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Daphne Marlatt's Musings With Mothertongue:
Writing the Erotic Lesbian Body

by

Lynda Hall

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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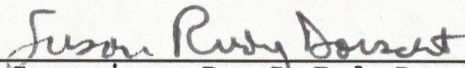
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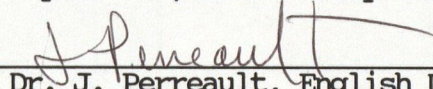


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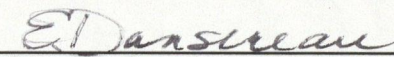
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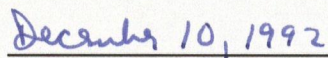
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ABSTRACT

My thesis explores Daphne Marlatt's works, *Touch To My Tongue*, *Double Negative*, and *Ana Historic*, from the perspective of her lesbian-feminist poetics and politics. I examine her poetic sexual/textual linguistic play in the context of her theoretical discourse on writing and the body, 'Musing with Mothertongue.' I focus on her belief in language's powerful role in construction of society and the self.

Chapter one traces the "awakenings" of Marlatt's lesbian-feminist consciousness through her early writings and interviews. In chapter two I explore Marlatt's writing of self into being and her suggestion that language "bears us as we are born in it, into cognition" (*Touch* 45). Chapters three and four examine mother/daughter and lesbian experience in Marlatt's writing. I investigate her analogy of the pleasures of lovemaking and writing as coextensive in nurturing self-discovery and subjectivity. Chapter five engages Marlatt's writing experience in a spiralling feminist community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My primary acknowledgement must certainly go to Kathy, for sharing the precious moments of this life's journey, and for continually nurturing my imagination and my spirit. I owe particular thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Susan Rudy Dorscht, for introducing me to the rich world of Canadian lesbian-feminist writers, and for her intellectual and editorial suggestions during my thesis preparation. I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Dr. Jeanne Perreault, who has been an ongoing source of feminist inspiration, strength, and intellectual excitement since my undergraduate years. Warmest thanks to Dr. Susan Stone-Blackburn for her camaraderie, and for her emotional and intellectual support of my endeavours. Thank you to Barbara Macleod for graciously guiding me through the graduate student's administrative maze. Finally, I wish to thank Daphne Marlatt for her most generous and candid responses to my queries, her supportive and encouraging interest in my thesis project, and her kind permission to quote her words. I have found inspiration and provocation in her poetic creation and theoretical works; her words have touched me deeply in so many ways.

for Kathy

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The sight was ordinary enough; what was strange was the rhythmical order with which my imagination had invested it. . . a woman writing thinks back through her mothers. Again if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilisation, she becomes, on the contrary, outside of it, alien and critical. Clearly the mind is always altering its focus, and bringing the world into different perspectives. But some of these states of mind seem, even if adopted spontaneously, to be less comfortable than others. In order to keep oneself continuing in them one is unconsciously holding something back, and gradually the repression becomes an effort. But there may be some state of mind in which one could continue without effort because nothing is required to be held back. (Woolf, 100-101)

INTRODUCTION

In this introduction I prepare the *hidden ground*, if I may borrow a Marlatt metaphor, for appreciating Daphne Marlatt's complex connections of language, self, other, and society. My thesis examines Marlatt's strategic emphasis on language's important role in the social construction of self and society. I focus on Marlatt's enunciation of the major function which writing itself plays in realizing and actually accepting the self-in-process, in this case, accepting the lesbian self. The foundation for my discussion is Marlatt's theoretical "Musing With Mothertongue," an essay on writing and the body. I delineate Marlatt's valorization of difference, not just feminine in contrast to masculine literary, historical and social constructs, but her address of the specificity of lesbian experience, of what Adrienne Rich calls the "politics of location" ("Notes" 210). I focus on Marlatt's desire to situate her lesbian-feminist discourse within the site and source of the female body, and within a feminist community, destabilizing destructive patriarchal, heterosexual constructs.

My research concentrates on three works written in the 1980's which assert lesbian sexual agency and feelings, reclaim erotic drives directed by one woman to another, and assume the prerogative of naming. *Touch To My Tongue*, *Double Negative*, and *Ana Historic* speak Marlatt's continually-developing lesbian-feminist consciousness. In addition, *How Hug a Stone* provides background for understanding Marlatt's "mothertongue" metaphor.

The major theoretical and structural framework for my study is the diverse lesbian-feminist poetic writing on "that body of language we speak, our mothertongue" (*Touch* 45), including works by Mary Daly, Hélène Cixous, Nicole Brossard, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig. I explore Marlatt's engagement with the erotic (m)othering inter-connection of self and other, self and language, in the context of writers she acknowledges as major influences - Adrienne Rich, Julia Kristeva, and Nancy Chodorow.

My thesis demonstrates Marlatt's critique of prescriptive patriarchal roles for women, such as institutionalized heterosexuality and motherhood, roles which are discursively perpetuated. I focus on her ability to view and write her own place as lesbian subject of self and text. She defies phallogentric domination of language and discourse. Her political writing creates the means to express a lesbian culture which is not founded upon power-imbalanced sexual difference, but concentrates instead on sameness, relationship and attraction. Her discourse makes the lesbian body and lesbian desire excessively present and real, denying patriarchal erasure and repression of women loving women. Marlatt's explicitly autographic writing of the self exposes and transgresses cultural myths inhibiting lesbian creativity and self-acceptance. Risking charges of essentialism, she celebrates the reality of women's total experience, a sense of self integrating women's physical body, intellect, emotions, and spirit, with the *jouissance* of the writing process. She celebrates naming the self and claiming lesbian subjectivity in the text and in the body. Writing lesbian love and physical desire, Marlatt contravenes prescriptive sociocultural constructs of woman as other/object/silent/heterosexual.

Marlatt's poetic desire to utter and outer her lesbian experience and emotions re-fuses fragmentation and negation. She invites active reader co-creation in a coming into being of the self, and a potentially erotic coming together of reading and writing, self and other. Inscribing a specific lesbian sexuality, she writes her discovery of *self* through another, experienced in a same-sex relationship. Marlatt articulates the need for tongue in sexual and political language, evoking an unending desire for pleasure and language, orgasm and poetry.

Marlatt perceives lesbian writing as othered other, as outside patriarchal heterosexual dynamics. She subversively associates the erotics and desire inherent in the experience of language (writer/writing, and

reader/writer) with lesbian lovemaking; mutuality, reciprocity, and continuity inform the movement. This circulating fluid possibility of non-dominance and exchanging roles replaces rigid philosophical binaries and linear thinking, which are structured both in language and ideologically based on the oppressive hierarchical male/female paradigm. Societally-structured male privilege and female submissiveness are turned inside out in Marlatt's transgressive reshaping and restructuring of language.

My study considers the possibility of a linguistic representation of the female body. I deliberate notions that the process of writing can offer a theory of the lesbian subject and her representation. Attempting to discover the historical basis for linguistic oppression, and to reclaim language, Marlatt shares with other feminists literary techniques of etymological investigation, word play, and disruption of conventional genres. Her emphasis on word sounds evokes the deep erotic association, process and attraction, of thought and sensations. She appreciates the sensuous feel of words and implicates bodily sensations in memory experience. A poem, "Hidden ground," illustrates her process of multiply articulating the desire for a common tongue, "that tongue our bodies utter, woman tongue, speaking in and of and for each other" (*Touch* 27).

Marlatt joyously embraces an infinity of potential meanings and readings. Critiquing the stable, unchanging self provokes possibilities for multiplicity and multivocality. Simultaneously, she valorizes the concept of a self and a language continually in process. A private note may support my reading of Marlatt's insistence on the complex relationship of language, self and society. For months I tried to write a chapter on Marlatt's etymological investigation, her active reclamation of language, and her use of syntax to subvert the patriarchal heterosexual subject/verb/object dynamic. I was continually frustrated; it was not possible to separate Marlatt's language from my reading of her experience, her theory

from her practice. I would always have to repeat references I had already used, those references which put Marlatt's work in a social context. My thought process supports Marlatt's notion that language, self, and society are not divisible. Her form and content integrate her practice and theory.

The repetition, pulse, and immediacy which connect Marlatt's works reflect her fluid associations of language and body, self and other, writing and experience. Her integrated approach to writing and life in turn informs the structure of this thesis. The issues I discuss flow and interweave, in response to her seductively rhythmic language. As a result, chapter headings and divisions break the momentum artificially. They do, however, convey the process by which my reading eye leapt in desire to cooperate with her insistence on seeing the connections. Each chapter addresses major issues which Marlatt articulates in "Musing With Mothertongue." The progression of my analysis supports her integration of the personal and the social. It moves from discussing the writing of the self, to investigating the maternal metaphor, to considering the writing of the self through the lover, and, finally, to celebrating the spiralling loving/reading/writing lesbian community participation in meaning making.

Marlatt actively (politically and poetically) illustrates a need to re-discover and re-claim language and create new images. Her writings make space for the presence of lesbian experience as a reality, and stimulate critical and cultural discussion. She forcefully articulates her belief in the power of language to transform the world through challenging social structures: "putting the living body of language together means putting the world together" (*Touch* 49). In the following chapters, I analyze Marlatt's work within the context of a continuing feminist dialogue, where she writes her self in a community of "chaotic language leafings, unspeakable breaches of usage, intuitive leaps. inside language she leaps for joy" (*Touch* 49).

CHAPTER ONE: 'THAT CLOTH OF CONNECTEDNESS':

AWAKENINGS WOVEN INTO MARLATT'S EARLY WRITINGS

Lesbian desire can be read into and from Daphne Marlatt's earliest texts. As work by Adrienne Rich and Nicole Brossard does, Marlatt's early writings express intense discontent and confused emotions about marital relations, and then articulate the freedom experienced through coming to understand lesbian feelings after first enduring a problematic marriage. In this chapter I track "that cloth of connectedness" in her works; I connect the unending playful rhythms and repetitions which interrelate her earliest writings with her recent work ("Self-Representation" 17).

Her early queries about a woman's place without a man appear in a letter to Robert Creeley in January 1969. Past remarks can productively be re-interpreted within her present lesbian-feminist perspective. She asks,

What is a woman without a man? Strangely apt, the story of Adam's rib, as if woman exists only by definition 'out-of-man' (man goes off alone into space). What is a woman alone? / & what is meaning?

Her questions expose language's powerful function in defining and limiting woman's space as subordinate to man's. Language structures our social hierarchies; woman can exist, by definition, only in opposition to man's primary presence. Marlatt critiques the prescriptive truths of religious stories which construct woman's submissive role. The "story of Adam's rib" allots man the role of creator, essential first being. Woman inherently comes second, is dependent on man for existence, and is expressly created to serve man's needs. Patriarchal biblical authority posits man as origin and source of life; woman's creative maternal role is preserved for man in this original tale. Stories of God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, and Adam, script a seemingly natural all-sufficient male cast. Then the patriarchal naming and defining occurs. Marlatt challenges these *facts*.

Marlatt transgressively asks the feminist philosophical question -

"What is a woman alone?" By writing her own lesbian experience, Marlatt makes woman's life without man a reality. Persistently asking "what is meaning?," Marlatt forces readers to also inspect the patriarchal stories which construct and define our lives. Defining her own life and existence, she literally refuses to be defined in opposition to man, or to allow man to assume the right of definition. Marlatt *mothers* our questioning stance.

Recently, Marlatt has spoken and named explicit lesbian desire in her writings, interviews, and public readings. In *Ana Historic*, Marlatt subverts a biblical Adam's patriarchal, privileged power to name, make and view by speaking, for example, one woman's gaze on and desire for another:

certified Teen Angels, Dolls. peering out of Adam's sleep,
waiting to be Made (passive voice), we flaunted gorgeousness
like second skin. . . i looked at her instead, the soft rise
of her breasts under her suit. (82)

The passive doll is replaced by an active gaze. The sexless angel is now live flesh with desires of her own driving her behaviour. Marlatt's writings actively question patriarchal, heterosexual views about women and sexuality by speaking from and within a woman's place - in her body and in language. The female teenage speaker is not "waiting to be Made," is not waiting to be given approval and existence through male recognition and male sexual engagement, is not waiting to be constructed by patriarchal scripts. Instead, she expresses her own desire for another female. Marlatt exposes stories which make woman's dependence on man seem natural, rather than socially constructed through culture. Her lines resist fairytales such as Sleeping Beauty, which perpetuate woman's metaphoric dependence on man's kiss to awaken and be. Metaphors of woman's awakening to desire, to recognition of our own bodies, to full experience of life itself, do not have to revolve around Adam, Adam's rib, or Adam's sleep. Rejecting a "(passive voice)" and objectification, Marlatt manipulates language to give presence to lesbian reality and to woman's subjectivity and agency.

In the chapters which follow, I track patterns in Marlatt's writings which foreshadow her present, politically-empowering lesbian-feminist poetics. Her theoretical discussions support my interpretations of her work as partly autobiographical, and as a palimpsest. In 1985 she said,

My work has been extremely autobiographical. I think that most women's lives have been so fictionalized that to present life as a reality is a strange thing. . . . Whatever it is that writing gets at, it's precisely that remarkable quality of being alive at this point in time. I don't see any way of honouring that quality except by writing directly out of your own life. It's the real I want to get at, in all its facets, in all its multiplicities. (Williamson, "Speaking In" 26)

In a 1990 essay on "fictionalysis," Marlatt discusses the inextricability of writing and life. Marlatt articulates the vital role writing plays in her experience of self and subjectivity. Through autobiographical writing, she comes to appreciate and speak her very real and specific location in dialogue with a nurturing feminist community. She explains her experiences of the complex interrelationship of writing, imagination, and reality:

Perhaps what we wake up to in autobiography is a beginning realization of the *whole cloth of ourselves* in connection with so many others. Particularly as women analyzing our lives, putting the pieces together, the repressed, suppressed, putting our fingers on the *power dynamics* at play. It is exactly in the confluence of fiction (the self or selves we might be) and analysis (of the roles we have found ourselves in, defined in a complex socio-familial weave), it is in the confluence of the two that autobiography occurs, the self writing its way to life, whole life. This is the practice of the imaginary in its largest sense, for without vision we can't see where we're going or even where we are. Autobiography is not separable from poetry for me on this ground i would call fictionalysis: a self-analysis that plays fictively with the primary images of one's life, a fiction that uncovers analytically that territory where fact and fiction coincide. (emphasis mine, "Self-Representation" 15)

Through a process of "fictionalysis," Marlatt stresses society's impact on her attempts to define the self, and again phrases her thoughts in terms of awakening to potential wholeness. Woman must actively "practice" vision, imagination, and voice to achieve subjectivity and to

gain a perspective on the "power dynamics" operating in society.

