

The Phantom Limb Syndrome: Writing the Postcolonial Body in Daphne Marlatt's "Touch to My Tongue"

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A COMMONLY INVOKED differentiator between postmodernism and postcolonialism is the idea of resistance. Stephen Slemon, for instance, views postmodern critical discourse as typically unresistant, devoid of political agency and energy. Whereas postcolonialism is infused with the energy of resistance, postmodernism, he maintains, is sapped of political efficacy by a pervasive negativity, the deferral of literary and social questions into the philosophical, and an assimilating and universalizing tendency. Too often, he contends, "the very real *crisis* of postmodernism is lost to a blandly self-reflexive methodology which forgets its own genealogy and its cultural and geographical place" ("Modernism's" 9). And because postmodernism privileges the interrogative impulse, it has a fairly limited capacity for reply and dialogue. Postcolonialism, on the other hand, is not confined to interrogating, questioning, and problematizing. It encompasses a larger repertoire of responses, including affirmative refusals, snappy rejoinders, performance, vernacular languages, shamelessly parodic gestures, confabulations, bad mouthing, impure remarks, and other forms both of protest and cultural construction. Slemon locates postcoloniality (in terms of specific signifying or semiotic practices) between "the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others" and a "specifically anti-colonial counter-discursive energy" that emerges from a "continuing yet subterranean tradition of refusal towards the conceptual and cultural apparatuses of the European imperium" ("Modernism's" 3). Such counter-discourses and recuperative writing-back construct and rein-

force within the postcolonial subject the agency and resistance lacking in his or her postmodern cousin.¹

Diana Brydon and Ian Adam similarly see resistance as central to postcolonialism. Focussing on terminology and only in a summary way on methodology, Diana Brydon charges that the "name 'postmodernism' suggests an aestheticising of the political while the name 'postcolonialism' foregrounds the political as inevitably contaminating the aesthetic, but remaining distinguishable from it." For her, postmodernism cannot account for "post-colonial resistance writing, and seldom attempts to" (192). She argues for a postcolonial aesthetics of impurity, "contamination," and getting one's hands dirty. Ian Adam looks to the linguistic work of Charles Sanders Peirce for a non-Saussurean, non-postmodern linguistics consonant with postcolonial resistance, worldliness, and agency. For Adam, Peirce's signs are not devoid of reference to the external world as they are in Saussurean "arbitrariness"; rather, he explains, it is the "resistances" within objects themselves which expose the insufficiency and conditionality of signifieds (86-87).

If we accept that a grounded, contaminated, material resistance is an important factor which demarcates the boundaries of the postcolonial and the postmodern,² and furthermore if the postcolonial begins at the very moment when colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others, then we are compelled not only to analyze languages and discourses as sites of resistance but also to consider the inscribed bodies of postcolonial subjects. Although the body is socially and discursively constructed, its materiality allows it also to elude in some measure the totalizing effects of such constructions, which in Western culture are almost but not quite "always already" constituted by phallogocentrism. As material substance, as that which resists the operations of naming and categorization, as non-name and sensible/sensual non-sense, the body also resists and displaces the official order which it acquires along with its native tongue. As flesh, the body is both vulnerable and resistant to languages, discourses, and social formations. And in *both* its vulnerability and its resistance, the body "writes back." That is, the very properties which make it susceptible to inscription also preserve some

measure of its resistant agency and signifying potential. The body protests. The body goes on strike. The body has other agendas.

This is perhaps most strikingly evident in hysteria. Even in the crippling illness of hysteria—thought to be a resistance to, even a defiance of, the overwhelming impositions of phallogocentric constraints, repression, and overwriting—the body retains its ability to sign for itself, sometimes in cases in which even linguistic sign-making breaks down.³ In hysteria, the body's signifying resistance returns with a graphic insurgence. Moreover, hysteria, like much postcolonial writing, deploys the vernacular. As Monique David-Ménard notes, "the visible features of hysterical paralysis . . . [are] not necessarily defined by a physiological substratum or mechanism. Instead, in its configuration and in the problems that affect it, a hysteric's body conforms to everyday language" (2).⁴

Focussing on intersemiotic translation⁵ between the body and writing—such as that modelled by hysteria—allows us to interpolate into postcolonial work the body as a resistant materiality which, like other material "objects," exposes the insufficiency and limited constituency of signified meanings. The postcolonial subject is not only a subject in and of language but an embodied subject as well—a point that needs to be underscored. As Fernando Coronil suggests, with regard to analysis of postcolonial and neocolonial societies "decoding bodily and sexual imagery would involve examining it in relation to specific forms of imperial domination, reorganization of domestic relations, languages of sexuality, and idioms of power of particular societies, including metropolitan ones" (95). Moreover, as Arun P. Mukherjee cautions in "Whose Post-Colonialism and Whose Postmodernism?" the analytical category of race must also be factored into any postcolonial delineations of the concept of resistance.

Of course, ideas such as "postcolonial," "resistance," "race," and even "bodies" must always be read within specific contexts. Obviously, "resistance" as theorized by various white postcolonial theorists is not the same "resistance" as that comprehended by non-white theorists like Mukherjee or Coronil.⁶ Notions of resistance literature and resisting bodies must also be qualified according to whether or not the country in question punishes the

reading and possession of books by imprisonment or torture, for example. A poetics of intersemiotic translation provides ways not only of representing the words but also of writing the very limbs and flesh of the resisting postcolonial subject into literature, theory, and criticism.

