the look on Mrs. S.'s face, accurately guessing what was going on in her mind. She decided to leave everything unsaid" (73). Here their difference is symbolized in the "language"of plants, thereby creating heterogenous discourses that give rise to the differend. This is a difference that allows one culture to "read" them as weeds, while another regards them as vital food and medicine, pointing towards attitudes which are poignantly expressed in the value each culture places on human life. Stacey's response to Rena's question is indicative also of a differend between them; although of the same culture, Stacey's insistence on viewing the village from an outside perspective, or as an "other," displaces her into another realm of discourse that is incongruous with Rena's. Yet Stacey's response of shame, and the depth of gratitude she consequently feels towards Rena, is indicative of the positive potential of the "negative phrase" of silence, of resisting the impulse to try to defend oneself in the same terms that occasioned the offense in the first place and redirecting one to consider the injustice of that stance. In this case, Stacey forms a link or bridge to understanding through a recognition and respect of difference that leads her to feel a sense of responsibility for her own actions.

Shame is a recurrent theme in *Ravensong*, representing a complex emotional response that is implicated in the cultural divide between the Native peoples and the white Canadians in the story. Ultimately, there are two kinds of shame depicted in this novel: one of the kind that

Rena elicits in Stacey, which is a shame that leads to a sense of responsibility for one's own thoughts and behaviours; and a second kind that gets turned back on the shamer, transforming it into guilt, which effectively deflects responsibility from the one who is shamed (such as the kind of guilt Momma resists inadvertently imposing on her daughter). Stacey notes this difference in a comparison of Steve, the white boy from school who tries to befriend her, and the "old snake" who is a repellent wife-beater and is ostracized from the village for sexually abusing his young daughter. Maracle's presentation of this issue is, as with others, relentlessly complex, and Steve, a seemingly decent young man, somehow looks worse to Stacey than the "old snake." It is strongly suggested earlier in the telling of this story, however, that the "snake's" time spent in white society helped shape him into the reprehensible man he becomes, so the comparison of Steve and the "snake" becomes a multi-layered analogy for the mind-set of white society as a whole. Stacey bluntly asks Steve how it felt to watch the villagers die, a question which she knows Steve cannot easily answer. She observes, "'Don't know what to say, Steve?'" and tells him that "You are now feeling shame" (186). "Steve was uncomfortable with his shame," Stacey notes,

> unlike the old snake....At the arc of the bridge he had turned to wave, no one waved back. Even this lack of response had not bent his shoulders the way Steve's now curved. Stacey knew the old snake felt deep shame. Shame so deep he had not defended himself. Shame so deep he left quietly as soon as he was able to walk. His assumption of dignity was to assure the people he had no quarrel with their decision. He had not wished to add the coercive force of guilt on top of his crime against womanhood onto the shoulders of the community. (186)

In contrast, Stacey feels a " twinge of guilt" at the sight of Steve's curved shoulders and, as a result, the "gulf between them widened. It grew until it became an ugly maw. A maw filled with a powerful raging wind that whirled everything into its centre. Stacey hung fast to the

fragile thread of herself. This maw could swallow her, given the opportunity" (187). Nobody wins in the "victim game," Maracle suggests, gesturing towards self-accountability as a first step in bridging difference, of "reaching across into the unknown" territory of the other. Nevertheless, the sight of Steve's "lonely defeated back" does elicit pity from Stacey, who "feel[s] sorry for the whole of white town for the first time. White town had no other story but its own. No Raven, just ratty tatty old crows....Crows whose lack of dignity stood in the way of even the most modest transformation" (187). When Stacey is finally able to break free from her compulsion to view her world in the binary terms of white culture, she has her own people's set of beliefs and stories to fall back on. Steve, she realizes, and Polly and Carol, have nothing but a "still town...an ache and a deep emptiness" (187). This awareness suggests that Stacey has come to comprehend and respect the differend between the two cultures, even as it evokes a pathos that can all too easily slip into apathy (like the apathy she recognizes in white society) if she and her people isolate themselves in their difference and refuse to even attempt to create a bridge between them. As Trinh T. Minh-ha points out, "[i]t is...much easier to dismiss or eliminate on the pretext of difference (destroy the other in our minds, in our world) than to live fearlessly with and within difference(s)" (84). Indeed, in order to live "fearlessly" one must first face one's fears in order to determine their origins, a process that can be quite painful.

Maracle's highly intricate revelations on cultural differences and prejudices point to an anxiety of influence wherein it is not easily determined where the interweaving of "us" and "them" begins, nor the interweaving of what might be called "traditional" and "colonized" life. This is perhaps put best by Grampa Thomas in the novel who tells the story of "She," the warrior woman of legend: "Not many of the villagers bought the story. It wasn't natural, many

said, to which Grampa Thomas retorted, 'We don't live in natural times so we have no way of knowing what is natural and what is not" (97). With this story, Maracle links the anxiety about cultural differences with the anxiety about women's roles in the village, drawing attention to the concept of "tradition" as paradoxical in itself. The story of "She" is interestingly interwoven with the story of Nora (whose funeral begins the novel), a woman who was not chosen as Speaker for the community because "they had never before chosen a woman as speaker" (99). Grampa Thomas goes so far as to suggest that Nora (and her daughter Rena, a lesbian who also defies "traditional" concepts of woman) is descended from this mythical woman:

> He told them a story and Momma had repeated it to Stacey. It was a story of a warrior woman of long ago, long before the complex clan system even. Grampa called her 'She,' the nameless woman. Nameless not out of disrespect but for want of definition. To children she was mother and to the world she was warrior. Her duality inspired fear and reverence in her fellow villagers. Grampa Thomas began to sing. Momma knew he was searching for memory; singing helped him unleash the memory of his ancestors. At the end of the song, Grampa Thomas decided that Nora and Rena were descended from this nameless woman with two spirits. (97)

The term "two spirits" is suggestive of a queer sexuality in Maracle's culture. In an interview with Janice Williamson, Maracle states that

> I think of homosexuals as people with a dualism, two-spirit people. It makes them good healers because they understand both male and female sexuality. We don't have a he/she in our language, so we don't have the homo-, hetero-, and all that other kind of sexuality; it's just human sexuality. And choice....The whole question of your sexuality is very very personal and private and determined by the spirit inside you. If you have two spirits, you're considered more powerful, because you have twice as much as everybody else (174).