Writing itself is experienced as a site of self-recognition; reality and imagination, fact and fiction, merge. "[D]efined in a complex socio-familial weave. . . . the self writing its way to life" suggests Marlatt's "self-analysis" and sense of self coming-into-being through the writing experience and process. Jane Gallop names this process "auto-graphical, a writing of the self" ("Writing" 284). Jeanne Perreault suggests that "understanding feminist autography requires attention to the peculiarly blurred space and ideological mediation between ideas of 'self' and ideas of writing" (1). Marlatt foregrounds her writing process as the "self" of the speaker is constituted through language. The self written and the self writing are inseparable. Subjectivity is textually embodied in the "act" of writing. In writing, then, a narrative of life events may be less important than the crucial ongoing process of the "self" writing "self."

Discussing *Frames* in a 1979 interview with George Bowering, Marlatt articulates her experience of the coincidence of writing, self-analysis, and making sense of the world. To "make sense" is literally to make, create, or construct reality through writing. She desires to rewrite not only prescriptive fairytales, but also proceeds to create a different truth and reality. The process of writing is a process of coming to self:

I chose a fairytale, & said I'm going to make this my story It was the only thing that could make sense of my daily living, in some kind of historical perspective, like personal history. . . . So it was a coming to myself. Even the act of writing was the only way that I could confirm who I was. ("Given" 37, 40)

Marlatt postulates that writing can create reality. Writing is a conscious act or process, with definite aims. She articulates a determined belief in the political empowerment of writing when she exposes what Bowering calls the "seemingly mundane housewife" role; she also foreshadows her rejection of the "passive voice" in *Ana Historic*, mentioned above, when she says,

I wanted the reader to zero in on the words because the words were the only reality. . . . I'm recognizing there that that's a role. That's the female role that I was raised in, to be passive. And that's the lie. . . . I was beginning to speak the truth. ("Given" 42)

The word "role" carries with it a double connotation: women are expected to act a part, and this part is appointed or defined by the patriarchy. Exposing roles in the process of writing her own reality and "truth," she rejects passivity and definition by others. Examining the word "housewife" and clarifying the reality behind the word and the roles the word implies, Marlatt interrogates the lies and the roles one is "raised in." Her process of writing provokes her to examine societally-prescribed roles, such as housewife, and actively change scripts through self-recognition.

In this 1979 interview Marlatt explains her continual process of viewing her language retrospectively to, as she puts it, "decode my own language, com(e) to understand what language is really telling me" (39). Marlatt's emphasis on the connections in her works, as they accumulate through time, prompts this first chapter in my thesis. In order to be co-creators with Marlatt in her writing process, an appreciation of her early comments is essential. Marlatt discusses her early development as a writer: "for most young writers the most intense part of their writing is when they're very young & they don't know what they're doing. And that everything they write from then on becomes an explication" (39). Marlatt continues, "the truth is like a palimpsest - all the layers at once" (43). My lesbian-feminist reading of Marlatt's work to date is immeasurably facilitated by my ability in 1992 to interpret "all the layers at once." The feasibility of retrospectively "Putting the pieces together, the repressed, suppressed" ("Self-Representation" 15), expedites my readerly journey through the labyrinth of her writing. Given Marlatt's frequent comments on her earlier suppression and repression of lesbian feelings, her most recent works can be approached as an "explication" of works that

came before. Patterns emerge and we see the connectedness and awakenings.

Marlatt sends a strong political message to her readers - each of us must take responsibility for actively creating our own lives, for writing ourselves metaphorically into being. She prompts writing for survival, and the empowerment of writing, especially autobiography; "it has come to be"

called 'life-writing' which i take to mean writing for your life and as such it suggests the way in which the many small real-other-i-zations can bring the unwritten, unrecognized, ahistoric ground of a life into being as a recognizable power or agency. This happens when we put together the disparate parts of our lives and begin to see the extensiveness of *that cloth of connectedness* we are woven into. Then we begin, paradoxically, to weave for ourselves the cloth of our life as we want it to be. (emphasis mine, "Self-Representation" 17)

"Writing for your life" implies lesbians' complex choice to make our experience present as a reality for the self and others, since lesbian experience is largely absent or considered perverse in the patriarchal, heterosexual society. Marlatt won't submit to psychological suffocation and lies inherent in acquiescence to dominant societal scripts. "To weave for ourselves" the reality we want is to assume subjectivity actively.

In a 1977 interview, she suggests that writing *Rings* helped her to come to terms with her emotional and intellectual confusion:

I was trying to figure out what the hell was going on with this inarticulateness between us. And then gradually it became clear that I was writing about being pregnant and all the conflicts of role, like what 'mother' was in terms of both the negative aspect of 'mother,' as I was sensing it from my husband's view, and what I felt - like the physiological changes that were happening to me and the increasing sense of mothering in a nurturing light that I was feeling. So the writing became an exploration of those roles and their implications and how they interacted with each other. (Arnason, 30)

Through the process of writing she explores her sense of self within the marriage. Her husband's negative perspective of the motherhood role conflicts with her own positive feelings. "Inarticulateness" describes her communication relationship with her husband; this echoes and incrementally

intensifies her comment that *Frames* is "written out of silence" (Bowering, "Given" 42). An examination of the titles of these two books, *Frames* and *Rings*, suggests her felt entrapment and limitations, and her sense of the very real danger which patriarchal marital scripts hold for some women.

In a poem provocatively entitled "Listen," Marlatt acutely combines the psychological and physical dangers of marital conflicts. A kitchen scene between husband and wife exposes the confinement inherent in a male-dominated marriage. Marlatt appropriately places it within the traditional domestic background for women - the kitchen. She depicts the "grating" situation of the woman who is sexually, economically and psychologically capitalized upon in marriage: "he saw her fingers grating, saw blood flying like carrot flakes. . . he read a long passage about their imprisonment in marriage. . . he read a passage about sexual capitalism" (*Net Work*, 140). Pointedly, the husband both owns the gaze and reads the truth of the situation from an already-written script. In Marlatt's perspective, patriarchal domination is definitely not an unconscious act.

In *Touch To My Tongue*, she re-members this felt confinement and loss of self in marriage. Female resistance is playfully perverse and "wilful":

that space between the last rib and the hipbone, that place i couldn't bear the weight of his sleeping hand upon - and my fingers flutter to my ring, gone. only a white band the skin of years hidden under its reminder to myself of the self i was marrying - 'worthless woman, wilful girl.' standing athwart, objecting, 'so as to thwart or obstruct,' 'perversely.' no, so as to retain this small open space that was mine. (21)

More than a decade later, no longer married but in a longterm lesbian relationship, Marlatt still uses images of rings, Adamic power, physical restrictions, and worthlessness; however, she now actively takes control of her space - emotional, physical, intellectual, and sexual. This territory is embodied as a "small open space"; she lays claim to the white space of skin hidden under the ring, the *hidden ground*. Given Marlatt's

insistence on multiple meanings, and her desire to reclaim the pleasures experienced in women's sexuality and physical bodies, the "small open space" may explicitly include the intimate space of the vagina. Making the personal political, Marlatt's writing makes "space" by speaking lesbian desire and experience, and brings the "hidden" into view, into reality.

Even in Marlatt's earliest works, she represents marriage in images of suffocation, physical violence, imprisonment, and death. In *How Hug a Stone*, the female is metaphorically trapped and pinned to a wall in death:

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

She protests the prison walls of the marital bedroom. Likewise, Luce Irigaray notes the deadly fixity of patriarchal familial contexts which:

[are] the privileged locus of women's exploitation. . . historically, within the family, it is the father-man who alienates the bodies, desires and work of woman and children by treating them as his own property. (*This Sex* 142-43)

Marlatt resists the fixed and deadly roles scripted for women playing this marriage game. She condemns patriarchal privilege to name women's things and experiences and control the roles women may assume. "Scientific names" and ominous laboratory procedures evoke the larger inescapable ideological dangers of patriarchal power. The "white sheet" evokes a morgue, but also the space of woman waiting to be written upon and created by man, waiting to be fixed into a family structure. Provocative associations of sounds and images suggest the mortification and dehumanization of the mother or maternal figure as moth or worm (*moththe*, *math-*, worm) - numb, helpless, and under complete male control while tied on the birth-bed. The deadly lure of the "bedroom lamp" insinuates women's potential physical and

psychological violation during heterosexual intercourse. The speaker protests being "wing-pulled-open" as "death." The mother also observes the perpetuation of the patriarchy as the father calls for his son to join the patriarchal game. Marlatt protests the patriarchal prerogative of voice.

The ecstasy expressed in associations of lesbian desire and lesbian writing in *Touch To My Tongue* contrast sharply. Lesbian eyes/I's envision creativity and renewal. The image of the dead pinned moth is replaced by

rufous hummingbirds [which] dive before our very eyes kissing space. . . . i want to open you like a butterfly. . . . your lips open under mine and the new rain comes at last, lust, springs in the beginning all over again. (32)

Lesbian desire metaphorically hums, flies, dives, springs, and kisses lesbian-valued space during oral sex. The speaker repetitively "comes" in orgasmic ecstasy, and creates "new rain," sexually-aroused fluid, without end. Each orgasm provokes and initiates the next kiss, the next "beginning." A hummingbird flying freely in outdoor fresh air displaces a moth, chloroformed, "wing-pulled-open," and dead, in suffocating bedrooms. Space, psychological and actual, is transparent in Marlatt's imagery. She critiques the deadliness of heterosexual experience and the moth "wing-pulled-open." Marlatt's writings offer the lesbian reader an empowering perspective and self-affirming space, as we see the hummingbirds "dive before our very eyes kissing space." This vision of mutually joyous lesbian desire and sexual response, woman loving woman without fear, accentuates the absence of heterosexual violence and dominance dynamics.

Marlatt autographically articulates her own painful, suffocating experiences in *Ana Historic*. In an interview with Janice Williamson, she notes, "Victorian stifling of female sexuality is something that comes under severe attack in *Ana*" ("Sounding" 56). In "Self-Representation and Fictionalysis," Marlatt connects her own life and her writing. *Invention* and imagination challenge history and fact:

And why isn't the imaginary part of one's life story? Every poet knows it is, just as i know that in inventing a life from Mrs. Richard's, i as Annie (and Annie isn't me though she may be one of the selves i could be) invented a historical leak, a hole in the sieve of fact that let the shadow of a possibility leak through into full-blown life. . . . Mrs. Richards is a historical leak for the possibility of lesbian life in Victorian British Columbia. (15)

Writing Ana into existence leaks possibilities for readers to co-create and to imagine lesbian life in history. Marlatt provokes our active construction of history and memory as she critiques the patriarchally-biased history we have inherited. Annie says to her mother, "holes. there were holes in the story you had inherited. holes in the image" (*Ana* 26). Marlatt's "invented" leaks and stories fill gaps in the patriarchal text.

In the autobiographical *How Hug A Stone*, Marlatt refers to the similarities between her own and her mother's resistance to the inherited scripts. They both refuse to play the game by patriarchal rules:

her dream, the one my mother inherited, her dress, my mother lending her body to it. as i refused, on a new continent suffocated in changing rooms thick with resentment: you don't understand, everybody wears jeans here i want a job. refusing the dream its continuity. (29)

Echoes of suffocation surround a daughter who responds and demands change. Simply a change in dress and pursuit of a job afford the new generation a change in roles; this effects material sociopolitical transformation which is invented, made real, and recorded as fact through Marlatt's writing.

Marlatt elaborates on her image of moth/mother, silent, "wing-pulled-open." She describes society's negative reaction to her mother's imagination and the fact she didn't "fit in"; she relates the mother's devastating fight against patriarchal authority, and her final submission:

she who had her wings clipped growing up: wondering even as a mother was she 'doing the right thing'? hiding her doubts to wrestle with the angel authority of father, teacher, doctor, dentist, priest, furious, raging at the false front of society, tearing out the placid assumptions of family...& then lapsing, controlled, into silence. (*How Hug* 67)

In my lesbian-feminist reading of these texts, Marlatt expresses lesbian rage at silence prescribed by society's "placid assumptions of family."

In a useful intertext, Phyllis Webb notes the enculturated mother/daughter inheritance of patriarchally prescriptive roles. Webb says, "I do not see my mother as anything more than a victim of the system who would have me carry on the tradition of victimization and its ulterior routes to power" (Hulcoop 155). Through the ways she chooses to live her own life, and the visions she creates in her writings, Webb refuses to continue the cycle of victimization. Marlatt, like Webb, challenges inherited scripts.