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We must also find, find anew, invent the words, the sentences that speak the most archaic and most contemporary relationship with the body of the mother, with our bodies, the sentences that translate the bond between her body, ours, and that of our daughters. We have to discover a language [*langage*] which does not replace the bodily encounter, as paternal language [*langue*] attempts to do, but which can go along with it, words which do not bar the corporeal, but which speak corporeal. (Irigaray 43)

Because Daphne Marlatt's immigrant experience emerges from a colonial British background, it is easy for readers to overlook the fact that she considers her immigration to Canada to have exercised a profound influence upon her senses of language, writing, and the body. In her essay "Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination," Marlatt reflects: "Looking back, i think that most of my writing has been a vehicle for entry into what was for me the new place, the new world" (219). She talks about the cultural and linguistic differences she and her family encountered upon emigration from Malaysia to Canada: "We came from a colonial multicultural situation in Penang where five languages were spoken in our house (English, Malay, Cantonese, Tamil, Thai) to a city [Vancouver] which was then (1951) much more than it is today, decidedly WASP, conservative, and suspicious of newcomers. We spoke the same language but not the same dialect . . ." (220).⁷ Not only words and accents but every quotidian detail—food, clothing, sports, pop culture, music, flora and fauna, the subjects of nightmares, etiquette, school subjects, and reading material—became a marker of difference. Marlatt enthusiastically adopted the accent, slang, habits, and practices associated with the new dialect to make herself into a Canadian teenager. It was not until years later⁸ that she began to feel that "like a phantom limb, part of me, that Penang past, not quite cut off, still twitched alive and wanted acknowledging" (221).

While the young Marlatt wrote her way into the world she wanted to be part of, multiplying her signifying capabilities in the process, her mother, whose role, identity, and status changed with immigration from colonial memsahib in Malaysia⁹ to isolated Canadian housewife, became increasingly nostalgic for things English. In trying to enforce Englishness, Marlatt's mother confined and reduced her engagement with the present and with the world outside the domestic sphere. As Marlatt writes: "My mother wanted to keep up 'English' in our values as we struggled very hard to become Canadian. This led to a deepening neurosis i could neither understand nor address" (222). The mother, as a mother, made desperate hysterical attempts on her own behalf and that of her children to salvage her colonial British culture and dialect. Her daughter, on the other hand, embraced postcolonial Canadian culture, swam into the flow of differences within a single language, and learned the subtleties of intralingual translation. The daughter's sense of linguistic estrangement led not to neurosis but "to a sense of the relativity of both language and reality." She acquainted herself with the idiosyncracies of language, its duplicity, and its figurative or transformational powers. As she says:

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

According to Marlatt, this first-hand experience of the split between signifier and signified extends for the postcolonial immigrant writer to an awareness of the duplicitousness of the second-person pronoun and the twin illusion of the unitary self. The sense "that the you you were in that place is not the same you as the you you are in this place, though the two overlap, produces a desire to knit the two places, two (at least) selves, somehow" (223).

This relationship between bodily memories and writing in the poem sequence of Marlatt's *Touch to My Tongue* is the focus of the present paper. What we shall explore is how this erotic, lesbian

feminist text composes the body and, conversely, how the body inscribes itself into the text. How does the split between signifier and signified function in the inscription of bodies gendered as feminine? As lesbian? How does Marlatt's postcolonial writing of the body incorporate the phantom limb of the colonial past? Finally, whose limbs assume the nature of phantoms?

In *Touch to My Tongue*, the desire to explore the relation between the multiple selves constructed through language and place, and between these selves and an Other, finds its most obvious expression in the multiplicity of forms included in this slim volume. Like the five languages spoken in Marlatt's Penang home, in *Touch to My Tongue* the treated photographs, the prose poems, the poetic essay "musing with mothertongue," a glossary to several of the poems, and a statement by photographer Cheryl Sourkes about her photographs (from a series called "Memory Room") explore different approaches to signification and representation, and signal to the reader the need to translate (in this case, intersemiotically between different media). Remarking upon the paradoxical relation between the desirable Otherness of the hieroglyph's opacity to phonographic meaning and its apparently transparent, visual readability and referentiality, Janice Williamson suggests that in Sourkes's treated photographs "the female figure becomes a kind of hieroglyph, or pictorial language which blurs the distinction between woman and writing" and that Marlatt's series of poems likewise take up "the hieroglyph's contradictory identity as both enigmatic otherness and proximity" ("It gives me" 178).

But the correlation of the hieroglyph with the body gendered in the feminine is not only an alliance of exotic Otherness. The apparent collusion of the feminine body with hieroglyphs and other visual signifying systems is reminiscent of Freud's theory of "somatic compliance," whereby the hysterical body is thought to comply "with the psychical demands of the illness by providing a space and a material for the inscription of its signs" (Doane 40). Freud and Freudians read the hysterical symptom as a sign or inscription on the woman's body; they believe that the hysterical body obeys the psychic imperative to transform itself into textual material. Indeed, Freud's notion of somatic compliance is fig-

ured upon a phallogocentric model of writing in which material substance (paper or flesh) is imagined as compliant with or subordinate to psychic demands.