Sexuality, as linked to the human spirit, is thus necessarily linked to the land and humans' relationship to and with it. The Earth, therefore, referred to in the feminine in this novel, is a

"She," embodying the spirits of both female and male, and consequently representing a concept which compellingly disrupts the Western metaphysical culture/nature, male/female dichotomies. "She," in the story relayed by Grampa Thomas, is nameless because indefinable, identified as a woman, despite the suggested masculinity of the term "warrior," yet clearly defying any easy compartmentalization of identity into gendered idea(l)s of feminine and masculine roles and behaviours.

"She" is in itself a fascinating story, one which seems a wonderful literary example of Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of gender. As with her ideas of difference, she emphasises the potentially subversive power of "gender" if it is considered not as a fixed or determined state reliant on biological sex, but as something that is constituted performatively. This concept of gender does not deny the influence of sexual difference, she suggests, but it does defy definitions based on sex alone. As Elizabeth Grosz compellingly posits, separating sex from gender creates a dichotomy that would merely replicate an opposition of the kind rendered in that between nature/culture and mind/body ("Ontology and Equivocation" 101). Like Irigaray, Trinh T. Minh-ha is concerned with emphasizing an ethics of difference based on sexuality and gender, writing that "[i]n today's context, to defend a gendered way of living is to fight for difference, a difference that postpones to infinity and subverts the trend toward unisex behavioral patterns" (116). Most significantly, this concept of gender does not degrade "traditional" women's roles, particularly those of "Third World Women," to use Trinh's words, such as that of mother, healer, and storyteller, by projecting an (Western) ideal of Woman or of a universalizing equality which, she argues, merely erases difference (105). She writes,

> [i]n its local perspective, the gender divide is always crystal clear, even though this clarity does not result from any consistent rule that scientific reasoning may

> invent to salvage it and is better conveyed through myths, stories or sayings than through analyses whose necessity for order calls forth the parade of police rationalities. (106)

So while Maracle's story of "She" highlights a problematic sense of "tradition" as it relates to conceptions of women' roles, as well as an anxiety of cultural influence, it also serves to weave together significant threads that relate to women as a source of wisdom and healing in the community, primarily through the function of storytelling, without denying or denigrating male participation and importance in these roles as well. Notably, it is a man who shares the story of "She" while defending Nora's right to "father" her children and choose to live independently of a man. Grampa Thomas implicates the coming of the Europeans (specifically the "blackrobes," or Catholic priests), with the shift to a split gendered consciousness that reflects the binary oppositions of Western metaphysics, for he suggests that "'We used to have people like ["She"] before the blackrobes came" (97). Additionally, while the villagers come to believe that only a man can and should be Speaker, it is interesting that Dominic is described by Stacey as possessing "feminine" physical characteristics: "the graceful movements of Speaker's body [were] almost womanly, so delicate were his gestures" (19). The figure of "Speaker" in Maracle's novel thus seems to embody the performativity of gender that Trinh outlines, while "She" represents the potential for women, especially, to defy containment in sex-defined gender roles. "She's" duality represents not a dichotomy or binary opposition, but a oneness that nevertheless does not erase sexual difference, nor, perhaps, cultural differences between women, whether between white and Native, or between the many diverse First Nations' peoples themselves. The defiant potential of "She" is literally "performed" in the novel by the characters of Nora and Madeline, women who pre-occupy Stacey's thoughts and create anxiety over their multiple differences. Through these women, Stacey confronts fears

and confusion over sexuality and the potential for "oneness," not only with the women of her village, but with white women as well.

Nora is portrayed as a "masculinized" woman because of her assumption of "male" roles upon the death of her husband. There is considerable anxiety about this for, even though the women of the village "hero[ize] Nora's courage....For a woman to take up the role of father in these times seemed threatening. It was her choice, was what Grampa ended up with. They all worried about the girls not being mothered while their mother was busy fathering them" (97). At the same time, Nora is "feminized" in appearance, although even in this she appears a blend of feminine and masculine traits, not so that she appears androgynous, but in a way that the "parts" form a "beautiful" and "graceful" whole:

> [Stacey] looked again at Nora's hands, large and strong, and at her body, lean and vigorous. She sat in the chair much the same way Stacey's father did, legs slightly apart, with her chest leaning into the conversation. When she was on a roll with some story or other she stood up and assumed the beauty and cadence of Speaker. Her eyes were large and shaped like Raven's, snappy and black, her skin dark but her hair auburn, almost red. She kept it sleek and tied back away from her handsome face. She was beautiful when she spoke. Her gestures were expressive, perfectly timed and graceful. (98)

Nora is "She" personified, yet that she is not chosen as Speaker despite her obvious gift points to the double-edge of tradition. On the one hand, as suggested by the story of "She," "tradition," as represented in a story of the past, is potentially liberating for women, offering a vision of possibility beyond definition, beyond the conception of what is "natural." Yet this "tradition" is rejected because it is not "natural" in light of present experience. Failure to choose Nora as Speaker represents how difficult it can be to disentangle complex societal influences that contribute to the construction of a concept of "traditional" gender roles and the

role of tradition within a community. The notion of "tradition," Maracle suggests, must be flexible and fluid, subject to the transformative potential of "Raven's song" itself. Notably, it is Nora who tells Stacey in a dream, "'Don't worry child, woman's day is coming" (99). In order to untangle the knotted threads of tradition, Maracle proposes a means of learning through story, and of seizing the possibility opened up in light of the current context.