Adrienne Rich also links the pain women experience in patriarchal society with the need for resistance through writing. Her writing is a consciously political act which exposes the reality of patriarchal violence and demands societal transformation. She advocates writing to bear female experience into being and to arise from symbolic death:

Both the victimization and the anger experienced by women are real, and have real sources. . . . They must go on being tapped and explored by poets, among others. We can neither deny them, nor can we rest there. They are our birth-pains, and we are bearing ourselves. ("When We Dead" 25)

Like Rich's, Marlatt's defiant writing insists on recognition of lesbian experience. She both "bares" and "bears" lesbian experience into being, refusing patriarchally-prescriptive space of silence and erasure. As early as a 1975 interview with George Bowering, Marlatt states her belief in the transformational power of language, and in writing as a "field of action":

You can change consciousness, & language is intimately tied up with consciousness. That is our true field of action, is language, as poets. And all you can do is to insist on the seeing as it's evidenced & manifested in the language. ("Keep Witnessing" 37)

Marlatt frequently acknowledges reading other lesbians' birth-pains, comings out, and everyday life experiences as a source and mother of her own awakening and self-awareness. In an interview, she notes the emotional

response and self-discovery she experienced reading Adrienne Rich's poems:

I remember reading Adrienne Rich's love poems on the plane back from Toronto to Vancouver and weeping in the middle of the DC7 because, all of a sudden, I realized a possibility of expression that I'd only dimly felt. And that was mind blowing. (Williamson, "Speaking" 27)

Adrienne Rich's love poems explicitly articulate lesbian desire and physical sexual experience. Marlatt says she reacts deeply to Rich's poetry because it gives words and expression to emotions Marlatt "had only dimly felt." The birth of self in language occurs in a lesbian community dialogue; through reading Adrienne Rich's words, Marlatt uncovers parts of her self which were hidden and repressed. Rich's poetic discourse helps Marlatt recognize her own lesbian desire. In reference to Rich's love poems, the "possibility of expression" may be Marlatt's freedom to engage actively in lesbian love, to give physical expression to her repressed desires; it may be her liberty to write and articulate her own lesbian desires, or, it may be both. As her writing self-consciously records her life experience while it is "in process," Marlatt demonstrates and foregrounds the writing experience itself. Encouraged by reading other writers, she offers self-recognition and new possibilities to her readers.

Naming Adrienne Rich as metaphorical mother of her lesbian feelings, Marlatt frankly addresses her shift in focus to a lesbian perspective:

The pieces never 'add up' to a single version because none of them are outdated - that's just it, they all exist in whoever 'i' is. I could say, looking back, that my writing has always been from a woman's perspective, but a change occurred in its focus, which used to be largely what men thought and how i stood in relation to that. Then when i began to be aroused by women - aroused at all levels, the intellectual, the erotic, the imaginative, the spiritual, the domestic, all at once - the focus shifted entirely. I've been intrigued by the cultural and political implications of that shift. That's what i was exploring in *Ana Historic*, in the figure of the woman who comes to embrace her love for women at a later age, having experienced marriage and children along the way. When this happens there is this incredible feeling of familiarity and surprise. As if you've finally embraced something you knew

dimly, somewhere, was always a possibility. ("Changing" 131)

Marlatt cites more than one lesbian writer as mother/nurturer of her lesbian awakening. Reading H.D., Marlatt first recognized her lesbian desires and the implications for her as a writer; Brenda Carr quotes Marlatt's acknowledgement of her fears and repression of lesbian emotions:

I suppose it wasn't until H.D. that I came across a woman whose work and whose concerns as a writer seemed so much in relation to my own. . . . that she was a lesbian and had an ongoing relationship with Bryher - that intrigued me, although at the time I was afraid to recognize my own leanings that way. ("Between" 101)

Marlatt often quotes H.D.'s words; she frequently strategically signals their important function as a source nurturing her own thought processes by foregrounding them in the textual location of an epigram. Through this intertextuality, Marlatt participates in a historic web of continuing lesbian dialogue and community experience. The lesbian dialogue and complex historical explorations in Marlatt's works recall the woven multiplicity of women's voices echoing between times, cultures and myths in H.D.'s *Helen In Egypt*. Marlatt's writings, fifty years later, reflect H.D.'s; both lesbian writers playfully re-vise time, space, and reality.

In this chapter I touched upon Marlatt's early texts and noted her inspiration from other lesbian writers. My strategy is motivated by my desire to provide background and to foreshadow her current lesbian-feminist stance. Marlatt has always connected "consciousness" and "language." Her early comments contextualize her recent writings, and foreground the major role that writing plays in her experience of life. My thesis responds to "that cloth of connectedness," her work. In the next chapter I explore her notion of "bearing" herself into being through language. I emphasize her self-conscious examination of how the personal mandates a writer's poetics.

CHAPTER TWO

'SHE IS WRITING HER DESIRE TO BE': BIRTH OF SELF IN LANGUAGE

Marlatt strategically articulates her prime concern with language in the first paragraph of "Musing With Mother tongue"; in her theory, language "bears us as we are born in it, into cognition" (*Touch* 45). Marlatt literally writes in order to make sense of events in her life, to birth her experiences into reality. Her maternal metaphor for her experience of language suggests the woman writer assumes agency by actively creating the world she desires to live in. Making sense of the world is literally creating sense, birthing experience into reality. Marlatt bases her epistemology on the assumption that we each actively construct our reality through language in the context of historic and socioeconomic ideologies. Grounding her theory in the womb, in uniquely female physiology, Marlatt gestures towards a woman's way of experiencing and creating reality.

In this chapter I examine Marlatt's maternal metaphor for her experience of language as a birthing of her self. I track the maternal metaphor through five major facets: the desire to write as her desire to be, the journey to self and subjectivity, the corporeality of language, the interplay of physical sensations and vision/cognition, and the power of voice and orality in speaking experience. Finally, I note lesbian writers' desire to overcome silence in patriarchal society, to experience intersubjectivity and support through writing/birthing self in community.

Throughout Marlatt's prolific works, she is literally "writing her desire to be," her desire to exist, her desire to be present in language and in the world. In *Ana Historic*, Marlatt exposes the absence of women's experience in the historical records, and the current problems women face trying to exist and express ourselves. Annie imagines looking over Ana's shoulder while she writes, and interprets Ana's desire to write her own existence into reality; I derive the chapter title from this quote:

she, unspoken and real in the world, running ahead to embrace it. *she is writing her desire to be*, in the present tense, retrieved from silence. . . . each evening she enters her being, nameless, in the book she is writing against her absence. for nothing that surrounds her is absent. far from it. (emphasis mine, 46-7)

"Unspoken and real" sums up the silence and lack of presence many women experience in society. Writing "against her absence," and against silence, Annie and Ana inscribe the presence of female subjectivity. "Writing her desire to be," Annie, like Marlatt, inscribes women's experience both in history and in the present. Marlatt's fictive Annie creates a life and a voice for herself, her mother, and Ana, through her writing. Literally through her writing process and her interaction with Zoe, Annie mothers her own imaginative possibilities and transforms her suffocating life.

Names are important. Annie notes that Ana's *being* is never recorded other than as a wife. Ana comes to North America defined as a wife, fixed in her position relative to a man. She is "named in the pages of history as 'Mrs. Richards, a young and pretty widow'" (Ana 21). Annie sardonically queries the lies, secrets and silences which prompt many women to hide behind the proper definition "Mrs.": "but what about the personal history of Mrs. Richards? (so personal it is hidden.) with what irony can we imagine her writing Mrs?" (55). The act of writing "Mrs." literally negates a woman's subjectivity. Marlatt's act of writing overturns this.

Annie answers history's framing construction and objectification of women's truth and reality; she "step(s) inside the picture and open(s) it up" (56). Marlatt embodies and opens up the multiple subject positions available to women through the variations of Annie, Ana, and Ina; she claims and connects the whole alphabet, from A to Z, Annie to Zoe. In an interview with Janice Williamson, Marlatt articulates her strong response to other feminist writings, and her desire for her writing also to birth into being new spaces for our experiences; she says, "I want to open

similar spaces for this kind of conversation with readers of my own writing. It makes for a different sense of writing" ("Sounding" 53).

Opening up "spaces" by analogy evokes the writer birthing her own experiences, and the maternal relationship between writer and reader in the co-creative act of meaning-making. In *How Hug a Stone*, Marlatt describes the writing process as an "opening up": "be un-named, walk unwritten, de-scripted, un-described. or else compose, make it say itself, make it up" (35). Embodying this theory, Annie imaginatively writes and creates possible lives for Ana - she may be an independent woman who teaches piano lessons; she may have a relationship with Birdie Stewart, another "enterprising" woman. Marlatt's writing transgresses Ana/Annie/Ina's silence; her writing replaces their absence by presence.

In *What Matters*, Marlatt suggests: "to realize our life is the same as to write" (124); she says: "maybe the artist is always the one outside, yearning to belong. creates what s/he want to be a part of, makes it so, momentarily, in the art" (149). In *Ana Historic*, Annie writes her way into a new life, and imaginatively mothers into being the unwritten and unrecorded lives of her mother and Ana. Similarly, while Marlatt makes space for her own lesbian experience in the world, she creates space for other lesbians "to belong," to "realize" our experiences as well.

Nicole Brossard also links writing, "literally creating ourselves," with birthing/exposing lesbian experience into the view of the world:

we give birth to ourselves in the world. Only through literally creating ourselves in the world do we declare our existence and from there make our presences known in the order of the real and the symbolic. . . . *Literal* means 'that which is represented by letters'. (*Aerial* 134)

Brossard stresses the need to actively create our own reality; declaring "our existence" through writing/voice gives us space and births us into subjectivity. She claims lesbian presence in the Lacanian symbolic realm.

Telling our own stories and writing our own narratives actively

creates our reality and "existence" out of what patriarchal society names fiction. "Existence" is at stake. In *How Hug a Stone*, Marlatt writes, "narrative is a strategy for survival. so it goes - transformative sinuous sentence emerging even circular, cyclic Avebury" (75). The dictionary definition of "survive" is: "to come alive through or continue to live in spite of." In a double movement, writing allows Marlatt both to "come alive" or recognize and act upon her lesbian desires, "in spite of" societal condemnation. "To come alive," to give birth and recognition to basic desires, depends in a complex circular manner on being able to perceive, conceive, know, that we, as lesbians, have community.

A "transformative sinuous sentence" and "circular cyclic Avebury" suggest Marlatt's conviction that writing and language have the power to transform society, to make us see new connections in present and historic experience. Her style embodies the circular, continuing traditions in which women must claim subjectivity - through the patriarchal society at Avebury, to women's physiological cycles (menstruation and pregnancy). Her circulating writing content critiques linear, fixed patriarchal thinking.

Marlatt queries, "without narrative how can we see where we've been" (*How Hug* 19). What goes unrepresented in culture is difficult to recognize or conceive in our own experience, causing repressed/suppressed desire. Untold stories leave many lesbians in a space of confined perspective.

Adrienne Rich foreshadows Marlatt's "survival" concern. Rich says, "writing is re-naming" (23). She provokes a "re-vision" of society as an "act of survival": "Re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" ("When" 18). Marlatt's writing of her self into being opens spaces for her readers to see "with fresh eyes." Her texts create and nurture lesbian life and community. She invites her lesbian-feminist readers to re-vise,

to work actively towards transforming patriarchal, heterosexual society.

Ana Historic highlights patriarchal strategies which erase women and women's words from history and from the present; Annie imagines her husband disparaging her circling writing style and her content as nothing:

this doesn't go anywhere, you're just circling around the same idea - and all these bits and pieces thrown in - that's not how to use quotations. . . scribbling. i look it up and it means writing. why do we think it so much less? because a child's scribble is *unreadable*? (she hasn't learned the codes, the quotes yet.) scribe is from the same root, skeri, to cut (the ties that bind us to something *recognizable* - the 'facts.' . . . 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. (emphasis mine, *Ana* 81)

Marlatt contrasts traditional expectations for writing and experience to be linear, factual, and work towards a conclusion, with "just circling around"; she precedes and "cuts loose" from these patriarchal "codes." Articulating "undefined territory" and refusing "relentless progress towards some end," Marlatt interplays writing, the multiple sites of lesbian erogenous contact, unending desire, and women's cyclical physiological experiences, such as menstruation. "Undefined territory" echoes the aboriginal analogy in *Double Negative*, where women's bodies and sexuality are likened to the largest patriarchally "occupied lands" (19). In heterosexual eyes, I's, (perspectives), Marlatt's text and Annie's text may be "unreadable" because they don't meet patriarchal expectations. Marlatt writes her own lesbian space into an ahistoric reality.

For lesbian readers and writers, autographic writing, birthing the self into being, bears double significance. Feminist autographic writings literally inscribe female subjectivity; they resist patriarchal theories which place woman "beyond representation, beyond selfhood" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 22). If women are "beyond representation, beyond selfhood," as Irigaray suggests, then lesbians bear a double erasure; society's

heterosexual prescriptions may condemn lesbians as negative and disgusting or situate us "beyond representation" and therefore constituting no threat, presence or significance. Transgressively, Marlatt speaks lesbian experience, the life of women loving women; inscribing lesbian subjectivity, she takes risks and refuses cultural erasure.

As Marlatt writes and births lesbian experience into being, she establishes different epistemological grounds for realizing *being* and existence, different concepts of meaning-making based on mutual nurturing. De Lauretis notes the power differential operant in heterosexuality:

The construction and appropriation of femininity in Western erotic ethos has also had the effect of securing the heterosexual social contract by which all sexualities, all bodies, all 'others' are bonded to an ideal/ideological hierarchy of males. ("Sexual" 158)

De Lauretis theorizes that female experience "establishes the semiotic ground for a different production of reference and meaning"; she suggests a critical text which is a "rereading against the grain of the 'master works' of Western culture and. . . . a rewriting of culture" (*Feminist Studies* 10). Marlatt's works exemplify de Lauretis's proposal to re-vise patriarchal scripts. The speaker in *What Matters* suggestively notes, "'s my rime against / the grain. . . . transforms all / matter of things / (weights wings, erases / territory. . ." (54). Marlatt challenges us to examine what really "matters." In *Ana Historic*, Annie articulates a transformative self-questioning provoked by nonconformity to traditional family scripts; Annie/Marlatt interrogates truth and difference:

true: exactly conforming to a rule, standard, or pattern;
trying to sing true. by whose standard or rule? and what do
you do when the true you feel inside sounds different from the
standard? (18)

In order to "utter" and give birth to "the true you feel inside," the lesbian writer must re-vise culture and break multiple rules and codes. Voicing the experience of women loving women, lesbian writers such as

Marlatt, Nicole Brossard, and Adrienne Rich, transgress the "heterosexual social contract"; they create new sites, new "semiotic grounds" for meaning-making and presence. They reclaim the female body as a site of meaning and sensual desire, negate male possessive, repressive gazing and naming, and destabilize the "ideal/ideological hierarchy of males" (de Lauretis, "Sexual" 158). Lesbian silence and erasure are denied.