Cartesian dualism and the valorization of reason as a "universal language" have conspired to reduce the body to a symptom of the "self" and to align that body-symptom with the symbolic or social order. As Andrea Nye explains in her reading of the history of the ideal form of reason, logic:

Logic proclaims itself the unreadable language, the language which has detached itself from confusion and passion, the language which has transcended natural language embedded in sensual lives, mutably imprinted with social, economic, or personal concerns. The logician does not speak; he does not tell the truth; he exhibits it. All vestiges of his speaking voice are transcended, all reference to his situation, to his sex, his place in time or space. Logic is the perfect transparency of a language which does not need to be read. (4)¹⁰

Though hysterical symptomatology, for example, has been analyzed intensively, the body's signifying production in general has remained relatively untheorized, with the result that we lack a vocabulary with which to discuss the significations of materiality and corporeality.

Against the abstraction, symptomatization, and exile of the body from signification, however, the Australian philosopher Elizabeth Grosz theorizes the body as "intextuated" (her word) and resistant to, rather than totally compliant with, social inscriptions.¹¹ As she states:

The body can thus be seen not as a blank, passive page, a neutral ground of meaning, but as an active, productive, "whiteness" [sic] that constitutes the writing surface as resistant to the imposition of any or all patterned arrangements. It has a texture, a tonus, a materiality that is an active ingredient in the messages produced. It is less like a blank, smooth, frictionless surface, a page, and more like a copper-plate to be etched.

The body is not nature or woman. Neither is it white or merely impressionable, childlike. It must always already be textual; otherwise, hysterical transformation/translation, for instance, could not take place. As Robyn Ferrell asks in her article "The Passion of the Signifier and the Body in Theory": "What else is hysteria, but the exhibiting of the body as a place of signification?" (174).

The hysterical or what I have called the “pictogrammic” body does not work from any of the intertwined principles of somatic compliance, phallogocentrism, Cartesian dualist models of mind and body, or representation.¹² The body is a lifesize pictogram, mobile, gesturing, animated, and audible. The body is a passionate, multilingual signifier.

It must be stressed, however, that Grosz does not set the body up as a counter-universal against “universal reason.” Feminist philosophers and writers like Grosz and Marlatt do not simply reverse the Cartesian mind-body binary, as many anti-essentialists claim. It makes no more sense to say that the body is a “universal” than to say that reason is. However, by factoring the body into signifying practices, instead of merely reading it through those signifying practices always already comprehended by (because constitutive of) consciousness—representation and mimesis—the body can be reinscribed so that new accents, new dialects, can be heard and new textual practices, such as those of *Touch to My Tongue*, set into motion.

For instance, Marlatt’s reference to her bodily memories of her Penang childhood as a phantom limb speaks of a kind of bodily semiosis which is typically overlooked or ignored because subsumed to the type of memory believed to have its seat in the mind. In “Sounding a Difference,” she describes this kind of memory as “a murmur in the flesh”:

... the experience of being back there in Penang so many years later and remembering, and yet not consciously remembering, having a memory that was in the body somehow, but wasn’t consciously accessible until I got there. I couldn’t have said how to get from A to B, but at a certain point, rounding a corner, I got an immediate flash of what I would see when I got around that corner, and I could not have foretold it until I was in that actual movement around that particular spot. And memory seems to operate like this, like a murmur in the flesh one suddenly hears years later. (Williamson 49)

Aside from memories accessible to consciousness, the body’s own motility links different times and places and different “selves.” The movements and gestures in which memories are stored are the same ones in which such memories are released. The body signifies and collects remembrances in muscles, heartbeats, physical motions, and sensual impressions. As signifying

material, as flesh, the body connects different *topoi*—for Marlatt, Penang past and Penang present. Walking along a street is an immersion in signs, symptoms, and remembrances; phantom limbs, odours, and unheard melodies accompany present stimuli and re-member the body past.

Touch to My Tongue begins with the speaker reading the other woman's face: "i see your face because i don't see mine equally flush with being." This facial flush nominates the speaker not as "self" but as Other. The flush of welcome and excitement of both their faces signifies the two women as, so to speak, Othering each other, "equally flush with being." At this same initial meeting, the speaker reads in the Other's face the traces of ethnicity, that very specific, if often ambiguous, sense of Otherness. What she sees in the lover's glow are "fjords in there," a Scandinavian heritage. Their respective sets of ancestors having emigrated from Scandinavia and India, being together in present-day Vancouver is a literal "co-incidence." They meet both in the present tense and "in these far places we find in each other." Their co-incidence in the time and space of Vancouver partakes of their shared sense of being from other places and times as well, not mythic time, of course, but family histories, cultural memories (the British claiming Bombay), and texts read (Sappho on the radio). Their selection of meeting place, "no not the Danish Tearoom—the Indonesian or Indian," reflects both of their ancestral and ethnic backgrounds—Scandinavian and colonial British in India. Later, separated by distance from her lover, the speaker realizes painfully and fearfully that "i can only be, no vessel but a movement running, out in the open, out in the dark and rising tide, in risk, knowing who i am with you" (20).

Marlatt uses language in *Touch to My Tongue* to access not only cognitive recollection but the body's memories as well. To quell the loneliness and pain of the physical distance from her partner, the speaker calls the lover up, either on the phone or in memory. The renewal of the connection—the tones and timbres of their speaking voices and their bodily memories of each other—sustains them over the geographical distance. Separated by distance, the lovers are "turned out," presumably of their paradise, but they realize that in their lovemaking they are "turned inside

out, beside [them]selves." While the speaker's conscious mind imagines the possible dissolution of their relationship, her body remembers them together as "creatures of ecstasy," which helps to bridge the distance and the absence. Drawing on this body knowledge, on these memories of rising "drenched from our own wet grasses, reeds, sea," they re-affirm their commitment both to one another and to the necessary reclamation of language, geography, and the social world.