While Nora possesses the talent of a Speaker and takes on the role of "father" in order to feed her children, Madeline seems to exemplify the "warrior" aspect of "She" when she takes up a gun to shoot her husband, punishing him for his unspeakable sexual violation of their young daughter. Madeline, until this point, is largely invisible to the villagers and in the novel, referred to only occasionally as "the snake's woman"; she is someone who is unknown and "other" to them because, while she is Indian, she comes from another Nation. The villagers' distance from her seems influenced by this difference, as well as by their dislike of the "snake" himself, who returned from the white world altered by its attitudes and with this unknown wife towards whom he behaves, Stacey believes, like a white man (149). Madeline's status in the village is interestingly summed up by Stacey, who wonders "where she was from, this nameless woman without family, without beginning or end. Who would they contact if the snake died?" (157). To Stacey, Madeline is initially "nameless," like "She" who defies definition. In addition, like Nora, Madeline takes on "male" duties when the family goes fishing, incorporating these jobs with the usual "female" roles, seeming to assume the roles of both mother and father to her children.

Madeline poses a dilemma for Stacey, who finds herself both attracted to and fearful of her. On the surface, Stacey's antagonism towards Madeline seems to be inspired by

Madeline's difference, particularly in the realm of language. Stacey is frustrated by her inability to follow Madeline's rapid, French-accented speech, and finds that Madeline's use of images that reflect her life on the prairies ("she used animals from a scattered and flat prairie to describe her every thought" 172) are unrelatable to anything in Stacey's own experience. In addition, Madeline is very forthright and physical in her expressiveness, something "that was hard for Stacey to take" (173). It is ultimately Madeline's exuberant physicality, her sensuality that is both earthy and ethereal, that troubles Stacey, for it awakens an "unnameable desire inside" her that causes Stacey to contrast herself with Madeline in metaphoric terms that notably come from nature:

> When Madeline was around she doubted the austerity she had been immersed in all her life. A sweet prairie dust-storm flitting about the hills did not seem sensible. The staidness of the mountains of Stacey's home, the powerful green, the giant cedars all called for a rigorous inner power, a discipline that she had accepted as the best possible form of human expression. Madeline was sensuous, she called up joyful memories of sun kissing skin, a light breeze cooling the hot kiss. She inspired the body to move gracefully, with full-blossomed passionate movement, greeting the world free of inhibition. It was annoying to have your whole self challenged so innocently. (173)

Madeline, in addition to the duality of "She," seems to embody the symbolic spirit of "Raven," which represents wind-swept chaos and the fluidity of change in contrast to the steadfast rootedness of "Cedar," with whom Stacey identifies (although Momma often tells her that she has "too much Raven"). In her interview with Jennifer Kelly, Maracle explains that "Cedar" represents the body as a house for the spirit, noting that "[i]t's stable and conservative and really reactionary, if you think about it, and our spirit wants to fly everywhere and do everything--so that Cedar becomes the house in our culture. Cedar represents our sacred house. Cedar represents all that is conservative and traditional, I guess. And Raven represents the spirit that just wants everything to move and shift and change and loves chaos" (87). It is

Cedar, for instance, who seeks to protect Celia from the disturbing visions Raven brings her, and who chides Raven for her plan to bring sickness to the villagers. Cedar twice urges Raven to be patient, to which Raven responds "'There isn't much time....These people are heading for the kind of catastrophe we may not survive. You, cedar, should think before you speak. You will be the first to perish'" (14, 44). Raven's words point to the oneness of the human spirit with the land, suggesting that the "catastrophe" to which she refers will be an ecological one; that is, it will encompass a destructiveness that extends to both the land and humans. As discussed, Maracle points to the inseparability of treatment of the earth with treatment of human beings, so "ecological" in this context necessarily includes both, and this is confirmed by her explanation that "Cedar" symbolizes the body. While Raven's "chaos" is linked with death in the novel and her voice portrayed as a haunting, ephemeral song, the spirit of Raven as exhibited through Madeline assumes an erotic, joyful quality that finds expression in the physicality of the body which is able to interact with the land and with other human beings.

While initially resistant to this spirit, Stacey inevitably concedes that Madeline has a profoundly comforting effect on her family, inspiring a physical closeness and intimacy which they had never before experienced (and which notably inspires Ned and Momma to consummate their relationship and thus cut Momma's traditional period of mourning short):

> After three weeks with Madeline, the girls and the books, change came to the family. Madeline was so effusive, it was contagious. She laughed hard and long, generally slapping whoever was near, not hard, but in a gentle familiar kind of way. She hugged her girls a lot. By the end of three weeks, Momma and Madeline took turns reading with one of the three girls on their laps or leaning up against the two women. Stacey liked this easy physical familiarity that Madeline was cultivating in her family. So did Ned. He had always been kind of physical himself. For him it was a happy transformation Madeline was bringing to the family. He sat with his arm about Young Jim, his hand resting

> on Momma's leg, listening to the nightly reading, peace and contentment written on his face. (179)