Marlatt's writing offers new sites for meaning-making and presence as she "writes her desire to be." She implicitly joins Monique Wittig's impassioned attack on psychological theorizations which are "untouched by history and unworked by class conflicts" ("Straight" 104). Marlatt emphasizes language's power to subversively expose and critique repressive historical and current versions of reality. In an interview, she says,

If history is a construction and language is also a construction, as we know - in fact, it actually constructs the reality we live and act in - then we can change it. We're not stuck in some authoritative version of the real, and for women that's extremely important, because we always were - the patriarchal version was always the version, and now we know that's not true. We can throw out that powerful little article. When we change language we change the building blocks by which we construct our reality or even our past 'reality,' history. (Williamson, "Sounding" 52)

Changing "the building blocks," lesbians speak experience and challenge the "authoritative version of the real." Marlatt's poetic constructions transgress repressive patriarchal, heterosexual laws and locate new life.

Inscribing the female body as a site of meaning-making, Marlatt and Warland build "anOther" reality; they compare the continual forward motion of the train to moving forward through language and birthing the self:

in constant motion lulled by the movement carrying us /
forward into ourselves / we are fed we sleep are held nameless
and content. . . words we head for down this birthing canal /
'the oldest living language' shaping our tongues lips / to
speak it out. . . / mouths move in anOther motion. (Double 16)

In the womb, we are "nameless and content," not yet defined as virgin/

whore/wife or "worthless woman, wilful girl" (*Touch* 21) by patriarchal constructions. Their playful allusion to sexual experience as the oldest form of communication, "the oldest living language," embodies the need to "speak it [lesbian desire] out," sexually and textually. Language and love are both "carrying us forward into ourselves" (*Double* 16). "This birthing canal" and "constant motion" evoke the continual process of experience. Teresa de Lauretis suggests "experience" is a continual "process" by which

subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations - material, economic, and interpersonal - which are in fact social, and in a larger perspective, historical. The process is continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed. For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival. (*Alice* 159)

De Lauretis's theories support Marlatt's theoretical and practical writings. De Lauretis metaphorizes the continual process of subjectivity construction as an unending journey. New experiences continually provide a change in perspective and therefore make transformation of subjectivity both a possibility and a reality. Each person can assume active agency and originate subjectivity in an "ongoing construction" of reality.

An "ongoing construction" echoes Marlatt's description of the mutual motivation she and Betsy Warland experienced when writing *Double Negative*; their shared realities and shared truths never ended:

what we wanted to continue was this being held in the rocking motion of the train which is very womblike. . . . we are active in our desire and part of what we desired was to be out in the desert as an image for a certain way of being. (37)

"Womblike" describes their reciprocal, nurturing relationship, and their relationship to language. They speak their lesbian "desire" on a real and metaphoric journey. Mutually discovering self through experience and through writing, they actively contribute to self knowledge for others.

A journey metaphor often illustrates the writing process's role in

Marlatt's coming into selfhood and subjectivity; her analogy to writing includes a baby travelling down the birth canal, and a child's nourishment at the mother's breast. Her trips and writings are experienced as voyages of self discovery, searches for identity, journeys down the metaphorical birth canal. While the metaphorical journey in search of self is common in literary tradition, Marlatt's maternal metaphor feminizes the concept. She continually seeks for the lost or repressed parts of herself. Readers may connect her discoveries to our own life experiences. Journeys and self-consciously writing about the journeys combine in "putting the world together" to come to subjectivity, as Marlatt articulates her relationship to language (*Touch* 49). The most crucial and principal basis for my thesis is Marlatt's insistence on language's primary role in the journey to self.

In *How Hug a Stone*, she journeys to and around England. She revisits and explores her relationship with her mother, reclaims women's collective memory at the Stone Circle of Avebury, and investigates linguistic roots. In *Double Negative*, she and Warland travel across Australia by train, and collaboratively speak their lesbian experience within society and within language. *Touch To My Tongue* moves the reader across Canada with Marlatt as she writes both her current experience and her memories of Warland; she celebrates the touching joys of language and lesbian love. *Ana Historic* foregrounds writing as an empowering source of lesbian subjectivity. Marlatt interplays Ana's trip to a new world and new possibilities, Ina's psychological trip toward death, and Annie's journey to selfhood through writing and love. Journeys, constant movement "down this birthing canal," engage her active desire to "be," to live the fullest life (*Double* 16).

As an epistemological corollary to the metaphorical journey to self through writing, for Marlatt, writing is a route "so as not to be lost, invent" (*How Hug* 15). She seeks lost connections between women. In *How Hug a Stone*, she writes, "her i lost, not him in the throng. . . where have

you gone? first love that teaches a possible world" (78). She explicitly connects mother love with love for other women, with birthing a possible ecstatic world - one not alienated or lost within a heterosexual hegemony.

In *Touch To My Tongue*, Marlatt speaks of loss in her separation from Warland: "afraid i'm lost. . . lost, *losti*, lust-y one, who calls my untamed answering one to sally forth, finding alternate names, finding the child provoked, invoked, lost daughter, other mother and lover" (27). On her journey to find self, her lesbian experience and lesbian reality are multiply provoked and evoked by spiralling inextricably related mother love, lesbian love, and her love of language. "Untamed answering" joyously reflects Marlatt's reciprocal, collaborative loving/writing relationship with Warland, as they refuse to be tamed by cultural condemnation. Marlatt inscribes "alternate names" for lesbian reality; she writes her experience into other's views and at the same time births her "lost daughter" - the lesbian readers who repress, suppress, or hide lesbian desires or loves in response to patriarchal society's crippling compulsory heterosexuality.

Self-reflexively, Marlatt discovers who she is by re-reading her own writing, examining her own naming and defining processes, in relationship to love and to language. Her works resound with references to the lost daughter, the lost girl. She offers lesbians a path to subjectivity and affirmation of our experiences. In *Ana Historic*, Annie writes about herself: "i was the child who grew up with wolves, original lost girl, elusive, vanished from the world of men" (18). Annie narrates her own journey to selfhood, a movement away from the "world of men" into love and respect for women, and, finally, she voices her erotic encounter with Zoe.

Ana's reflections on Jeannie's birthing process speak the continual process of the self coming into being: "woman a rhythm in touch with her body its tides coming in not first nor last nor lost she circles back on herself repeats her breathing out and in" (125). "Not to be lost" involves

a continual tidal journey of self discovery and accepting bodily physical experiences. Marlatt's continual, rhythmic writing and re-vision processes facilitate getting "in touch" with multiple aspects of her self.

Marlatt juxtaposes "movement" in language, lesbian sexuality, and lesbian subjectivity in *Touch To My Tongue*: "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). She experiences "knowing who i am" in a tidal movement within the writing process and within lesbian love. On a mutual journey, Marlatt and Warland resist the dangerous distance from self which heterosexual society scripts for lesbians. Lesbian subjectivity redefines and restructures the social context, provoking new connections:

a tidal place i knew as mine, know now is the place i find with you. not perverse but turned the *right* way around, redefined, it signals us beyond limits in a new tongue our connection runs along. . . . broken open by your touch, and i *didn't* even feel a loss, leaving the need for limits at your place, leaving the urge to stand apart i sink into our mouths' hot estuary, tidal yes we are, leaking love and saying it deep within. (emphasis mine, *Touch* 21)

In Marlatt's later works, neither language nor love have "limits"; both seductively invite participation with no "urge to stand apart." Language flows with tidal insistency; the pulsing "leaking love" provokes images of child birth, lesbian orgasm, and the lesbian writer in process. "Turned the *right* way around" suggests the medical procedure in which a baby is turned in the birth canal; by analogy, Marlatt and Warland actively and together find the right direction through interplay of lesbian love and writing. Marlatt speaks lesbian desire "beyond limits" and assumes agency in the way language "births us, insofar as we bear with it" (*Touch* 46).

Marlatt replaces heterosexual stances with a shared space free from male sexual domination: "leaving the urge to stand apart i sink into *our* mouths' hot estuary, tidal yes we are" (emphasis mine, *Touch* 21). This tidal lesbian love has no patriarchal "limits." The words "broken open by

your touch, and i *didn't* even feel a loss" allude to Betsy Warland's companion piece, *Open is Broken*; Marlatt ecstatically interweaves tidal experiences of lesbian body, desire, and voice without "loss." The sexual and textual "touch" of the lover's tongue births new connections. Pamela Banting comments on the inscription of desire in this "opening" passage:

lesbian love moves into the narrow space posited between the woman and her body and opens it up, expands it. Whereas it is believed that desire cannot insert itself into what is read as the metaphoric gap in the somatically compliant body, the lesbian lovers, on the other hand, locate desire without loss, without finitude, a limitless procession of rings. If to sign is to say 'yes,' then the lesbian lovers sign with their bodies. (emphasis mine, "Translation Poetics" 236)

Marlatt writes/sites time and space where "lesbian love moves." Lesbian love offers women knowledge of our bodies and desires, knowledge which patriarchal heterosexuality often suppresses. To "sign," to "open" up and expose our bodies and emotions to ourselves and to our lovers truly "expands" our territory. "Desire without loss" engages mutual, swelling, unending ecstasy in lesbian love. "Our mouths' hot estuary" suggests fluid reciprocal sexual bliss and intimates a fusion of sexuality and language.

Marlatt engages de Lauretis's statement that "the position of woman in language and in cinema is one of non-coherence; she finds herself only in a void of meaning, the empty space between the signs" (*Alice* 8). Marlatt creates new meaning in a previously "empty space"; she journeys to self knowledge through writing and loving collaboration with Warland: "the place i find with you" (*Touch* 21). Signing with her body, she occupies de Lauretis's "empty space between the signs." Subverting "right form," she insists on re-echoing, redefining, and "Listening In" on the words:

poetics is a strategy for hearing, at every comma, every linebreak, each curve thought takes touching nerve-taboo, the empty space where speech, constrained by the 'right form,' the 'proper word,' is gripped (passive voice) by silence. (38)

Marlatt fills the "empty space" and "silence" lesbians encounter in

heterosexual society with explicit, graphic inscription of lesbian desire. She ecstatically declares "we are" in words ("deep within" language) and in the sexually explicit coming into being "deep within" through vaginal orgasm: "Tidal yes we are, leaking love and saying it deep within" (*Touch* 21). She theoretically provokes a "process of association": "we know from dreams and schizophrenic speech how deeply association works in our psyches, a form of thought that is not rational but erotic because it works by attraction" (emphasis mine, *Touch* 45). Birthing lesbian desires into view and into cognition, she touches "nerve-taboo" ("Listening" 38).

Ana Historic births women's experience into view. Marlatt claims women's bodily, historic and socioeconomic space. She structurally and contextually illustrates the birth of lesbian subjectivity. In the first few pages, a plaintive "Who's there?" echoes repeatedly. Annie self-consciously searches for self: "it was the sound of her own voice had woken her, heard like an echo asking, 'who's there?'" (9). Significantly, she wakes to question reality by the "sound of her own voice"; self agency interweaves with sound and voice and sense. Marlatt denounces the historic and continual patriarchal effacement of women's body and experience: "who's there? (knock, knock). who else is there in this disappearing act when you keep leaving yourself behind in the next bend. given that 'yourself' is everything you've been" (46). Suppressed memories deny self.

The end of the book is also the end of the need for a "disappearing act." Annie and Zoe enact lesbian desire and mutual subjectivity: "we give place, giving words, giving birth, to each other - she and me. you. hot skin writing skin. . . reading us into the page ahead." Awakening to rich possibilities of "being" involves unending loving, writing, and reading: "it isn't dark but the luxury of being has woken you, the reach of your desire" (153). Marlatt speaks a "luxury" of being through her writings.

The erotic analogy of "hot skin writing skin" and birthing "hidden"

experiences echoes when Marlatt speaks of Warland's "dearly known skin - its smell, its answering touch to my tongue. . . . love, we part each other coming to, geyser, spouting pool, hidden in and under separate skin we make for each other through" (*Touch* 30). Rolling fluid syntax conveys sexual/textual reciprocity and a coming into being through the other. She inscribes new ways of seeing and speaking. Fluid immediacy and repetition point towards the infinite, the impossibility of closure in experiencing lesbian love and lesbian writing of the body. Encompassing the volume's title, the phrase - "its answering touch to my tongue" - inscribes the mutuality and reciprocity in both sexual and linguistic communication.

A major "mother" for Marlatt's aesthetics, Hélène Cixous provokes women to speak our experiences; she links the female body's multiple, diffuse erotic zones with language's "infinite" "profusion of meanings":

Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization. . . . A woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor - once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction - will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language. ("Laugh" 256)

Multiple, fluid movements possible in "mother tongue" and in lesbian love metaphorically replace the primacy of the phallus and the fixed-meaning, authoritarian male tongue. Equally "smashing yokes and censors," Marlatt maternally metaphorizes writing as "shoving out the walls of taboo and propriety, kicking syntax, discovering life" (*Touch* 49). Marlatt's writing of the body "articulates the profusion of meanings that run through it."

Cixous foreshadows Marlatt's insistence on the corporeality of language; she provokes sexual and textual flow, ecstasy, and turbulence:

Her rising: is not erection. But diffusion. Not the shaft. The vessel. Let her write! And her text knows that in seeking itself that it is more than flesh and blood. . . . uprising openly. . . . a turbulent compound of flying colors, leafy spaces, and rivers flowing to the sea we feed. ("Sorties" 88)

Cixous's "leafy spaces" and "flesh and blood" echo in Marlatt's analogy of lesbian sexuality, birthing experience, and language's creativity; her "woman writer" risks "nonsense, chaotic language leafings" (*Touch* 48).