If writing provides access to the body, so too the body informs writing and social practices. Whether she draws upon the logic of symbols, mythologic or etymologic, Marlatt attempts in the act of writing to connect memory with both present and future possibility. That is, she uses writing to recover lost memories. These recovered memories can in turn create new writing and social practices. As she says, "[i]n a sense, it's almost like a racial memory, verified in the recording of the relationships of words to various civilizations. There is also a connection between memory and possibility. The invention of possibility which is utopian allows for a new practice" (27). As a postcolonial writer, Marlatt refuses the traditional notion of mythology as transcendental, transhistorical, and transpersonal, interpreting it instead as contemporary, personal, local, even geographical. In a 1976 interview, "There's this and this connexion," she explicitly connects mythology with the reclamation of geography, terrain, habitat, and a sense of place. Questioned as to the connection between her interest in recording local reality in an authentic and accurate way and her interest in mythic reality and in writing out of what the interviewer describes as "an almost religious sense," Marlatt responds as follows:

Well, brother, what can I say to that that might be useful? . . . I *am* interested in mythic thought. Because it seems to me that myths—well myths are a language in themselves but they do tell us how the early or first inhabitants of a terrain saw themselves in terms of their terrain, they tell us about inhabiting a place, and they tell us about the powers of the earth we inhabit which we've lost the sense of.
(Cooley et al. 32)

Marlatt's postcolonial usage of mythology is as another language in which to access the real and the local, another language for

translation. Insofar as it is local, mythology is not a narrative of the imaginary or utopian but a map of the earth and its previous inhabitants. It is not the deferral but the actualization of the real in language, time, and space. For her, mythology is someone else's mother tongue. A translation effect, mythology is not a religion but a language which connects the hungry ghosts of the ancestors with the desiring bodies of the living inhabitants of a given locale.

Marlatt's feminist and postcolonial poetics coalesces around her translative use of etymology and mythology. In the poem "yes" (21), for instance, she explores both contemporary and past associations of the word "jade." She begins from the word's dictionary meanings of "'worthless woman, wilful girl.'" "JADE a sign on the road announces," but she translates it as an advertisement for "stone of the flank," recalling the possessive weight of her ex-husband's hand upon that part of her body during sleep. She associates the word with her own exhaustion and spiritlessness, her jadedness, during that period of her life. She also remembers that the jade stone has traditionally been thought to be a cure for kidney disease. She contrasts heterosexual marriage—ceremonially marked by the mythological figure of Hymen and by the breaking of the bride's hymen—with the experience of her lesbian love relation and the feeling of being "broken open by your touch," without loss, abandoning the "need for limits" and "the urge to stand apart." The image of the wedding ring and the "white band the skin of years hidden under its reminder to myself of the self i was marrying" is replaced by the ring of "our mouths' hot estuary, tidal yes we are, leaking love and saying it deep within." For Marlatt, the wedding band symbolizes both heterosexual marriage and "this small open space that was mine" prior to her marriage. "This small open space that was mine" refers both to psychic space, a sense of self, and to the body. Thus, for her, her former wedding ring symbolizes an attempted somatic compliance between psyche and body.

By contrast, with her lesbian lover, lovemaking is both love *and* its utterance. This other "yes," "redefined, it signals us beyond limits in a new tongue our connection runs along" (21), is pronounced "yu" (23). "Yu," the notes in the glossary to *Touch to*

My Tongue inform us, is “the Indo-European root of ‘you,’ second person pronoun; also an outcry as in Latin *jubilare*, ‘to raise a shout of joy’ (as the initiates at Eleusis might have done on seeing the luminous form of the risen Kore)” (36). It is not a promissory “yes,” as in a wedding ceremony where the words “I do” or “I will,” supplemented by a wedding ring, promise to love and honour. This other “yes” (“*yu*”) does not promise to love from this day forth. It does not enact or exact a promise; it enacts love. “*Yu*” does not promise to love; it loves. It raises a shout of joy in the Other. In their lesbian relation, lovemaking and the jubilant cry of “*yu*” literalize the body of the Other and/as love. Love is at once symbolized and desymbolized. Love is desymbolized insofar as the lesbian lovers represent this desire without loss or finitude, not as a single gold band but as a limitless procession of rings (of desire, of fulfillment). Nevertheless, love *is* symbolized because if to say “yes” is to promise, then the lovers promise with their bodies: “Tidal yes we are, leaking love and saying it deep within” (21).

Similarly, in the poem entitled “kore” (23), the lesbian love relation both accumulates elements of the mother-daughter relation and deconstructs them at the same time. Even as the mythological parallel is drawn, it is reduced, played down, and problematized within the context of the poem. For example, within the poem it is undetermined which lover plays the role of Demeter and which Persephone. The title, “kore,” might suggest that not the poet but her lover is Kore. Yet the lover’s eyelashes, “amber over blue,” recall “(*amba*, amorous Demeter, you with the fire in your hand, i am coming to you),” which implies that the lover is Demeter instead. In an interview with Janice Williamson, Marlatt has discussed the mother-daughter elements of her relationship. She says: “Well, we each get to play the daughter and we each get to play the mother. . . . That’s why there is so much mother/daughter imagery running through *Touch*, and the confusion between Persephone and Demeter is a deliberate confusion” (“Speaking In” 26).