As a combination of "She" and "Raven," Madeline represents a quality of spirit that is evocative of Audre Lorde's concept of the erotic, which, as noted in chapter one, represents a "sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic or intellectual," and which significantly "forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them" (56). Madeline influences not only a closer intimacy among Stacey's family members, but manages to form a bridge with Stacey that overcomes Stacey's fear of oneness with an/other different from herself. Stacey's complex response to Madeline suggests that it is the prospect of change, of the stirrings of the "spirit," which causes her anxiety and keeps her from truly connecting with Carol and Steve. This anxiety also keeps her from allowing herself to feel sexual desire. For although she feels stirrings at the sight of the village men at Nora's funeral ("For Stacey the silent ritual of male physicality was captivating. She could not draw her eyes from the bodies of the men. Some small ray of light flickered in the pit of her stomach" 13), she consistently represses any feelings of sexuality in herself, rationalizing her abstinence as a practical protection against pregnancy in order to keep her safe to pursue her dream of university. At the funeral, for instance, Stacey's attention is drawn away from the men by the sight of her "very pregnant" cousin Stella. She fears a relationship with a white man, given the example of her cousin Shelley, who was abandoned and now lives in destitution on the streets of Vancouver, while at the same time she fears the "traditional" life of staying in the village and filling the roles of wife and mother. It is telling, however, that her fears of sexuality are intimately associated with death, as evidenced by her stirrings at Nora's funeral, and the problematic of Polly's suicide, which Stacey links with the expression of sexuality. Stacey's dream, however, is essentially one of change, of being able to return with a

knowledge that she believes can help her teach the children of her village so they no longer have to cross the bridge to white town. Like Momma, Stacey represents a paradoxical desire for both isolation and movement. Madeline, however, shows Stacey the positive potential of physical change and transformation, one that is linked with an exuberance of life rather than the tragedy of death, and it is meaningful that the bridge they construct between them is founded on the sharing of story.

Stacey's teaching of Momma and Madeline to read points to the transformative and healing power of story, whether it is in oral or written form. It is primarily in the women's active engagement with language that Stacey's family is brought closer together, and which enables Stacey to overcome her distance from Madeline and her distrust of Madeline's physicality. Just as importantly, if not more so (although inseparable from Madeline's influence), is that the act of reading helps Stacey and Momma bridge their own generational differences, bringing them closer to an understanding of each other. It also signifies a shift on Momma's part towards an awakening from her isolation from the rest of the world. The more Momma learns of Stacey's experiences in the white world, and anticipates Stacey's impending departure for university where she will spend four years away from the village, the more Momma wishes to understand that world and the effect it could have on her daughter. While her motivation for understanding is perhaps a negative one based on fear, that she does seek to understand, and seeks out their stories to understand, implies a positive movement beyond tolerance. She tells Stacey that "'I always wanted to know some of their stories. I don't understand them people at all--how they live, what they do. Their stories must tell you something about them, eh?'" (147). At the same time, Momma's desire to learn how to read is a personal one, something that she believes will be a significant accomplishment that will make

her family proud of her (147). Both Madeline and Momma learn to read very quickly, and their joy in the reading of stories from and about a world neither has seen is remarkably empowering to them, for they bring to their reading the erotic quality that allows for a bridging of difference. It is through reading, as well, that Momma discovers the differend between her people and whites, when she observes that for white people "'[t]he 'flu means illness...For us it means terror" (178). Yet, while the reading takes Momma a step closer to the others, it is the step closer to Stacey it brings that is most meaningful to her. It is, significantly, on the arc of the bridge where mother and daughter finally connect, in a poignant scene of farewell.

It is on the bridge where Stacey has found her only moments of serenity amidst the turmoil of the spring and summer, where she is most at peace within herself because of her openness to the world around her. Here mother and daughter both weep, their tears blending with the renewing raindrops, and hug for the first time in many years. Additionally, Momma shares with Stacey that "Momma" is her real name, explaining that it was the first English word that her own mother learned and thought was a name. This revelation turns their tears to laughter, signalling the intertwining of the emotions of grief and joy that makes any change somehow bearable in its painfulness, while also symbolizing the intricate tensions between tradition (home), and change (the unknown) that are woven throughout this novel. Momma, in her own way, is a "She," who, although strongly identified, and who strongly identifies with, traditional ways that are potentially stifling, nevertheless represents a hope for the future of the village. Momma, Stacey realizes, is like "Swimmer," the female salmon who swims up-river to spawn. Stacey recalls this story in one of her meditations on the bridge while watching the dwindling water of the river stream beneath her. Swimmer is a symbol of procreation and the determination of a species to survive against all odds, as well as a symbol of love, patience and

loyalty to one's mate (60). Stacey recalls her father's words to her brother after watching Swimmer's mate help her up the falls and then spend two long hours of violent struggle to get over the falls himself, while Swimmer swam patiently in the pool above waiting for him: "'And that's how our men feel about Creation'" (60). Stacey further observes that "[b]oth fish knew they would die. The end of the trail for them began with the need to procreate. Their courage was augmented by the brutal truth that there was nothing in it for them but death" (61); yet it is a commitment to life and not a death instinct that drives the salmon to spawn at any cost. Stacey recognizes this commitment to life in her mother, and it enables her to finally free herself of the troubling attitudes that have kept her distanced from her as well as the rest of her family. Swimmer's story, and her mother's courage, also point Stacey towards recognizing the importance of roots, of family, and the devastating consequences of rootlessness and isolation which separates one from the spirit of Creation: "Maybe that was it. Maybe some white people had no roots in the creative process, so could not imagine being that devoted to staying alive. If you have only yourself as a start and end point, life becomes a pretence at continuum. White folks, even her friend Carol, all seemed to be so rudderless....Maybe no roots was the problem" (61).