Marlatt refuses culturally-prescribed repression of women's desires and women's bodies. Her writings strategically enact Cixous's manifesto to speak the body and desire. Discovering self, Annie refocuses and inscribes her physical body and its pleasures in the context of the writing process:

my secret pleasure, feeling the flow, a sudden rush of blood slide out between my lips and onto the pad. . . refocus of myself. . . . *i made that!* the mark of myself, my inscription in blood. i'm here. scribbling again. writing the period that arrives at no full stop. not the hand manipulating the pen. not the language of definition, of epoch and document. . . but the words that flow from within. . . the words of an interior history doesn't include... that erupts like a spring, like a wellspring of being. (*Ana* 90)

Marlatt's words refuse historical erasure, patriarchal definition, fixed positions, and final truths; she writes a "flowing," continuing stream of female subjective experience. Marlatt foregrounds the creative writing process itself: "*i made that!* the mark of myself, my inscription in blood. i'm here. scribbling again." She celebrates (*i made that!*) her freedom to write her self and create her own reality. In an article which illuminates Marlatt's engagement with the writing of the self, and Marlatt's deeply-felt political mission, Jeanne Perreault discusses "a writing of self that makes the female body a site and source of written subjectivity, yet inhabits that body with the ethics of a deeply and precisely historical, political, sexual, and racial consciousness" (1). In writing her self, Marlatt's "refocus of myself" emphasizes the crucial need to situate herself within her specific location. Paralleling Perreault's words, Marlatt comments on "what we experience as authenticity (as the authority of subjectivity) of the i that writes. . . . this i has a sense of her own ground - ethics, politics, history - her own specificity which won't be

denied" ("Changing" 132). Marlatt *sites* her ground as woman and lesbian.

Marlatt interplays women's ongoing, cyclical, repetitive "flow from within" - inner emotions, menstrual blood, amniotic birth fluids, and "gushing" sexual arousal - with the "flowing" pen. Speaking lesbian desire and response truly provokes a "wellspring of being." Marlatt also defiantly and theoretically queries the absence of women's physical experience and the dominance of male experience in "patriarchally-loaded language"; she asks, "where are the poems that celebrate the soft letting-go the flow of menstrual blood is as it leaves her body?" (*Touch* 47).

Celebrating the female body and its functions subverts prescriptive, patriarchal cultural negation and denigration. Marlatt's words refuse the self-betrayal and alienation which are built into patriarchal language:

the words for our bodies betrayed us in the very language we learned at school: 'cunt,' 'slit,' 'boob,' ('you boob, you dumb broad'). words betraying what the boys thought of us. wounded or sick. (*Ana* 62)

Marlatt strategically reclaims language. She exposes the deprecation of women and our bodies which language constructs. Her joyous celebrations displace negative notions of "wounded or sick." She condemns reductive, sexist epithets, such as "boob," which associate breasts with stupidity.

In an interview with Brenda Carr, Marlatt discusses her repression of desire before her lesbian experience, and the effects on her writing:

Woman's body has been so repressed in our culture - fetishized on the surface but repressed deeply in terms of our actual sexuality and the force of our desire. It 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. To develop my own sense of the line or even of how i might move through syntax to speak my own being, i had to give up trying to imitate men. ("Between" 99)

Marlatt voices an important gesture towards women's empowerment: "i had to give up trying to imitate men." She defiantly claims space as the "*subject* of, my desire" and creates her own "line." She insists that women

do imagine and do desire. Here, Marlatt articulates one of the major self-affirming *outcomes* of lesbian sexuality: "It has been a long journey for me to come into my body." Writing, she births her subjective experience.

In *Ana Historic*, Marlatt speaks woman's desire and body through the multiply suggestive sexual/textual and maternal notions of "mouth speaking flesh" and "massive syllable of slippery flesh"; Ana struggles to find a language adequate to birth the self while she watches Jeannie's labour:

this was a mouth working its own inarticulate urge, opening deep. . . . Ana was saying Push, even as she caught a glimpse of what she almost failed to recognize: a massive syllable of slippery flesh slide out the open mouth. . . . This secret space between our limbs we keep so hidden - is yet so, what? What words are there? If it could speak!- As indeed it did: it spoke the babe. . . mouth speaking flesh. she touches it to make it tell her present in this other language so difficult to translate. the difference. (*Ana* 125-6)

To speak woman's "hidden" sexual desire and bodily sensations subversively requires an "other language." Luce Irigaray suggests that we would need to

dig down very deep indeed to discover beneath the traces of this civilization, of this history, the vestiges of a more archaic civilization that might give some clue to woman's sexuality. That extremely ancient civilization would undoubtedly have a different alphabet, a different language. . . . Woman's desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man's. (*This Sex* 25)

Marlatt searches for a "different language." In an article on "Self-Representation," she suggests the "subject who so dominates this stage of representation is white, heterosexual, middle-class, monological, probably Christian, and usually male" (16). She defiantly speaks woman's desire and experience. In "the other language so difficult to translate," the mouth and the vagina urgently give birth and voice to the "hidden" (*Ana* 126). In this context, the newly born baby may be envisioned as lesbian experience struggling to be, and lesbian memory struggling to be re-called into presence. Conflating the "open mouth" and the vagina connects bodies and words, the birth and voice of self through loving and writing. Presence

denies absence ("she touches it to make it tell her present"); the "touch" of active agency - speech, birth, and sexual arousal - creates presence.

Throughout *Ana Historic*, Marlatt inscribes the need to read and understand desire. Whatever the language in which it is communicated, desire is a major aspect of our "cloth of connectedness." Birdie confronts Ana with her sexual guilt and fear, with her self-inflicted denial of presence: "you've wanted to make your own way in the world. . . . but you're afraid, my dear, afraid of your own twat" (*Ana* 135). To realize her full potential in the new world, Ana must accept her body and her desires, and refuse alienation from her self. Desire is inscribed in the body; Ana "reads" the desire in Birdie's eyes and births it into reality:

In Birdie's eyes she is all too transparent. It's not, surely, that she's afraid of her own sex? Or is she? 'You fear what you want.' Birdie's hand cups her chin and turns it gently towards her, 'am I right, my love?' / Lifting her eyes in a sudden rush of desire she reads likewise in Birdie's face, a sudden rush of relief - 'You see it written across my face,' she admits. (*Ana* 138-9)

Two women, through loving physical contact and through dialogue, "read" their mutual desire. Gentle "touch" and facial expression convey desire nonverbally. The body of the text and body of the self both provoke reading. Cixous's answer to patriarchal denial is for women to voice our desires in an "emancipation of the marvelous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak" ("*Laugh*" 250). Cixous, like Marlatt, provokes speech; women's voice reclaims presence and subjectivity.

Marlatt correlates the corporeality of language with the maternal body and the lesbian body of experience. She writes, "hidden in the etymology and usage of so much of our vocabulary for verbal communication (contact, sharing) is a link with the body's physicality" (*Touch* 46). "Contact" and "sharing" evoke the close bonding of mother/daughter/lesbian lover. Women's physical and emotional experiences must actively be written

and created/constructed as real; strong voices such as Marlatt's birth women's experiences into recognition by patriarchal, heterosexual society.

Marlatt's maternal metaphor suggests we can literally create and potentially transform the world we live in; she theorizes: "putting the living body of language together means putting the world together, the world we live in: an act of composition, an act of birthing us" (*Touch* 49). Marlatt warns that language itself carries ideology and delimits the way we perceive the world: "language constructs our world" (*Touch* 49). She provokes our very active manipulation of language's constructing power. Given our inherently inferior position in patriarchal ideology, women, and moreso lesbians, gain by enacting Marlatt's "act of birthing" ourselves.

In Marlatt's experience, language "bears us as we are born in it, into cognition" (*Touch* 45). She frequently conflates the womb and cognition. Her maternal metaphor suggests that the power of language to shape or construct our sense of self, shape the way we experience the world, is like gestation in the mother's womb. As we consciously use language, manipulate the syntax, multiple meanings, sound associations, we assume agency and create our experiences within language. Remembering her emphasis on the multiple meanings of words, and her continuous dictionary usage, I find "cognition" defined as: "Action or faculty of knowing, perceiving, conceiving." This associates knowledge and vision with conceive. "Conceive" conveys multiple meanings: "become pregnant; form in the mind, imagine." Completing Marlatt's ongoing circling thought process, language births experience into being, into intellectual recognition, and into imagination. Lesbians who suppress/repress emotions may potentially conceive, know, perceive, or imagine these erotic feelings into reality by writing and reading. Marlatt, and other lesbian writers, assume agency by metaphorically birthing self into subjectivity; they become both mother and daughter, perceiver and perceived, knower and known, in the process.

Marlatt theorizes that through language we develop self-knowledge and learn to understand our experiences and emotions. Theoretically, human beings experience language as a transparent, static system by which we share meaning, a communication tool which permanently exists for us all to re-present our realities. In contrast, Marlatt emphasizes language's continual movement and shifting in relation to meaning; she stresses the power of language itself to *shape* our perceptions of reality.

A precursor for Marlatt's maternal metaphor is H.D.'s meditations connecting the womb and the brain: "The brain and the womb are both centres of consciousness, equally important" (*Thought* 21). Marlatt quotes this as an epigraph to *Touch To My Tongue*. H.D. further writes, "Vision is of two kinds - vision of the womb and vision of the brain" (20). H.D. suggests that perception, and by inference knowledge, may be experienced through the consciousness of the mind or the womb. She clearly foreshadows Marlatt's association of language, vision, and knowledge or cognition: "in a crucial sense we cannot see what we cannot verbalize. . . we are truly contained within the body of our mothertongue" (*Touch* 47). It is important to voice experience to make it real. H.D. valorizes the creative, ongoing process of self-awareness and understanding. Complexly, for Marlatt and H.D., lovemaking and writing both birth the self into consciousness.

H.D. subverts the intrinsic male privilege in the patriarchal male/female paradigm and its subsidiary hierarchical binary oppositions of mind/body, master/slave, and active/passive. She is a major precursor for Marlatt's insistence on explicit representation of the female body, maternal processes, and female desire - the female experience and body which patriarchal ideology often devalues or erases from thought.

H.D.'s "vision of the womb or love-vision" posits specifically female physiology and sexuality as creative stimuli; she writes, "There is no great art period without great lovers" (20). For H.D., love and the

creative arts are interdependent. Bryher's significant role in stimulating H.D.'s writing is well documented; Bryher provided not only emotional support, but also operated as a medium, interpreter, and source for H.D. Marlatt and Warland likewise foreground reciprocity and interdependency in their lovemaking and in their writing. They bear witness to the joyous reciprocity of lesbian subjectivity and birth their experience together.

Double Negative contains imagery similar to H.D.'s vision and womb:

you pulled me under last night / sucking me out through my
womb inside out / re-versed writing across bed into sky /
touching holding everything / words my only boundary. (25)

"Touching holding everything" sensually conveys experience in the womb of language. Marlatt and Warland articulate experiences of both the mind and the womb in graphic sexual/textual wordplay. The phrase "words my only boundary" recalls Marlatt's belief that verbal relations have "preceded us and given us the world we live in. . . as at birth" (*Touch* 46-7). Noting her pleasure in the multiple meanings of words, to have words as the "only boundary" or structure for our lives opens us to unending possibilities.

"Re-versed writing across bed into sky" associates the birth bed and lovemaking with the infinite possibilities for metaphorically seeing or recognizing or conceiving the whole sky or universe through writing (*Double* 25). Marlatt's and Warland's inscription of lesbian desire "re-verses" traditional patriarchal scripts. In re-versing the metaphorical film reel, they resist the inevitable heterosexual ending; the family romance myth is rewritten and re-vised. They also re-verse patriarchal psychoanalytic theories which erase the mother/daughter bond. Freud and Lacan prescriptively separate mother and daughter and transfer female love to the male. In *Double Negative*, patriarchal "reality" is re-versed: woman may embrace a woman as source of life and love, and write subjectivity.

"Re-versed writing across bed into sky" also pictures Marlatt and Warland self-reflexively re-versing, rereading and examining their own

writing and loving processes. In section 2, "Crossing Loop," they reread and re-vise past work, and rebirth their past experience into the present. Writing about their experience together, they re-verse traditional literature in which heterosexuals speak for the lesbian, or lesbians code sexual experience into near invisibility. The title, "Crossing Loop," graphically re-presents the sign of infinity, as well as the reciprocal, exchangeable mother/daughter positions and lesbian sexual acts. Loving and writing both birth the two writers infinitely into subjectivity and being. The bed, sky, and universe are possible experiential spaces for lesbians.

"Sucking me out through my womb inside out" complexly interrelates orgasmic coming into being through oral sex, birth of a child, breast-feeding, and finding self through writing experience. The sexually erotic, explicit imagery also echoes Marlatt's query: "what syntax can carry the turning herself inside out in love when she is both sucking mouth and hot gush on her lover's tongue?" (*Touch* 48). The "sucking" image situates writing on an unending continuum of women's nurturing experience, along with pregnancy, the baby nursing, and lesbian oral sex. Marlatt represents language and lesbian love as mutually stimulating sites of creativity.

"Inside out" echoes throughout Marlatt's works, emphasizing her desire to write, "outer," and "utter" her lesbian experience and her inner feelings. The ecstatic orgasmic imagery of being "pulled. . . inside out" conflates the maternal metaphor with their pleasure at *being* in both the sense of writing and loving. Being "turned inside out" enacts the overwhelming physical and emotional experience of the birth process as well as orgasmic release. By analogy, writing is "an act of composition, an act of birthing us, uttered and outered there in it" (*Touch* 49). They voice their experience from inside the womb of the train; they "compose" and write their lives at the same time as they experience it. Marlatt speaks and utters her lesbian experience; she turns inside out (outers)

lesbian desire and experience previously hidden due to the heterosexual hegemony. Bringing lesbian experiences "out" of the closet through writing births and mothers them into existence and into reality. "Birthing" into words the "inner" experience of the "womb" subverts Lacanian theories grounded on the primacy of the phallus and what can be seen as the norm.

Responding to another woman, Marlatt opens herself to ecstasy. Foreshadowing Marlatt's textual/sexual outing, Wittig writes, "You turn m/e inside out. . . . you take the heart in your mouth" (*Lesbian Body* 86). Speaking lesbian desire brings "out" the "heart" - the physical and emotional core/kore of being. Marlatt writes, "peering with the rush of coming to you. . . i slow down, learning how to enter - implicate and unspoken (still) heart-of-the-world" (*Touch* 22). Words come from the mutual loving experience, and allow entrance into ecstatic life. Refusing heterosexuality's power imbalance, the sharing nature of lesbian love and lesbian writing emphasizes community for growth. They desire to break "out" of silence, and to open "out" into companionship and communication.