Furthermore, along with this naming/unnaming, there is the complication of the second-person pronoun. The poem chants “no one wears yellow like you,” “no one shines like you,” “no one

my tongue burrows in." The description of lovemaking leads to the statement, in parenthesis, "(here i am you)." As the poem works toward orgasm, as "lips work towards undoing," the mythological connotations of Demeter and Kore are stripped down to the etymological level, to the Indo-European root of the word "female," which originally meant "to suckle" but has diversified into "fetus" (that which sucks), "fellatio" (sucking), and "felix" (fruitful, happy) (36). In other words, Marlatt uses the etymological evolution of the term "female" to radically complicate the pronoun "you" and the standard positionality of self and Other. The second-person pronoun, by virtue of Marlatt's translational accretion to it of its Latin root *jubilare*, "to raise a shout of joy," supplements Otherness with the cry, jubilation, and excess.

To say "you" in this translation is not only to designate or name that which is not the self. It is simultaneously to *enact* Otherness, and one's pleasure in the Other. Saying "you" is the exaltation experienced at the entering in to oneself of the Other. Thus it is not (or not only) that the self is discovered through intersubjective discourse or through intercourse. The Other is not simply a means to the solidification of the unitary self. Sex is not a detour through the Other towards a refreshment and consolidation of ego boundaries. "Extended with desire for you and you in me it isn't us" (24), as Marlatt writes in the poem following, refusing the reduction of two to one implicit in the traditional mathematics of love in the Western world. "You" (*yu*) plus "me" does not equal "us."

Through such translations and deconstructions, Marlatt collapses dialectics and brings different dialects and different bodies into play. Bodies and lovemaking alter language. With the revision of established meanings, the body surges ahead of language, its materiality and its motility exceeding categorical thought. For Marlatt, language does not represent anything else: "it does not replace the bodies around us" (45). Like the phantom histories we carry with us encoded in our tissues, language "is both place (where we are situated) and body (that contains us), that body of language we speak, our mothertongue." If one brackets the ideas of representation and completion, then one can find both "alternate names" and "that tongue our bodies

utter, woman tongue, speaking in and of and for each other" (27).

That tongue our bodies utter is the focal point of the poem "in the dark of the coast." In this poem, the lover converses with a small bird singing in the underbrush in a way analogous to how her body, her skin, answers to the touch of the Other. The lovers, reunited after the long period of separation, discover new things about each other. Marlatt writes: "i didn't know your hair, i didn't know your skin when you beckoned to me in that last place. but i knew your eyes, blue, as soon as you came around the small hill, knew your tongue" (30). The tongue she knew is both the literal organ of the tongue and perhaps a shared lovers' language not unlike "the hidden Norse we found." Paradoxically, distance, parting, absence, and mourning are very prominent in this poem about reunion and erotic fusion. The emphasis of the poem is not upon the merging of identities in one another, as in conventional love poetry, but upon how "your naked, dearly known skin—its smell, its answering touch to my tongue" creates a "separate skin we make for each other through." The hieroglyphs of embrace spell a new alphabet, a new skin, for their being together.

The final poem of the sequence, "healing," shows in retrospect that the lover's body has translated itself into the text not only in the erotic content but in a number of other senses as well. As she tends to her lover's needs following gall bladder surgery, Marlatt is led to consult the dictionary for the etymology of the word "gall." Its etymological history includes words meaning to shine, words for colours (yellow), bright materials, bile or melancholy, glad, glass, glaze, and glee. These derivations of "gall" run throughout the entire series of poems, but perhaps the best example is the opening of the poem "kore": "no one wears yellow like you excessive and radiant storehouse of sun, skin smooth as fruit but thin, leaking light. . . . no one shines like you" (23). Similarly, in the poem "where we went," brightness, glass, and glaze appear: "we went to what houses stars at the sea's edge, brilliant day, where a metal crab jets water catching light, heaven and earth in a tropic embrace joined upright, outside glass doors people and cars and waterglaze" (28). Just as Cheryl Sourkes's

photocollages intermingle with Marlatt's poems and poetic essay, so the lover's body inserts itself symptomatically and erotically into the text. Just as the lover's skin produces an "answering touch to my tongue" (30), so her bodily symptoms translate themselves intersemiotically into her partner's poetic sequence.

The loved body transgresses the bounds of textual decorum and has its "say" within the text too. In hysteria, the erotogenic body bypasses the dichotomy between the real and the represented to translate itself directly into motor and speech "symptoms." Thus, if the body can translate itself into motility and speech, it would seem possible that it can translate itself into the tissue of written text. Or, just as the body carries memories in its tissues and limbs which can be translated into speech in the "talking cure" of psychoanalysis, so too corporeal information can be translated into writing. The material substance of the body translates itself intersemiotically into the material substance of language, signifier to signifier.

In a recent essay on translation, Marlatt writes that "[t]ranslation has always stood in an intimate relationship to writing for me, not the same but similar to, and it is this shade of difference . . . that is exactly the area . . . that the process of translation works. . . . For me translation is about slippage and difference, not the mimesis of something solid and objectified out there" ("Translating *MAUVE*" 27). Translation works (in) the area of *différance*. In both writing and translation, "what one ends up saying is never simply one with, but slipping in a fine displacement of, intention" (28).