The theme of women in the novel is no less complex than the theme of cultural differences, and these are themes which necessarily overlap and intertwine with Maracle's critique of the logic of domination (as do all the "themes" in *Ravensong*, leading me to consider that "theme" is a woefully inadequate descriptive term in this instance). Significantly, in relation to the tremendously important role of storytelling in this novel as transformative and healing, and its connection with women and with nature, it is through Stacey's recognition of the place of women in both her own society as well as those of others, that the first step upon

the bridge of difference seems to be taken. As discussed, Polly's suicide triggers the many questions (often seemingly unrelated on the surface) that Stacey grapples with, questions which lead to revelations, if not quite understandings, of the various forms oppression may take both within her own community and in the white world. One of the significant paths upon which this questioning takes her is to "German Judy," a white woman who lives in the village with her lover, Rena. It is through Judy that Stacey begins to grasp the underlying reasons for Polly's suicide, even as the concept of suicide continues to elude her. This tentative grasp is intimately bound up with cultural and gender differences when Stacey observes that

> [t]here were no support systems for white women, not among their relatives or in their community or in law. No wonder Polly killed herself. Until now Stacey had bagged white men and women in the same sack. White women started to look different. Stacey felt a little uneasy about this. (81)

This observation underscores Stacey's sense of difference from white society, but at the same time, by recognizing that white women "looked different" from white men, Stacey finds herself in that in-between place where reaching out can occur. In a conversation with Steve, Stacey further recognizes the potential of the bridge which spans the gulf between her society and his. She comments, in response to the fact that Polly's suicide was likely precipitated by her abusive father, that "'Maybe she had no family, no one to stand by her" (184). Steve replies that maybe she had "'no place in society'" (184). Stacey further considers that "[she] was not familiar with his standard radical sociological language, but she didn't seem to have trouble grasping the trouble of 'no place.' What he didn't realize was that for Stacey no family and no place were synonymous" (184). Stacey's initial perception, for instance, of Madeline's lack of family implies a "rootlessness" which makes Madeline similar to Polly (and sadly, Stacey learns that Polly's father beats both Polly and her mother, 80 and 184) and Carol. As such,

Madeline embodies not only "She," but all dis-placed women who are betrayed within the very walls of the home which is supposed to give them a sense of belonging and safety, but which is revealed to be like a cell which keeps them contained in a loveless vacuum. "She" is, indeed, emblematic of displaced women, given that her own story is ironically dis-placed by a sense of "tradition." This image of "home" contrasts sharply with Stacey's sense of the belonging and security that represents her own home. It is Madeline's husband, the "old snake," who represents an incursion of "white-town" into the village, yet Stacey "couldn't know then that some of the families were already changed. She couldn't know that her own clan was the last of the families to cling to their ancient sense of family and that this was going to break down steadily as white town invaded their village" (150). It is this overlapping of gender and cultural differences which contributes to the complexity of Stacey's revelations and to the story of *Ravensong* itself as an insightful weaving of intricate and multi-coloured threads of life's seemingly irreconcilable dichotomies.

"'Death is transformative,' Raven said to earth from the depths of the ocean" (85). The deaths of Polly and Nora, and the grief they inspire, are central to the unravelling of the tightly wound ball of threads which forms the heart of *Ravensong*. In the Epilogue, we learn that the "novel" is in itself a story that has been woven by not only Stacey, but by Celia, Momma and Rena--a story that "took all winter" to tell (197), a story whose telling is prompted by yet another death which, like Polly's suicide, defies understanding. This time, it is poignantly one of their own who takes his life; thus suicide becomes yet another symbol of the disease of the spirit that threatens the Native people's lives. The story inevitably circles back to Raven, who began the song, but who left in despair as her hope for her people shrivelled (54). Raven's haunting melody is echoed in the women's voices who join in mourning song, as well as

entwining in the sharing of story that encapsulates both grief and joy as inextricable movements of emotion. Raven, the trickster storyteller and harbinger of social transformation, is a symbol in this novel, a cultural figure who represents the double-edge of transformation that is necessary for the continuance of life, but which often involves the pain of disease and death. It is "Raven" who instigates the 'flu epidemic as a lesson for her people, but her voice is never quite heard, except by Celia who was then too young to deal with the knowledge Raven gives her. Raven sets the story in motion and may be seen in light of Trinh's concept of the storyteller as the "Great Mother" figure who is both healer and "bringer of diseases" (127). It is by assuming the voice of Raven that the storytellers in the novel, and Maracle, convey the knowledge that death has transformative power, that endings inherently possess beginnings and potentialities. Although Raven leaves, figuratively signalling that this transformation has not yet been successfully put into motion, "her" story does not go unfinished (if such a story can ever be said to be "finished"), but is picked up by the women and continued and, in the process of that continuation, is furthered as a vehicle of healing, for "Raven's song" is the story of Stacey's people and their struggles to survive. As Trinh suggests, "[a] story is *not* just a story. Once the forces have been aroused and set into motion, they can't simply be stopped at someone's request. Once told, the story is bound to circulate; humanized, it may have a temporary end, but its effects linger on and its end is never truly an end" (133). The sharing of story in *Ravensong* exemplifies Trinh's concept of storytelling as a healing process and the importance of healing as a communal process, a form of "reconciliation" which necessitates the involvement of family and community and which is a "socio-cultural act, a collective, motherly undertaking" (140). All of the women who participate in the story are mothers, but, as Trinh suggests,

> [t]he storyteller, besides being a great mother, a teacher, a poetess, a warrior, a musician, a historian, a fairy, and a witch, is a healer and a protectress. Her chanting or telling of stories...has the power of bringing us together, especially when there is sickness, fear, and grief. (140)

This concept of the storyteller is also evocative of Maracle's "She," an indominitable spirit who represents a radical empowering potential for not only the women in this novel, but for all peoples. Importantly, "She" resists definition, and is, therefore, a powerful emblem of the capacity for narrative to defy external representations of the self, for *Ravensong*, itself, is a narrative which challenges such representations of First Nations' peoples, and especially, First Nations' women.