In *How Hug A Stone*, Marlatt suggests words bear "us in this kiel, to ku-,kunte, to, wave-breaking womb: bride who comes unsung in the muse-ship shared with Mary Gypsy. . . . Marianne suppressed, become/ Mary of the Blue Veil. ." (72). Marlatt births and exposes the "unsung" brides, the many Mary's who were forced to suppress their emotions throughout history. She describes words as womb, cunt, or muse-ship; words become a desired space which contains and sustains and nurtures women's experience, sexual and other, into being. Marlatt often achieves multiple meanings in a single sentence. Here, she reclaims words which the patriarchy traditionally diminishes or denigrates - cunt and womb. She demands recognition for the two unique female physical anatomical parts which allow mankind to exist and perpetuate life. She subverts institutional suppression of the woman's body, and, at the same time, reclaims women's

power to name our body. Joyously naming body parts and specific physical experiences, she resists patriarchal alienation of women from our bodies.

"Wave-breaking womb" hints at powerful emotional and psychological rhythms and contractions which metaphorically birth the self through words. She also implies that words are a breaker from waves of emotional turmoil; words provide a safe harbour in the storm, and a release from suppressed emotions. The womb image suggests a safe and nurturing space for a developing body; Marlatt associates this space with "the beginning: language, a living body we enter at birth, sustains and contains us" (*Touch* 45). In "the beginning" of the search for self-knowledge and cognition of the world, we must be able to name our experiences and thus birth them into reality. Connecting language and "the beginning" with the womb resists Lacanian notions of the phallus as Primary Signifier.

The mind's potential to birth "anything" imaginatively into being or to recall repressed desires is particularly attractive for lesbians. Traditionally viewed as doubly lacking or absent, the lesbian actively desires to birth her experience into reality: "'If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything' her mind a womb its blood the 'watching nothing going by'. . . . this texting the abandoned made new in her. . . what is woman (in the emptiness)?" (*Double* 49). "Her mind a womb" capable of watching and realizing experience echoes H.D.'s meditations on cognition and perception. Marlatt's and Warland's collaborative "texting" about their writing and their lovemaking re-calls "abandoned," repressed experience and desires. They refuse absence and "emptiness" by birthing or bearing their experiences into presence and into the view of others.

Likewise, Hélène Cixous provokes revalorization of woman's body and experience in the meaning-making process. Cixous's maternal metaphors echo Marlatt's emphasis on women's vision, perspective, and ability to birth our reality into cognition through the writing process. Cixous condemns

the "taboo of the pregnant woman," the patriarchal devaluation of woman's body and creative potential; she suggests "the gestation drive - just like the desire to write [is] a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood" ("Laugh" 261). In *Double Negative*, the womb and blood also coincide, "'ready for anything' her mind a womb its blood the 'watching nothing going by'" (49); the flow of blood reverberates with Marlatt's tidal images for loving and writing processes.

Vision and sight create reality and understanding: "it's *what* we see this illusion the eye momentarily believing in unity (believing *is* desire) seeing is. . . writing the not here inverts turning perspective upside down" (*Double* 54). Nicole Brossard addresses both the problematics and the positive aspects of a woman's gaze centered on another woman:

A woman's gaze, which is to say: she who knows how to read. Illiterates of desire that we are, when women know how to read on the body of the other who is similar, it means they know the rigours, the jarrings, the hysterical border. (*Aerial* 43)

Barbara Godard also explores the societal transformation inherent in women claiming control of the gaze: "From the spectacle, the seen, women transformed themselves into seers" ("Epi(pro)logue" 324). Marlatt and Warland perceive, read and write each other's desire; they bear lesbian reality into perspective and literally become "seers" and prophets.

H.D.'s "vision of the womb" prompts Marlatt and Warland to proclaim a re-vision on women's part: "we see ourselves not reflected but re/called out of this Kangaroo Court re/called out of the Father's optical illusions changing the reel inside out into the womb of the continent ochre" (44). They sarcastically play with the dominant patriarchal "vision" and control of society. Through writing, they can turn "inside out" and expose the patriarchal "Kangaroo Court" and its laws prescribing perception and judgement of women. That court, where man is both judge and jury, can be "re/called" as an illusion and displaced; in a new sitting of the court

women can demand subjectivity and reality for our own perspectives.

Claiming subjectivity, the speaker views and "re/calls" her self into being. Refusal to be the object of the male gaze transforms the entire picture. Here, two women mutually and consensually activate the gaze; each freely assumes the subjective stance. By analogy, the mother and the child both achieve subjectivity and agency in the birthing process and in early childhood contact. Marlatt and Warland "re/call" or re-member their inner emotions; in their script and their view, institutional suppression of woman's body and of lesbian love is re-verses. They reveal, birth or turn their emotions "inside out" for others to perceive. By "re-versing" or "changing the reel" and the perspective, lesbians can view, acknowledge and voice our own experience as real.

While denying the patriarchal script which casts women in reductive roles of mother/whore, they expose an inescapable fact - men are born of women; women's flesh necessarily always precedes masculine rationality:

rail at His One Essential Story telling and retailing of male quest escape from the metaphorical womb and the conquering of it *this* is where the v inverts reveals how u and me and he are all held fast by the womeworld. (54)

Marlatt and Warland critique Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories by which women are "all held fast" and our activities are prescribed. They underscore the theoretical masculine fears of being suffocated by the mother, or denied nurture. Also, the male quest for dominance and mastery over the female is irrelevant in a narrative where two women love and write "beyond" these tedious heterosexual powerplays.

Marlatt and Warland reject this patriarchal selling job, the "retailing of male quest." Two lesbian lovers write a reality which excludes male conquering heroes and ridicules the need for a penis for sexual satisfaction or to birth experience into being. They deny one authoritative version of reality, "His One Essential Story." In reality,

the masculine is not even necessary. Marlatt and Warland tell multiple new stories. In their "metaphorical womb," women birth experiences through words; they record "their mindscapes (real to reel)" (*Double* 51).

Marlatt and Warland resist philosophical manoeuvres by which man denies the essential need for the "wombworld." In their transgressive writings, "where the v inverts," the explicitly rendered Mound of Venus, is the site of multiple new texts and multiple new experiences. The Mound of Venus rises above every birth; no man can escape this reality. The existence of "where the v inverts" destroys the "One Essential story," physiological and psychological theories of the phallus as the Primary Signifier, the only physical attribute to be seen. They destroy exclusive masculine power to name and bring women into being. Two lesbians together "reveal" their experiences; they rewrite the "male quest" and masculine phallic power into absence in a "context of total rupture with masculine culture, . . . careless of male approval," as Wittig provokes (*Lesbian* 9).

Julia Kristeva's words illuminate Marlatt's epistemology; she notes,

certain texts written by Freud. . . [and] Lacan), imply that castration is, in sum, the imaginary construction of a radical operation which constitutes the symbolic field and all beings inscribed therein. This operation constitutes signs and syntax; that is, language, as a *separation* from a presumed state of nature, of pleasure fused with nature so that the introduction of an articulated network of differences, which refers to objects henceforth and only in this way separated from a subject, may constitute *meaning* it is the penis which, becoming the major referent in this operation of separation, gives full meaning to the *lack* or to the *desire* which constitutes the subject during his or her insertion into the order of language women . . . call into question the very apparatus itself. ("Women's Time" 198)

Marlatt often cites Kristeva's semiotics. Both writers refuse the phallographic prescriptive repression of the maternal body; for them, entry into the world of the symbolic order definitely does not require negation of the mother/daughter bond. Marlatt and Warland celebrate the pre-verbal experience in which the mother and child are interdependent; mutually,

they desire and enjoy the rhythms, the sounds, and the touch of each other. Punning on being "pregnant with meaning," Marlatt constructs and births the analogy: "like the mother's body, language is larger than us and carries us along with it. it bears us" (*Touch* 46).

Marlatt and Warland frequently draw upon patriarchal stereotypes in order to transgress them. They manipulate traditional essentialist stereotypes of mother "nature" and the closeness of women to earthly, nurturing things. They replace artificial oppositional binaries, such as culture/nature and head/heart, by celebrating relational connections. As a subversive strategy, they overturn patriarchal fixed, linear thinking, and incipient devaluation of women's body, experience and writing. They recover and reappropriate the life-supporting cyclical, tidal movements of menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. Insisting on the integration of body and mind, womb and vision, they celebrate the continually moving sensual experience of the womb as an "ever turning" nurturing mother earth. This nurturing space provides the potential words and meanings necessary for bearing the self/selves into being:

then a gradual sensation / of the Great Wheel rolling under us
/ of the Great Womb we call earth / not solid not still / but
an ever turning threshold / its movement carrying us into /
THIS: / 'what is about to be said' / here. (*Double* 33)

Lesbian writers and lesbians survive through association with the "ever turning threshold" of already existing written works by lesbians. Constant movement "of the Great Womb we call earth" evokes the flowing sensuality a lesbian experiences on the threshold of writing and love. Marlatt circulates around the double notion of two lesbians as women loving women, and two women giving birth and reality to each other.

In her writings of the 1980's, Marlatt articulates her loving, creative space within the body of language and within her lesbian body of

experience. In *Double Negative*, the speaker notes, "this body [is] my (d)welling place, unearthed" (48). She juxtaposes mutually-moving sensual, "welling" enjoyment and the "(d)welling place" she finds within lesbian lovemaking with the writer's pleasure in language. Marlatt's present stance evolves from an earlier desire to articulate the immediacy of bodily sensations. In a 1979 interview she notes, "Language is leafing out, it's everything that is growing that is organisms, that is body. It's a body. I love that phrase, the body of language. And I'm trying to realize its full sensory nature as much as possible" (Bowering, "Given" 60). In a 1973 letter to David Wilk, editor of *Truck* magazine, Marlatt wrote: "the body is context & as such is prime, as primal as context can be in terms of the 'real,' that term that seduces us so & that we need."

Cixous flaunts the authority which pregnancy (and by implication writing) gives to women: "when pregnant, the woman not only doubles her market value, but - what's more important - takes on intrinsic value as a woman in her own eyes and, undeniably, acquires body and sex" ("Laugh" 262). She relates women coming to appreciate and understand our physical experiences through pregnancy, childbirth and sexual arousal to women's desire to write the self. In Cixous's utopian world, she imagines women love and respect other women, eschewing male approval.

Self-knowledge and self-respect can be invaluable products of woman's active subjective positions in the maternal experience, the sexual experience, and the writing experience. "The desire to live self from within" echoes Marlatt's deliberately repetitive emphasis on lesbian freedom to experience fully our emotions and desires, and as a corollary, lesbian writers' confident open articulation of the "whole body" of our sexual, emotional, and intellectual being. Cixous and Marlatt joyfully voice the "desire for language" to birth experience into being, and to take "on intrinsic value as a woman in her own eyes" ("Laugh" 262).

Marlatt and Warland query: "thriving outside The Gaze / (can we see what we do not value)" (*Double* 24). Their writing inscribes an affirmative yes! However, they are "thriving" and flourishing through valuing their lesbian experiences and their bodies, and through speaking their desire to be.

Assuming identity separate from patriarchal objectifying gazes, they claim voice, make love with each other, and are "birthed into subject"; they give birth to a joyous vision of multiple subject positions:

but what if the boundary goes walking? refuses to be that place the hero enters. . . . given herself a shake and birthed into subject. the inconceivable doubling herself into life. . . the doubling of 'woman' into hundreds camped in the middle of desert. . . no longer the object of exchange but she-and-she-who-is-singing. (*Double* 48)

They use the power of discourse to rewrite the heterosexual, patriarchal story of male heroes and male quests. "No longer the object of exchange" by men, a lesbian can realize subjectivity and double "herself into life." Through writing and loving together, they successfully create their lives in the absence of male power interventions - an "inconceivable" feat in heterosexual society's perspective. Marlatt notes, "lesbian culture tries to do something which, as Nicole Brossard has said, is unimaginable from within the dominant culture. We try to imagine the fullness of who we might be outside of patriarchal reference" (Carr, "Between" 105).

"Birthed into subject" involves actively assuming subjectivity and perspective. They refuse male entry in multiple senses, not just sexual; they write and create a world which appreciates and recognizes women's total experience - physical, emotional, and intellectual - outside and irrespective of patriarchal judgement. They write a new story and make space for lesbian love and lesbian subjectivity. "Doubling herself" through writing experiences for others to read, and for themselves to reread and re-member, they challenge societal erasure of lesbian being.

A note on the back cover of *Double Negative* explains, "this text

plays with doubleness - the doubleness or duplicity of language. . . "Marlatt and Warland capitalize on the multiple meanings available in language. At the same time they expose the "duplicity" inherent in language's repressive social construction of reality. The "endlessly repeating" and mutuality in lesbian sexual engagement between two similar bodies "doubles"; it doubles in a "continuing fascination with making one out of two, a new one, a simultitude" (*Touch* 46). Marlatt and Warland "double" and birth themselves into being through writing collaboratively and through sexual engagement. Personally finding the self through the sexual/emotional/intellectual connections of one woman with another, and publicly exhibiting and writing lesbian desire, inscribes presence and inherently refuses patriarchal erasure. "Hundreds [of women] camped in the middle of the desert" (*Double* 48) form a body of resistance which can't be overlooked; in an empowered community, women assume voice, space and subjectivity through singing. They assume agency in constructing reality.

Cixous similarly speaks the desire and unending possibilities of language to birth self into being: "I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation. Write! and your self-seeking text will know itself better than flesh and blood" ("Laugh" 260). "Singing," for these writers, grants voice even more presence, empowerment, and pleasure. "Singing" commonly occurs in lesbian writings, allusively associating joyful voice, speaking lesbian presence out loud, within a community of hearers. Sexual/textual politics link the erotics of language with the mother/daughter bond, and the erotics of lesbian love; Marlatt writes, "in poetry, which has evolved out of chant and song. . . sound will initiate thought by a process of association. words call each other up, evoke each other, provoke each other" (*Touch* 45). Sounds "initiate thought by a process of association"; sound creates sense and meaning similar to the sense two sexually-engaged

bodies "call up." Song, sound and language nurture and provoke community.