The notion of *différance* deconstructs the conventions of mimesis and representation, which typically employ the body of the Other, usually woman, as a supplement. As Sherry Simon says, "[b]oth women and translators are the 'weak' terms in their respective hierarchies, sexual and literary" (Homel and Simon 52). Thus the drift and slippage inherent in translation are important to Marlatt as a feminist writer. The doubling involved in translation—"there are two minds (each with its conscious and unconscious), two world-views, two ways of moving through two different languages"—is compounded when, as in the case of Marlatt translating Nicole Brossard's *MAUVE*, the two writers

involved are “aware of the displacement that occurs between their own experience as women and the drift that is patriarchally loaded in their language.” Then, Marlatt says, you have both drift and resistance, immersion and subversion, working together. Moreover, her translation of *MAUVE* involves the interlingual translation of a text which is composed, in part, as an intralingual translation: “Meaning operates strangely in [*MAUVE*], seeping from one phrase to others around it, leaking back and forth between fragments, definitely not progressing in linear fashion” (“Translating *MAUVE*” 28). This is the translation of one inter-language into another.

The promise of translation for Marlatt is multifaceted. For feminist writers, the notion of fidelity—the fidelity of language to event in the promise, in marriage, and in translation—is problematic. Against fidelity, Marlatt posits difference, infidelity, excess, slippage, drift, leakage, stain, bruise, curve, and so on, the words themselves reflecting the “interference” of the body or bodies in the act of translation. For her, translation takes place not only between two languages but between two tongues, two mouths. The relationship of one mouth to another (those of the self and the Other, the translator and the other writer) doubles that between “the living body and its mental impress” (29), that divergence of the body from its virtual image, especially the body gendered in the feminine, because it has been “much imaged.” Unfaithful translation, translation unfaithful to the traditional translation contract, provides a method for deconstructing the Cartesian “universal reason” which has operated to erase her body’s differences, to alienate its drives and significations, and to subject her (render her faithful to) the Law of the Father. The liquid hydraulics of translation (leekage, seepage) supplant the mechanics of representation and mimesis. Unlike representation, translation involves her in an intimate, dialogic relation with an Other. In the words of Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Nicole Brossard, “I am already a translation by being *bilingue*, I am already a translation by being lesbian feminist, I am already a translation by being a woman” (qtd. in Mezei 49).

Although the parallel is instructive in terms of understanding the nature and extent of their project, feminist writers such as

Marlatt are *not* repeating René Descartes's gesture of writing in the vernacular. They do not write in some "universal" feminine or maternal language, nor do they seek to invent one. Furthermore, they do not write *in* the (m)other tongue either, since that language does not exist as a language independent unto itself; it is instead an interlanguage. They write toward an Other language, the language, that is, both of another body than the one Western cultures have inherited from Descartes and the language of an Other's body. Their inspiration is in the interpenetration and permeability between the particulars of the intextuated body and the lived world (which is not necessarily the so-called "real" world, or the world of "real" men). Neither text nor body is the site of origins. The site of origins is endlessly displaced, though translation continues to take place. Since transcendental signifiers, like proper names, will not translate, the phallus, for one, translates itself out in feminist translation poetics. That is, it no longer stands as the signifier which governs all other signifiers, organizing bodies, masculine and feminine bodies, according to its drives and phantasies.

Translation poetics reinscribes the body differently from its inscription through representation, mimesis, and "universal reason." In the retrospective reading compelled by the ending of *Touch to My Tongue*, the lover's diseased gall bladder becomes a kind of phantom organ which permeates the entire text. Just as the body carries memories in *its* tissues, so too the tissue-text is imprinted not only with the lover's erotic body but her symptomatic body as well. The phrase "gall, all that is bitter, melancholy" (32) refers to an historical organization of the body around four "humours" instead of according to the dualist mind-body split. Through techniques such as these, Marlatt translates intralingually, from English to English. She also translates interlingually from the dead languages of Latin, Greek, Old English, Old Norse, and others into contemporary Canadian English. The old roots and phantom residues of these languages serve as a source language from which to inscribe a new target language. And she translates intersemiotically between the body and the text.

It is possible at this point to review and recontextualize the mother-daughter relationship described by Marlatt in her essay on immigration and recapitulated with differences in the relation between the lovers in *Touch to My Tongue*. As Marlatt depicts it now, during her teenage years the mother-daughter relationship revolved around a contest between colonial and postcolonial uses of language. In “Difference (em)bracing,” an essay published in the 1990 collection *Language in Her Eye: Writing and Gender*, she refines her earlier remarks about the effects of her family’s immigration to Canada (quoted above, page 19) by nuancing more fully the class, gender, and family politics involved. She describes the tensions between her mother and her Canadianized daughters over the differences between the mother’s mother tongue of “English English” and what the mother referred to as their “American English” and the battles over translation which ensued: “And so i engaged in long battles with my mother, each of us trying to correct the other, she correcting for purity of origin, while i corrected for common usage—each of us with different versions of ‘the real thing’” (190).