Perhaps the most evocative and compelling symbol of connection and transformation in *Ravensong* is the bridge, a symbol that can have a profound meaning from the perspectives of both Native and white societies. As Maracle suggests, the bridge, the connection between the two already exists, and "[i]t's a human connection. We have the connection of a society run amuck [sic]. So the connections are all there. What I think is missing is the fundamental starting point of examining how we view the world and with what sorts of eyes we're looking at it" (74). *Ravensong* represents an unflinching accounting and understanding of the disparate views of these two societies, and the places in which these perspectives (their "differends") clash. The understanding of cultural differences is intertwined with sexual difference as well, suggesting that a gender bridge is also required that does not erase difference and ultimately render women invisible and disposable. Whether conceived in terms of Lyotard's "phrase" or Lorde's "erotic," the spirit of sharing, of "reaching into the unknown," is ultimately what the bridge stands for, with footings in both cultures and an arc that sweeps over the uncertain waters of the chasm that separates them. It is a symbol that embodies, in Maracle's terms, the

spirits of both Cedar and Raven, in Cedar's sturdy support and Raven's fluid transformations. Stacey herself is a character within whom the spirit of the bridge is strong, and it is through her, primarily, that the potential of this connection is explored. Stacey's movement from a "split self" towards wholeness or "oneness," as she puts it, is a painful and perplexing one, and the path is not "straight and narrow," but curvilinear and even cyclical. As Stacey's example shows, self-examination and -exploration are painful but necessary steps towards building a bridge that can withstand the inevitable assaults on its foundations. Through Stacey, Maracle also suggests that the healing of the spirit is necessarily conjoined with a healing of the land, and that it is important to "know" intimately, through experience and an opening to emotion, where one's own roots lie; indeed, it is important to recognize that one's roots do lie in the earth, no matter how much concrete may cover it. Ultimately, Maracle suggests, we must read and listen to each other's stories in order to facilitate the kind of understanding that can lead to bridge-making. Her critique, in this novel, of the Western metaphysical tradition of dichotomized thinking points to the often violent rupture between male and female, culture and nature, mind and body, and self and other. The sharing of story, however, has empowering potential, Maracle counsels, but it requires an active engagement that can lead each listener to respond to the questions posed from her or his own uniquely situated perspective. In the novel, Momma and Madeline are exemplary examples of this kind of active engagement with story, given their willingness to apprehend others through their own stories. We may learn from them while we each create our own narratives of "self" that not only envision new possibilities of spirited living, but envision differently so that we may bear witness to the differend.

Conclusion

> when you see the land naked, look again
> (burn your maps, that is not what I mean)
> I mean the moment when it seems most plain
> is the moment when you must begin again.
> (Gwendolyn MacEwen, "The Discovery")

In an essay entitled "The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet," SueEllen Campbell writes of a tension between her academic specialty in contemporary critical theory and her academic and personal interest in ecology. She speaks of the seeming incommensurability of these two viewpoints, citing especially the post-structuralist emphasis on textuality versus ecology's emphasis on materiality. She writes that a "'misread' text and a depleted aquifer present quite different practical problems and raise quite different moral and ethical questions. But they both speak of our intimacy with what surrounds us" (131). There are many commonalities between the two, she ultimately suggests, such as the "questioning of authority" and a "shared critique of the idea of objectivity" (128-29): "Theory and ecology agree: our perceptions are always subjective and we are always involved" (129). Yet, if "we come to occupy the landscape we create," as Evernden suggests, then there is an implied textuality in the land; it is something we "read" into being, and how we "read" it reflects not only our attitudes towards it, but our relationship with it and with other people. Most interesting, however, is Campbell's emphasis on desire; she asks: "when theory and ecology speak of loss and desire, are they speaking of the same thing?" (135). Desire, she suggests, referencing psychoanalytic theory, emerges from a sense of loss, from the sense of separation we feel when we first experience ourselves as separate beings (separate from the mother, in particular). "At the core of our sense of self, then" she writes, "is our feeling of loss

and the desire for unity that is born of loss. Loss makes us what we are, and desire is an empty force (not dependant on any object we might want at any given time) which always drives us but can never be satisfied....Our desire marks what we have lost and what we still hope to regain. Desire, for ecology, goes beyond the human" (134-35). Desire, loss and grief stand out as motifs that are common to all of the texts I have looked at in this study; they are motifs that intertwine in diverse and complex ways, and are intimately bound up in a relational sense of self that is notably shaped by its experiences with both human and non-human nature.

What is most striking in these texts, however, is not the overwhelming centrality of grief, perhaps, but the emphasis on grief as a process that is both healing and transformative. There is a clearly felt desire in all of these works to (re)present the movement of emotion without losing the sensation of fluidity and catharsis. For grief in these texts is cathartic, pointing to a lived sense that women, especially, have been fractured somehow, and that, by writing their selves, or of the self coming into being, the writing is itself a healing and transformative process. The emphasis is always on movement and a process that can lead to news ways of envisioning the world, rather than a sense of hopelessness or nostalgia over the irrevocable loss of something that can never be regained, such as a pristine wilderness or a "traditional" way of life that ignores the complex socio-cultural influences that necessarily transform even a sense of what is, in fact, "traditional." The transformative process of narrative is evident in Maracle's emphasis on the power of story to weave together disparate threads that can bring a community together, and form a bridge across the distance of difference. Given the emphasis on process and movement, however, there is an evident resistance to closure in these texts, to defining the self as something finite and enclosed. As

such, the authors challenge the concept of a unified, universal subject that transcends space and time, presenting instead a "subject-in-process" which is discursively formed, but remains fluid and open to endless (re)definition. Their narratives, consequently, disrupt the ahistoric idea(l) of Woman as well as common stereotypes based on gender, race and ethnicity.