Marlatt's deliberations on language stress the interplay between the two "senses" - meaning and feelings. Through language, she explicitly links and relates the physical tongue, maternal birthing, and sexual coming into being and speech: "to relate (a story) and to relate to somebody, related (carried back) with its connection with bearing (a child); intimate and to intimate; vulva and voluble; even sentence which comes from the verb to feel" (*Touch* 46). She makes the analogy between telling a story and bearing a child. Echoing "vulva and voluble," she erotically suggests that lesbian oral sex and lesbian voice (tongue) both create and stimulate new connections. She securely sites lesbians' relationship to language in the nurturing maternal and sexual realms.

Marlatt's thematic repetitive strains of images and symbols link the womb, sound and language in meaning making:

language is first of all for us a body of sound. leaving the water of the mother's womb with its one dominant sound, we are born into this other body whose multiple sounds bathe our ears. . . gradually we learn how the sounds of our language are active as meaning and then we go on learning. . (*Touch* 45)

The body of language and the body of the mother fluidly nurture, and create or give birth to meaning. "Multiple sounds [which] bathe our ears" convey Marlatt's strikingly sensual delight in language and sounds. She speaks her always-in-process loving experience of and in language.

In an interview with George Bowering, Marlatt comments on the need to diminish the "distance" of understanding: "What I've been interested in doing is bringing any reader in, like placing that screen so inside, so internally, that there's no sense of distance" ("*Given*" 38). "Placing that screen so inside" evokes the experience of the womb. Marlatt inscribes lesbian subjectivity and makes the inner "outer," forging new connections.

Language, sound and sensations produce shared meaning in a community and in a continually changing socioeconomic, historic context. In one of

the many intertextual moments between Marlatt and Phyllis Webb, she echoes Webb's startling, provocative lines in *Naked Poems*: "Hieratic sounds emerge / from the Priestess of / Motion / a new alphabet / gasps for air. / We disappear in the musk of her coming" (np). Lesbian coming, both sexual and textual, gasps the lesbian self into being. In a multiply connotative metaphor, the newborn baby, the lesbian reaching ecstatic orgasmic release, and the lesbian seeking to voice her existence into reality, all gasp "for air," for space in which to breath and to be.

The "Priestess of Motion" evokes the constant movement in Marlatt's language. The image nicely acknowledges both women's activities as seer, priestess or role model; through their writings they teach a new way to come into being or discover subjectivity. Webb further comments on these lines in *Talking*; she writes "'A new alphabet gasps for air' Actually, an old alphabet Shamanic" (70). Marlatt's self-conscious poetic style and her emphasis on word sounds evoke the "gasping" metaphor. In her writing, careful attention to words and sounds becomes as natural and continual as breathing. She stresses the continuous struggle to voice current lesbian reality within patriarchally-dominated language and life scripts:

that is the limit of the old story, its ruined circle, that is not how it ended or we have forgotten parts, we have lost sense of the whole. left with a script that continues to write our parts in the passion we find ourselves enacting, old wrongs, old sacrifices. & the endless struggle to redeem them, or them in ourselves, our 'selves' our inheritance of words. wanting it to make us new again: to speak what isn't spoken, even with the old words. (*How Hug* 73)

"Our 'selves' our inheritance of words" engages Marlatt's theory that language constructs reality. Inherited words must be redeemed to "make us new again," or birth our experience into reality. Marlatt records the simultaneity of experience with words and stresses the need to examine not just what she intends to say, but what language itself is saying:

if we are poets we spend our lives discovering not just what

we have to say but what language is saying as it carries us with it. 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. the given. the immediately presented, as at birth. (*Touch* 46-7)

Language can "make us new again," birth lesbians into existence through speaking "what isn't spoken" (*How Hug* 73). "Priestess of Motion," Shaman, seer, the lesbian writer uses the living body of language to "imagine a nation at home in the 'deathless body'" (*Double* 50). Because lesbians have existed throughout history, our lives and experiences represent a "deathless body" which resists compulsory heterosexuality and historical erasure. "The deathless body" also alludes to the unending desire for both orgasm and for writing, as well as desire for the constantly changing "living body of language" (*Touch* 49). Marlatt politically and effectively uses imagination to "imagine a nation at home," a society which is comfortable with our experiences and our language. While Phyllis Webb more cryptically voices lesbian love that "isn't spoken," she, Marlatt and other lesbian writers emphasize the power of linguistic movement and renewal to transform societal expectations.

Marlatt articulates her difficult struggle to accommodate lesbian sensual experience within the patriarchal symbolic language system. In discussing Marlatt's notion of the "mother-tongue," Gail Scott says,

our relationship to language is first formed in our mother's womb as we listen to the rhythms and sounds of her body. . . . at the same time we are developing another relationship to language, that of the 'fathertongue' of education, the media, the law, all of them patriarchal institutions. . . . [our silence] will have to be pierced by new conceptions of time, space and continuity. ("Shaping" 184, 191)

Marlatt's notion of the "mothertongue" is based on an epistemology of "another relationship to language." Her works birth a world and language which do accommodate lesbian needs and experience, and provoke new "ways of seeing." She overcomes historical silence and conceives a new physical

relationship between language and "time, space and continuity."

Marlatt's note to *Touch To My Tongue* connects the poet's physical experience of the "living body of language" with shamanic influence:

the poet Alexandra Grilikhes. . . speaks of reading poetry to an audience as a shamanic act: 'the poet dances in animal skins to evoke in you what longs to be evoked or released'; 'the speaking of poetry is above all a physical impulse, and the performance of the poem *is* the poem.' (36)

The poet's physical movements and linguistic movements, "speaking of poetry," both evoke or release repressed or suppressed feelings. This echoes the poet's active play: "inside language she leaps for joy. . . . an act of birthing" (49). Speaking and performance birth reality.

In Chapter Two I have stressed Marlatt's "womb-like" experience of language in a theoretical context. In Chapter Three I further explore her maternal metaphor. I trace her intense retrospective exploration of her difficult relationship with her mother, and the complex interplay of "mothertongue," and mother's words, in constructing the child's reality. I further examine the analogy Marlatt creates between maternal experience and the pleasures of writing as coextensive in nurturing self-discovery and subjectivity.

CHAPTER THREE

'INA I WOULD GIVE BIRTH TO, ENTER HER INTO THE WORLD':

WRITING BIRTHS BOTH THE SELF AND THE (M)OTHER

As I have already noted in several contexts, Marlatt uses a maternal metaphor to articulate her experiential relationship to language. Even the title of her essay "Musing With Mothertongue," contains her metaphor; in this work, Marlatt writes, "like the mother's body, language is larger than us and carries us along with it. it bears us, it births us, insofar as we bear with it" (*Touch* 46). Marlatt experiences language as a space she inhabits and continually grows within, similar to the nurturing space of the mother's womb; she notes that woman is an "inhabitant of language" (*Touch* 48). In this chapter I explore Marlatt's journey to self through the interplay of her loving, sensuous relationship to language and her ambiguous loving experiences with her own mother. Re-membering and writing her mother's life in the past, Marlatt journeys down a metaphorical birth canal to her own subjectivity in the present; she also writes her mother's life into being and significance. In a discussion with Janice Williamson, she claims her adult re-connection to her mother facilitates her writing:

Acknowledging my own ambivalent relationship with my mother and working through to a deeper understanding of her helped empower me to write. . . . I can only realize what we had in common by also expressing where I felt she betrayed me as a mother, because she was in such deep psychological trouble herself she couldn't go on mothering. ("Sounding" 48-49)

Marlatt resists historical repression of women's voice and mother/daughter bonding. She frequently speaks this resistance within images of continuous relationships through the generations and between lesbian lovers. Alice Jardine notes that Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva all have directed "attention to the ways in which the mother and the maternal have been silenced and indeed mutilated in order for Western culture to survive" (263). Refusing silence, Marlatt corroborates Adrienne Rich's

call for a re-vision of the institution of motherhood. Rich attacks the repression of the intimate bond between mother and daughter; she writes,

This cathexis between mother and daughter - essential, distorted, misused - is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality. . . . Like intense relationships between women in general, the relationship between mother and daughter has been profoundly threatening to men. (*Of Woman Born* 225-26)

"Musing With Mothertongue" articulates the "amniotic bliss" which Rich evokes. Erotic energy flows as Marlatt connects language, matter, mother, and lesbian sexuality: "to utter and outer (give birth again); . . . pregnant with meaning; to mouth (speak) and the mouth with which we also eat and make love" (*Touch* 46). Marlatt speaks to Rich's comments on the "great unwritten story" and the distortion of women's experiences; she suggests that "patriarchally-loaded language. . . miscarries, and so leaves unsaid what we actually experience" (*Touch* 47). Marlatt credits her readings of Rich, Daly, Kristeva, Chodorow and Dinnerstein for her new understanding of the maternal role in self-knowledge. She says,

as I've been circling around the subject of mother for a long time in my own writing, I find the writing these women are doing, talking about what Freud didn't manage to talk about, that pre-Oedipal stage and its extreme influence on us, I find how that links up with Kristeva's sense of the semiotic in language very illuminating. (Williamson, "Sounding" 48)

Julia Kristeva links language's relationship to experience with the repression of women's desires; she notes, "Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother" (*Desire* 136). Kristeva articulates patriarchal ideology's basic strategy to construct and perpetuate the heterosexual hegemony; repression of the female child's "continuous relation to the mother" efficiently blocks and suppresses the basic erotic

desires of one woman for another. In "Listening In," a statement of poetics, Marlatt imagines a woman deliberating Kristeva's words: "she knows what mother means, and language, and symbolic function. . . the words don't make sense *together*, the pieces of her world don't (her world? she thinks, isn't *the world*)" (37). Marlatt writes her world, women's world, into reality. She makes "sense" of the togetherness of the words mother, "symbolic function," and instinctual drives. Doing so, she assumes agency for women speaking our own experiences from our own perspectives. Desire and agency are not male preserves. Actively refusing passivity and victimization, both mother and daughter claim subjectivity in the symbolic world of language; they name their world and speak experience of desire.

Marlatt articulates the primary erotic mother/daughter bond in *How Hug a Stone*; she writes, "*ku? ku? ku? (qua?) where have you gone? first love that teaches a possible world*" (78). Her direct address to the mother births her mother into the present; her memory and language re-call the absent mother. The child's pre-linguistic words, "*ku? ku? ku? (qua?)*," suggest Marlatt's theory concerning the meaning making in "presyntactic, postlexical" fields (*Touch* 48) and sound making "sense where it borders on non-sense" (46). They also evoke the female child's search for and desire to return to the original space of maternal bliss. Marlatt clearly hints at her original, primary love for the mother. She posits her initial love for her mother as a source of lesbian love, as a "first love that teaches a possible world." Here, lesbian love re-enacts woman's primary erotic desire for her mother, the love which patriarchy self-servingly represses.

In the last ten years Marlatt's discourse self-consciously exposes the dangerous psychological and philosophical patriarchal theories which separate woman from her self, mother from daughter, woman from her female lover. She returns us to the preoedipal stage, the space in which the female child is not separated from love for the mother, love for another

woman. Nancy Chodorow's research on the development of the mother/child relationship informs Marlatt's thoughts. In turn, Freudian and Lacanian recognitions that the first significant Other is always the mother form the basis for Nancy Chodorow's re-vision of the mother/child relationship. For lesbians to accept a loving bond with another woman, we must actively transgress compulsory heterosexuality. Psychoanalytic theories which grant the mother the status of "first significant other" are indeed supportive.

Patriarchal psychology and philosophy conveniently displace the female child's bond with the mother. Theoretically, for the female child successful entry into the area of language and self-expression requires repressing mother love, and transferring to bonding relationships with men. Man is inherently Subject, and the phallus is the primary signifier, while woman is Other, inferior, silent, absent. Chodorow's research into early child development and gender construction calls into question the female child's alienation from the mother. In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and Sociology of Gender*, Chodorow suggests girls "neither repress nor give up so absolutely their preoedipal and oedipal attachment to their mothers" (168). Chodorow critiques the masculine bias prominent in psychoanalytic theories; her research initiates several crucial feminist re-visions of theories concerning child and gender development.

Marlatt's discourse supports Nancy Chodorow's revalorization of the mother/daughter bond. Many of Marlatt's writings retrospectively explore her early emotional attachment to her mother. In an interview, she says,

I can actually see in my relationship to her [mother] such an appreciation of her femininity that it almost supports Freud's notion (although I dislike this notion because he couldn't recognize a female libido as female; it always has to be modeled on the male libido) of the little girl as the little man courting the mother. (Williamson, "Sounding" 49)

She implies that her "appreciation" of her mother's "femininity," her instinctual desire to court another woman, occurred at a very young age.

She displays discomfort with using Freudian terminology and Freudian theory to describe her special relationship with her mother. Marlatt inscribes women's problematic misrepresented space within dominant Western discourse. She must designate herself "little man" to express her female childhood experience. She denounces phallocentric limitations of Freud's theories and his *insights*: "he couldn't recognize a female libido as female; it always had to be modeled on the male libido" (emphasis mine). Marlatt strategically recovers and reappropriates women's body, women's experience, and women's libido. She re-members and re-claims a daughter/mother loving relationship and exposes patriarchal ideological barriers.

Marlatt challenges patriarchal ideology, the prescribed familial relationships, and women's relationship to language; her writing embodies her invocation that women must "take issue with the given" (*Touch* 47). She calls into question exclusive reliance on a male model for women's libido. Speaking the reality of a female libido directed to the mother, Marlatt refuses to completely repress her memories of that instinctual drive.

Luce Irigaray critiques the restrictively masculine viewpoint that informs Freud's theories. Her work provides a foundation for analyzing Marlatt's discomfort with naming all libido as masculine. Irigaray undermines Freud's statement that "we are now obliged to recognize that the little girl is a *little man*" (emphasis mine); she critiques Freud for reducing the female child's sexual drives and pleasures to the masculine (*This Sex* 35). Irigaray claims Freud "*considers the girl's desire for her mother to be a 'masculine,' 'phallic' desire*. This accounts for the girl's necessary renunciation of the tie to her mother" (37). She declares Freud gave little attention to the "specific relation of the girl-woman to the mother-woman" (37). Marlatt consciously explores this specific relation.