It is crucial to remember that Marlatt’s mother had been a memsahib in their Penang household and, moreover, that the term “memsahib” is, as Brenda Carr reiterates, a derivative of “sahib,” the white colonial male master of the household, and thus reflects the “mem’s” subordinate status. While her mother functioned in many ways within her purview as an accomplice to the colonial project, she was also in equally many ways its victim. Though educated to the colonizing task with an English boarding school training, she was herself born in India into an Anglo-Indian family of two generations. As Marlatt confesses:

Words were always taken seriously in my house because they were the weapons of that struggle [with her mother over reality]. But a woman’s sense of herself in the language she speaks can only be denied so long before it transforms into a darker (side of the moon), a more insistent ir-reality, not *unreal* because its effects are felt so devastatingly in its subject and those around her. Her words, her very style of speaking derided by her own children, her colonial manners and English boarding-school mores dismissed as inappropriate by Canadianized daughters who denied any vestige of them in their own

behaviour and speech, she withdrew into chronic depression and hypochondria. 'Unbalanced.' 'Loony.' But to deny: to completely say no to. A powerful mechanism. A form of colonialism at work within the family. (190-91)

Throughout this passage, Marlatt is ostensibly talking about her mother's enforcement of colonial and traditional heterosexual family relations, but the lack of personal nouns or pronouns in the final few phrases of the passage creates an ambiguousness which reminds us that repressive power relations cannot be attributed exclusively to the colonial side. Just as Marlatt's mother tried to enforce coloniality within the family, so too her daughters, denying their mother's speech and its accompanying reality, practiced a kind of postcolonial counter-enforcement upon her. Contrary to Sarah Harasym's argument that Marlatt erases the reality of the amah as a Third World woman in "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts" because she is preoccupied with questions of her own identity and with the workings of representation (Harasym 121-25), Marlatt's poetics are *not* based on representation but rather on translation, a practice which, I would suggest, derives largely from the language practices she learned battling her mother on Canadian ground(s) and from her more positive childhood interactions with her amahs in Penang.¹³ Puzzling over the problem of speaking about differences and speaking to Others, Marlatt recalls:

It wasn't sharing but difference in a multiplicity of ways i felt first as a child in Malaya where i was taught the King's (it was then) English, to mind my P's & Q's, to behave and speak "properly," when all the while i was surrounded by other languages that were not proper at all for a white colonial child, but which nevertheless i longed to understand, filled as they were with laughter, jokes, calls, exclamations, comfort, humming. Sometimes rocked to sleep, sometimes teased or scolded, sometimes ignored by the sounds of Cantonese, Malay, Thai, i stood on the fringe and longed to know what the stories were that produced such laughter, such shakings of the head. ("Difference (em)bracing" 189-90)

The five languages of her Penang home and the co-habitation within *Touch to My Tongue* of multiple signifying genres and forms are alike based on translation.

Touch to My Tongue celebrates both the lesbian love relation, which simultaneously supports and undetermines the mother-daughter relation, and a postcolonial delight in translation.¹⁴ The multiple aspects of the mother figure touch upon Marlatt's mother, grandmother, and the elements of the mother/daughter relationship which are rehearsed in the relation between herself and her female lover. The dynamics between and among mothers and Others become radically complex. The phantom limb which beckons Marlatt to re-visit Penang one year after her mother's death also takes her to the land of her amahs, those women who spoke Cantonese, Malay, Thai, who were bilingual or multilingual. Having "completely [said] no to" her mother, she completely says yes/ya to her lesbian lover. Like her amahs in Penang, the lovers translate. In other words, they practice what Bharati Mukherjee calls "the 'step-mother tongue' in which post-colonial writers write, 'implying as it does the responsibility, affection, accident, loss, and secretive roots-quest in adoptive family situations'" (qtd. in Hutcheon 81). The "phantom limb" is not only the contained, if redolent, colonial past then; nor is it only a metaphor. The phantom limb of Marlatt's Penang past embraces both her colonial and her postcolonial mothers' bodies.¹⁵

Therefore, while the lesbian Other is a different Other than the mother as Other, or the Third World woman as either mother or Other,¹⁶ saying "yes" to her lover is also a way of saying a belated "yes" to these her several mothers. As Luce Irigaray states emphatically in her article "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother," "It is also necessary, if we are not to be accomplices in the murder of the mother, for us to assert that there is a genealogy of women" (44). Arguing against the Oedipal basis of psychoanalysis, in that article Irigaray's model for a genealogy of women is primarily based on the nuclear family. But a genealogy of women, a history of encounters with mothers' bodies, can and must include mothers and daughters from outside the narrowly-defined patriarchal and colonial family unit. It must include, for example, Marlatt's relations with the amahs who cared for her as a child. Moreover, a genealogy of women inevitably requires the

invention and multiplication of kinship terms supplementary to those of the phallic mother and daughter.

At the conclusion of the poem sequence of *Touch to My Tongue*, Marlatt seizes on the word "glisten," one of the derivatives of "gall," and puts the letter "g" in parentheses so that the word translated in this fashion doubles as a visual (glisten) and an aural (listen) term. The lovers, taking turns playing mother and daughter, return to their bed, entwine their warm limbs, and (g)listen to a new (m)other tongue.