By focusing on the novels in this study individually, I have sought to honour the diversity of each woman's position and the complexity of her respective narrative strategies in addressing what I have designated as a unifying focus on explorations of identity and nature in their writing. In particular, I have been concerned with the ways in which these writers address the association of woman and nature that has posed a dilemma for feminists as outlined in the introduction. As I have suggested, the woman-nature association, as expressed through the culture/nature dichotomy, is dynamically inter-related with the problematic of subjectivity. This has led many feminists to follow Simone de Beauvoir in rejecting the status of "Other" in favour of the seemingly empowered position of the active "male" subject as a means of negating woman's association with nature in order to rectify her exclusion from the world of "culture." Yet, as feminists such as Susan Hekman have pointed out, the embracing of "male subjectivity" merely reinforces the inferiority of that which is identified with the "female," so that "equality" can only be achieved through a self-same identification with the (white) male. This "erasure" of woman is a key point of contention for feminists such as Irigaray, Cixous, Cornell and Kristeva, among others, who argue that the representation of woman as "lack" is always already apparent in the language; thus, in order to become "visible," women must write their "selves" without effacing their sexual difference. In addition, some ecofeminists have compellingly pointed out, along with the "post-structuralist" feminists, that it is a dualistic style

of thinking which leads to the creation of "value hierarchies" and "value dualisms" that reinforce the "logic of domination" by which it is reasoned that "man" is morally justified in subordinating and oppressing that which is "other" to himself, including women, racial and ethnic "others," and non-human nature. It is this intersection of subjectivity and the culture/nature dichotomy that has underlined my readings of each of the texts in this study, and I conclude that each of these women disrupts the dichotomies of self/other and culture/nature without embracing (white) "male" subjectivity, or continuing a devaluation of non-human "nature." Their texts, in fact, offer a wide range of strategies for disrupting binary oppositions, and, as a result, they recuperate and affirm those terms that have been traditionally associated with "Woman," while, at the same time, destabilizing the fixed categories of "Woman" and "nature."

While commonalities are apparent in comparison, most poignantly, as I have noted, in the shared identification with grief, these women's perspectives on the culture/nature dilemma are complexly varied, which has led me to complement my readings with a variety of theoretical perspectives. What emerges quite strongly is that each writer in some way apprehends the radical subversive potential of the "place between," which I have variously explored through the idea of the "blank page," Irigaray's concept of the "interval of desire," Kristeva's notion of the "abject," Lorde's "erotic" and Lyotard's "differend." This demonstrates that there is a multiplicity of ways of experiencing and conceiving of this subversive space as evidenced by the diversity of approaches that these women take towards radically challenging the traditional norms and values of Western society. These women challenge universality by exploring self-identity at the personal and local level, at what is often

referred to as "writing from the margins." Yet all three shift the terms of the "map," as it were, for in their challenges to dichotomies, they necessarily disrupt the perceived opposition between centre and margin.

Of the many seeming contradictions and paradoxes that emerge in their work, perhaps most evident, in light of the focus of this thesis, is a seeming contradiction between the emphasis on the corporeal materiality of experience and the notion that the "subject" is a narratively constituted phenomenon. This contradiction lies in the nature of representation itself, however, for in their challenges to the supposed objectivity and authority of "representation," there is a self-reflexive awareness in these texts, particularly in those by Marlatt and van Herk, of the act of writing as a representational act which runs the risk of replicating the authorial gesture. This idea of representation is, however, complicated by the fact that how we conceive of "nature" is already prefigured by linguistic concepts, for "nature" is, itself, a construct. Thus, there is a gap even between our lived experience of the land and the "identity" of the land itself. As SueEllen Campbell points out, borrowing a phrase from Barry Lopez, "'[t]he land retains an identity of its own'" (130). The land, however, cannot write itself into being in order to challenge reductive representations; therefore, the challenge is to be aware of the gap and honour this "differend" in our representations of that which cannot speak for itself. There are numerous moments in the texts, for instance, where the gap between lived experience and the description of that experience is highlighted. Marlatt's Annie and Maracle's Stacey, for instance, often struggle with the ability to express their experiences and emotions in words, particularly when their self-awareness stems from an intimate engagement with the non-human world. Much of this tension arises from what van Herk calls the "terrible

implacabilities of resemblance and the imagination" ("The Map's Temptation" 129), thus pointing to the irreconcilable nature of experience and narrative representation. The writerly desire is to replicate experience as faithfully as possible and, as especially evidenced in Marlatt's novel, to inscribe women's experience into the pages of history and literature. Yet, as Annie's anxiety over the writing of Ana's life suggests, the concurrent fear is that, in so doing, the writer may inadvertently (re)inscribe a static image of Woman that is taken to be universal and essentializing. This fear is heightened by the fact that these women explore a sense of identity that is intimately related to a corporeal connection with the physical world of "nature." Yet, as becomes quite clear, this engagement with the land and with place is revealed as a necessary component for the concept of a relational self that emerges from the disjunction between subject and object. Most importantly, it is the emphasis on the corporeality of this experience which is key; that is, in order to have a sense of place in the world, one must feel that one is at "home" in one's own body. This is vital, these authors suggest, in order to disrupt the concept of Woman as "lack," as well as the erasure of racial and ethnic differences that serve to make the "other" invisible.

As suggested in the introduction, these authors seek to write the self and the world in ways that are reflective of process, while also self-reflexively acknowledging that narrative is inevitably complicit in the (re)creation of new forms of representation. Van Herk and Marlatt, especially, seek to disrupt the "map's" claim to authority and singular truth through their own discursive engagement with the traditions of history and cartography. Van Herk, for instance, deconstructs the map form itself and reconfigures it as a textual, moving palimpsest that may "capture" the multi-dimensional dynamics of place, and that necessarily includes the relational,

emotional aspects of human involvement which transforms "empty space" into significant place. Her "geografictione" seeks to convey this interactive dynamic by contrasting the reading of a novel with "readings" of the landscape, thereby suggesting that both book and landscape possess a multiplicity of "meanings." This concept of the landscape as "text" is echoed by Barry Lopez, who writes that the

> physical landscape is baffling in its ability to transcend whatever we would make of it. It is as subtle in its expression as turns of the mind, and larger than our grasp; and yet it is still knowable. The mind, full of curiosity and analysis, disassembles a landscape and then reassembles the pieces--the nod of a flower, the color of the night sky, the murmur of an animal--trying to fathom its geography. At the same time the mind is trying to find its place within the land, to discover a way to dispel its own sense of estrangement. (xxiii)