NOTES

- 1 Although Slemon rightly refuses to define the postcolonial as the moment inaugurated with the commencement of a post-independence historical period in former colonies, he by no means discounts the historical. Rather, as a postcolonial critic and theorist he "resists" the colonial practice of containing subversive movements by consigning them to the narrative of colonial history or relegating them to the past. He rejects any notion of the postcolonial as an historical "before and after" phenomenon.
See also Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World." For an analysis of two exuberantly backtalking postcolonial poets' experimentations with the lyric, see Banting, "Tremendous Forgeries."
- 2 In her essay "Ludic Feminism, the Body, Performance, and Labor: Bringing *Materialism* Back into Feminist Cultural Studies," Teresa L. Ebert divides post-modernism into two camps—"ludic postmodernism" and "resistance postmodernism"—and attempts to reclaim resistance for postmodernism. Such valorizing of resistance by postmodernists and postcolonialists alike ought to make readers cautious about all such staked claims.
- 3 See Breuer and Freud.
- 4 For expansion of these comments on the signifying resources of the hysterical body, see David-Ménard.
- 5 Roman Jakobsen divides translation into three categories: interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic. My work extends Jakobsen's definition of intersemiotic translation as a form of intermedia translation (between painting and text, for example) by positing a form of intersemiotic translation between bodies and writing. For expansion of this concept, see Banting, "The Body as Pictogram."
- 6 One also recalls writer Lee Maracle's objection to the application of the term "postcolonial" to Canadian literature and culture. She observes that indigenous peoples in Canada "have not had a change in our condition." "Postcolonialism presumes we have resolved the colonial condition, at least in the field of literature. Even here we are still a classical colony. Our words, our sense and use of language are not judged by the standards set by the poetry and stories we create. They are judged by the standards set by others" (13).
- 7 It is important to note that four of the five languages spoken in Marlatt's childhood home were those spoken by the servants. I will return to this crucial point later.
- 8 The death of her mother precipitated Marlatt's journey back to Penang in July 1976 (Thesen 2).
- 9 Brenda Carr's essay "The Western Woman and 'the Colonial Empire of the Mind': (Re)Constructing the Memsahib as (M)other in Daphne Marlatt's 'In the Month

of Hungry Ghosts'” can be read as a kind of companion essay to the present one. (I want to thank Brenda Carr for reading an earlier draft of my paper and making provocative suggestions for revision.)

- 10 Nye's description of logic and the logician sounds uncannily like descriptions of the “logic” and bodies of hysterics.
- 11 Many theorists influenced by Michel Foucault have discussed the inscription of the body by discourses. However, much remains to be done with regard to the problem of the reciprocal inscription of discourses and texts by the body. Grosz and her postcolonial Australian colleagues Moira Gatens and Vicki Kirby have made significant beginnings in this area. See also Jane Gallop.
- 12 For arguments counter to the dualist version of the body, see Grosz and David-Ménard.
- 13 In her reply to Harasym, Carr suggests that the “limits of feminist discourses cut both ways: in privileging the amah, we may lose sight of the conditions of the sexed body for the memsahib. I would suggest that a more productive model might be one in which neither memsahib nor amah are read out as fully empowered or victimized. . . . In this way, while accounting for the obvious unevenness of their subject positionings in imperialism, the amah may be read for contradictory instances of her agency, while the memsahib may be read for contradictory instances of her disempowerment. . . .”
- 14 In the second poem of *Touch to My Tongue*, Marlatt explores together the Otherness of the lover and of the mother figure. In the absence of her lover, the figure of the great mother in the first poem becomes for the speaker that of the terrible mother, she who “takes back what she gives, as you might, or i might,” in the second (20). The allusion at this point to the double figure of the great mother/terrible mother does not reflect a nostalgia for a utopian or prelapsarian order. Rather the figure of the maternal conjures up Marlatt's own personal, familial background.
- 15 African American writer Toni Morrison's new novel *Jazz* contains a passage which configures an absent father as a kind of phantom limb. The passage extends over three paragraphs. I quote a mere portion:

Only now, he thought, now that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not. Before, I thought everybody was one-armed, like me. Now I feel the surgery. The crunch of bone when it is sundered, the sliced flesh and the tubes of blood cut through, shocking the bloodrun and disturbing the nerves. They dangle and writhe. Singing pain. . . .

And no, I am not angry. I don't need the arm. But I do need to know what it could have been like to have had it. It's a phantom I have to behold and be held by, in whatever crevices it lies, under whatever branch. Or maybe it stalks treeless and open places, lit with an oily sun. This part of me that does not know me, has never touched me or lingered at my side. This gone-away hand that never helped me over the stile, or guided me past the dragons, pulled me up from the ditch into which I stumbled. . . . When I find it, will it wave to me? Gesture, beckon to me to come along? Or will it even know who or what I am? It doesn't matter. I will locate it so the severed part can remember the snatch, the slice of its disfigurement. Perhaps then the arm will no longer be a phantom, but will take its own shape, grow its own muscle and bone, and its blood will pump from the loud singing that has found the purpose of its serenade. Amen. (158-59)
- 16 Wittig argues that the dialectical use of the term “Other” preserves the economy of the Same and deprives the said Other of subjecthood even before having gained it. Despite the multiplication of different categories of Otherness, she says, “[b]oth the figureheads of the dominators and of the dominated have adopted

this point of view" and Otherness remains an essentialist position, defined solely in relation to the Same or the One.

In this regard, my retention of the term "Other" would seem to weaken somewhat my argument at this point. However, it would be premature in a discussion of the intersemiotic translation between bodies and texts, an area only just beginning to be analyzed, to attempt to jettison all familiar language. Moreover, I have marked, where appropriate, the compromised nature of both the "Other" and the related concept of "the self," notions which continue to determine how we conceive of bodies.

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