Yet, as van Herk suggests, it is not possible to "know" the "landscape" through our minds alone, or from the limited and distanced perspective of vision. This kind of perspective not only perpetuates our sense of "estrangement" from non-human nature, it forms the basis for acts of possession and colonization that, because of this distance, allow for the objectification and reification of the land, as well as the peoples who inhabit it. The erasure of peoples through mapping practices is highlighted in her text by the troubling replication of their "invisibility" on her own "map" of Ellesmere. Their presence is, nevertheless, felt by van Herk, who does evoke echoes of their own history in her un/readings of the palimpsests of place. Van Herk, however, refuses to further the colonization process by telling their stories[1]:

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[1] In her essay entitled "In Visible Ink," van Herk writes about an additional trip to Ellesmere Island where she travels outside of the Lake Hazen National Park and is led by an Inuit guide. Here she indicates more explicitly her wariness of appropriating the rightful stories of others as they are expressed through their language and in their engagement with place. Although she learns Inuktitut words for "signs" of the landscape, she refuses to replicate them, writing that "[t]hey are Pijamini's words, not mine, and if I was able to hear them and to mimic them, it was only through his agency" (10).

instead, she points to the fact that these stories do exist, if one but has the eyes to "see" and the ears to listen. The effect of colonization is likewise explored by Marlatt, who draws strong connections between the exploitation of "natural resources" and the objectification and subsequent subjugation of women.

The "logic of domination" revealed by colonization and resourcism is also poignantly exposed and sharply critiqued by Maracle in her novel, who importantly highlights the complex intersection of gender and race as bases for dismissal and oppression within the anthropocentric and androcentric world-view (what feminists often refer as "the patriarchy"). While she does not explicitly target the problematic of representation like Marlatt and, especially, van Herk do, there is, nevertheless, an implicit subversion of cultural stereotypes in her novel, especially those of "Native" women. She also cleverly exposes the troublesome nature of stereotyping a people and culture through her depictions of the attitudes of the Native villagers in her novel towards white people as a whole and, by exploring the differences between these two cultures, she reveals the complex layering of the history and conditions that have fostered such hatred of the "other." As in Marlatt's and van Herk's works, "history" in *Ravensong* is revealed to be a palimpsest, where the experiences and perspectives of those on the "margins" have been erased and overwritten. This erasure, Maracle suggests, serves to perpetuate apathy towards and misunderstanding of the "other," while privileging a perspective that is necessarily skewed. Maracle shifts the terms of centre and margin, however, just as the other two women do, and, in so doing, exposes the inter-dynamic aspects of the "privileged" and the "marginal" viewpoints. Overall, Maracle's novel compellingly challenges the oppressive conceptual framework that operates in Canadian society by revealing the tragic consequences of this

world-view as it reverberates through the lives of all peoples who live within the political borders of Canada.

Maracle similarly troubles rigid oppositions between genders and gender roles as symbolized by her compelling story of "She," especially, and, like Marlatt and van Herk, she presents a concept of gender that is fluid and performative, and open to endless (re)configurations, while also acknowledging and respecting sexual difference. In contesting the idea of "traditional" gender roles, Maracle, van Herk and Marlatt all highlight the troublesome concept of "home" as it has served as a prison for women and as it "matriculates" with their multiple and profound griefs. In *Ravensong,* Stacey's concept of home as a place that embodies a network of family relations and roots is poignantly contrasted with the "rootlessness" of white society in its concept of home and family. This is especially interesting in comparison with van Herk's interrogation of "home" and the restlessness and rootlessness that pervades her engagements with place, and the seemingly paradoxical sense of death that intertwines with her idea of "home." It is striking how many emotional undercurrents and themes converge in a comparison of the texts of these women, especially considering their very different styles and approaches to the topics with which they are concerned.

In closing, it is not the commonalities between these authors' works that I wish to emphasize, however, but the diversity of the authors' voices. There is a temptation when exploring a common "theme" in women's writing to diminish difference in favour of similarity in order to establish an overall sense of "solidarity" as women; yet, to do so would be to ultimately diminish the very strategies of defying universalizing representations that these

writers employ in their works. In an essay entitled "Difference (em)bracing," Daphne Marlatt, in discussing the impact of reading women's writing and the inherent empowerment in a diversity of voices, writes: "I am not myself, or we are not myself, *or* each of us is our selves in the plural, struggling to speak the differences we sense through rigid assumptions of sameness and identity in the language we have inherited" (192). Here Marlatt points to the underlying tension I have discussed in relation to these texts, which is that of wishing to present an "I" which is, nevertheless, irreducible to a singular identity, while using a language deeply ingrained with the dichotomized style of thinking that pervades the Western conceptual framework. To read women's writing is to become aware of a dialogue, as Marlatt puts it, a conversation with many voices and perspectives. She writes: "Becoming aware of this dialogue on the (many) fringes, listening to other women's words/realities, is to engage in a delicate balance between recognition of difference and recognition of shared ground. The balance between i and we, neither capitalized nor capitalizing on the other" ("Difference (em)bracing" 192). In this study I have attempted to engage these writers in a conversation that reflects a shared interest in exposing the "self-destructiveness of male-dominated society," in Adrienne Rich's words, a destructiveness that is painfully reflected in the status of women, First Nations' peoples, and the land in this country. This pain is echoed in all of the texts I have looked at, suggesting that a fundamental re-visioning of Western attitudes is required in order to achieve both a healing and transformation that entails a never-ending process of self-evaluation and -exploration. As Lee Maracle compellingly suggests, and as is evidenced in all of the texts examined here, it is through storytelling and narrative that we may begin to envision differently.

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