As I noted, Marlatt resists the oppressive patriarchal "view" that woman's desire "always has to be modeled on the male libido" (Williamson,

"Sounding" 49). Jane Gallop also critiques Freud's conceptualization of all desire as based on masculine parameters. Similar to Marlatt's emphasis on the body as a site of social construction, Gallop interrogates Freud's limited, reductive "view" of women - physical and psychological. Gallop quotes his defence that "we are entitled to keep our view that in the phallic phase of girls the clitoris is the leading erotic zone"; she says,

Freud insists on reducing the little girl's genitalia to her clitoris because that organ fits 'our view', [this] is phallic. . . . The girl is assimilated to a male model, male history, and, 'naturally', found lacking. (*Feminism* 69)

Gallop critiques the masculine view which reduces the female sexual response to the clitoris, a perspective which denies the multiple female erotic zones, such as mouth, vagina, and breasts. Limiting his "view" to the clitoris, Freud set up an artificial contrast to the masculine penis; by physical comparison, in the masculine perspective, the clitoris is nothing to see, or "naturally" lacking. In a doubly reductive strategy, Freud completely fails to appreciate (or chooses to ignore) the ecstatic, unending pleasure women derive from the vagina when he claims a lack of sensation in this area. Irigaray suggests that in Freud's phallic culture woman's "sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*. A defect in this systematics of representation and desire. A 'hole' in its scopophilic lens" (*This Sex* 26). Irigaray and Gallop expose patriarchal linguistic denigration of woman's body - hole, nothing, lacking, defect.

In Marlatt's celebratory writings, she voices woman's body and woman's experience, joyously subverting these negative connotations. Marlatt's investigations of her early feelings for her mother critique patriarchal theories which deny woman agency in desire; she "dislikes" the unavoidable choice - leaving her experience unspoken, or misrepresenting her self as a "little man." I include this lengthy discussion since it contributes to several themes interweaving through the whole cloth of Marlatt's work, and

through my thesis deliberations. Marlatt's strategic responses to these phallogentric ideological traps offer women possibilities to actively assume agency in constructing subjectivity. We need to "turn the lens around" and re-vise limiting patriarchal views of mother/daughter/lesbian desires and woman's writing as "nothing looking at nothing" (*Double* 49).

In *Ana Historic* Marlatt interrogates patriarchal society's erasure of women's experience. She explores mother/daughter bonding, imaginatively creating historical accounts of women sharing their lives. Annie clearly evokes the complex interplay of language, voice, and physical presence: "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" (48). "Nothing looking at nothing" echoes in this negative terminology; Marlatt represents women's absence from history, and absence from present cognition or understanding of our own bodies and our own experiences: "lacking? empty. wanton. vanish. vacant. vacuum." These words incrementally allude to woman's negative presence, to the space we do not take up. On closer examination the words are even more devastating. "Vacuum" means a "space entirely devoid of matter." Remembering Marlatt's musings in *What Matters*, in *Ana Historic* "vacuum" represents a world in which women's experience, and doubly, lesbian experience, does not matter.

"Wanton" bears multiple meanings; Marlatt plays the positive adjective "playful, irresponsible, luxuriant, unrestrained" against the negative/positive possibilities of the noun "unchaste woman, playful child." "Want," "lacking" and "wanton" suggest repressed female desire, while "wanton" subversively evokes women's "wilful" expression of desire.

Her plaintive self-interrogation of her relationship to language in *What Matters* again echoes in: "Something is wanting in me. and it all goes blank on a word. want" (*Ana* 48). She questions why society makes her feel guilty, depressed, and personally responsible for experiencing a continual

lack and want. She suggests society itself must be judged for not making space for women's experience, or for lesbian experience. She asks,

What matters? what is the matter? or what is the matter with you? In the dialect I grew up speaking the latter question always implied that you were missing something, meaning 'not all there.' It took me a while to junk the last two words and arrive at the necessity of asking the first. & so to be present, to a place i could take on as home (with the response-abilities that implies), in a language i share with others - engaged, as definitive, & as quick, as the bodies we touch each other in. (*What Matters* 12)

She articulates the important moment of discovery when she learns to "be present," questions society's limitations, and stops censuring her self. Marlatt correlates the touching erotic mutual pleasures of "the bodies we touch each other in" - the body of language and the sexual physical body.

Rejecting notions that "she" was "missing something," she negotiated an important move - asking her own questions and claiming subjectivity. Actively assuming agency gave her a "place" in the world, in language, and in her body. Ten years after writing *What Matters*, Marlatt defiantly names and defines "what matters" for her self, and engages in a shared lesbian-feminist dialogue. Subversively, she now re-claims her culturally-imposed "missing" connections with her mother. Being at "home" in a language she shares with others re-calls her womb metaphor for safety and nourishment, and her notion of woman writer as an "inhabitant of language" (*Touch* 48). Defining her own "wants," she challenges masculine authority and control.

When Marlatt speaks her "appreciation" of her "mother's femininity," she overturns phallocentrism; she recognizes the wants and desires of one woman for another. She claims agency and subjectivity for woman as viewer who appreciates what she sees. Neither the father, nor the male child, are authoritative points of reference; Marlatt rejects Freudian theories of penis envy and the Oedipus complex. She fills a historical, philosophical, and psychological "vacuum" when she refuses to repress her love for women

or to repress her insights; Marlatt urgently speaks her previous "lack" of sexual satisfaction and names the repressed erotic bond to her mother.

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Chodorow's and Rich's writings inform Marlatt's investigation of the mother/daughter bond. Chodorow suggests "permeable ego boundaries" connect mother and female child: "From the retention of preoedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries" (*Reproduction* 169). Chodorow claims importance for the female child's experience before she is constructed by patriarchal ideology. "Flexible ego boundaries" helpfully account for the depth and intensity of love in lesbian experiences. Our flexible, shared identity eases knowing, merging and separating, continuity and empathy, with other lesbian women.

Adrienne Rich foreshadows Marlatt's investigations. Rich suggests that a "complex new bond with our mothers is possible" for those women who have had children and later come to recognize and act on their feelings for women (*Of Woman* 232). Marlatt's writings evoke this complex bonding; her lesbian and maternal experiences inform her ongoing retrospective journey through the mother/daughter labyrinth. She continually scrutinizes other women's writings on motherhood, particularly those which connect motherhood experience and lesbian desire. Intertextually, she consciously echoes other women's writings in her own. In our May 1991 interview, Marlatt remarked that it is "theory that illuminates your experience."

While Marlatt gains enlightenment from Chodorow's insights, she equally draws upon Adrienne Rich's critique of Chodorow's theories. Rich provokes an examination of both "motherhood" and "heterosexuality" as political institutions, and Marlatt follows her example. Rich says,

Chodorow concludes that because women have women as mothers, 'the mother remains a primary internal object [*sic*] to the girl, so that heterosexual relationships are on the model of

a nonexclusive, second relationship for her, whereas for a boy they re-create an exclusive, primary relationship.' . . . Chodorow's account barely glances at the constraints and sanctions which historically have . . . obstructed or penalized women's coupling. . . . She dismisses lesbian existence with the comment that 'lesbian relationships do tend to re-create mother-daughter emotions and connections, but most women are heterosexual' (implied: more mature, having developed beyond the mother-daughter connections?). She then adds: 'This heterosexual preference and taboos on homosexuality, in addition to the objective economic dependence on men, make the option of primary sexual bonds with other women unlikely'. ("Compulsory" 33)

Rich condemns Chodorow's failure to question heterosexuality, thereby perpetuating heterosexuality as "normal." Chodorow notes societal pressure through economic and moral sanctions against homosexuality, but she doesn't question inherent injustice in this discrimination. Chodorow observes the common existence of strong lesbian relationships, and our natural basis in early child development, but she doesn't suggest societal change to accept lesbian relationships. Chodorow also doesn't comment on her alarming claim that our "sexuality suffers" because women "may be willing to put up with limitations in their masculine lover or husband in exchange for evidence of caring and love. This can lead to the denial of more immediately felt aggressive and erotic drives" (*Reproduction* 197). As I noted in Chapter One, Marlatt voices the socioeconomic/historic reasons why lesbians become wives who deny "erotic drives." Chodorow skips over women's limited or absent sexual pleasure in heterosexual relationships and doesn't connect lesbians' consistently multiple orgasmic experiences with mother/daughter "permeable ego boundaries." Her narrow heterosexual vision mirrors Freud's and Lacan's biased phallogocentric perspectives.

Rich also criticizes Chodorow's insinuation that lesbian relations are immature. Reflecting close mother/daughter bonds, partially gained through clitoral stimulation, and not requiring penetration by the penis, lesbian sexuality may be "naturally" immature or underdeveloped. Chodorow

undervalues the mother/daughter connection, presumably because no male is present? Chodorow implies that vaginal, heterosexual behaviour is superior and normal, and that a penis and penetration are by definition necessary for "mature" sexuality. Chodorow's observation that "the option of primary sexual bonds with other women [is] unlikely" perpetuates the denigration of erotic mother/daughter bonds and encourages the heterosexual hegemony.

Marlatt writes within this continuing feminist dialogue. Her works confront and defy heterosexual biases. Marlatt depicts mother/daughter bonds and lesbian love and sexuality thriving despite patriarchal laws, scripts and biases. *Ana Historic* embodies Marlatt's investigation of the maternal influence, exemplifying woman's active agency in constructing subjectivity and gender through language. I choose to subversively read her text in support of Rich's claim that "Chodorow's account barely glances at the constraints and sanctions which historically have. . . obstructed or penalized women's coupling" ("Compulsory" 33). Marlatt emphasizes the mother's role in socializing the daughter. She explores the mother's problematic position; through love of the daughter, the mother teaches her to fit into society, thereby perpetuating socioeconomic and psychological subjugation. Marlatt implicates the matrilineal "line of inheritance" in corroborating stifling phallogentric, cultural constructs:

'pearls are perfect for you, see how they glow against your skin.' rehearsing your will in the imagination of us fully grown. retelling the history of each piece, endowing us with its continuance, grandmother to mother to daughter, the female line of inheritance - 'these will be yours when i'm gone,' because that was all you had to give. (*Ana* 57)

Marlatt condemns the mother's role in willing the daughter to relive and perpetuate woman's suffocating role in patriarchal society. Marlatt's life and writings inscribe a new will, a new desire for active agency and subjectivity. Julia Kristeva claims women's new "will" rejects *sacrifice*:

The new generation of women is showing that its major social

concern has become the socio-symbolic contract as a sacrificial contract. . . . they are forced to experience this sacrificial contract against their will. ("Women's" 200)

Ina's life is one of sacrifice and forced submission to patriarchal domination. Hysterical, near suicidal death, trapped in a claustrophobic marriage, she still trains her daughter to accept the same fate. As Marlatt retells "the history of each piece," she profoundly analyzes a mother's role in constructing her daughter's future perspectives. It is a sad commentary on a mother's life if "all" she has to give her daughter are "pearls," false adornment to lure and attract male attention.

Ana Historic must be read in cognizance of autobiographical facts, such as Marlatt's real mother's "sacrificial contract," her retreat from society, and her early death. Marlatt says, "she withdrew into chronic depression and hypochondria" ("Difference" 191). Marlatt's mother, and Annie's mother in *Ana Historic*, both give in to culturally-induced fears and patriarchal erasure; both acquiesce and escape to absence, non-feeling, and death. Marlatt's writings create and will space for women to realize choices exist; she opens up multiple realities and life scripts.

Marlatt does not save her readers from the teenager's anguish in the troubled relationship with her mother. Repetitive direct address to the mother, and the immediacy of Marlatt's language, make us consciously live through and connect with Annie's experiences. Many details harshly reveal and critique the mother's role in socializing the female child. The mother consciously teaches play-acting and subservience to the male establishment. Learning proper "feminine" behaviour can be a repressive and controlling act; "blocks and stops" warp Annie's innocent desires:

all that you inherited you'd pushed onto me. a roundabout word for blocks and stops. it wasn't control but repression they were after when they taught that. . . . - the mothers, the inheritance of the mothers. you taught me a lot. you taught me the uneasy hole in myself and how to cover it up - cover girl, the great cover-story women inherit in fashion and makeup, you

taught me how i was supposed to look, the feminine act. (60-1)

Marlatt reveals the mother's role in passing on to daughters "the feminine act," the need to be seductive and solicit the male gaze. Marlatt does not flinch from exposing the heterosexual societal requirement that "normal" women must "act" a part, practice deception and censorship of our bodies, behaviour and thoughts. "Cover girl" and "cover-story" bring to mind Adrienne Rich's discourse on *Lies, Secrets and Silence*. "You taught me the uneasy hole in myself" implicates the mother in inculcating female bodily/sexual shame; it also suggests the mother complicitly precipitates her daughter's sense of emptiness, lack, helplessness, and self-denial.

Marlatt discussed with Janice Williamson the difficulties of the mother/daughter bond, the problem of the mother fostering female denial:

the mother herself is ambivalent towards her daughter; she wants to be nurturing, she wants her daughter to have everything she didn't have, but at the same time she's raising her daughter to accept the limitations of being a woman in a patriarchal society. ("Sounding" 48)

Marlatt articulates the major societal conformation that perpetuates compulsory heterosexuality and women's internalized inferiority. The mother "wants her daughter to have everything she didn't have." She trains her daughter to be subservient to men, but expects her to have a more liberated life. The mother kills herself in psychological turmoil, but she expects her daughter to play out the same deadly marital script.

"The inheritance of the mothers" evokes the historical process of women's repression, the process which Marlatt's writing enters into and "opens up." Marlatt demonstrates how the mother's language and behaviour construct the female child's shame for her body and distance from self:

that child, one with her body. not yet riven, not split into two - the self and the body that betrays the self. bleeding. . . . in a hushed voice, 'women's trouble.' that body that defeats the self. the body, not even your body. split off, schizophrenic, suffering hysteric malfunction. all of this contained, unspoken, but sounded in the shame with which you

handed me my first box of pads. (Ana 89)

Women's experiences are repressed, "hushed" or "contained, unspoken"; the body "betrays" and "defeats" the "self." In this scenario, it seems impossible to imagine desire, and even moreso to enact erotic feelings. Such patriarchal language constructs, frames and distorts women's experience of life. Marlatt critiques these complicit disguises and lies:

looking smart was part of your identity. . . . framed by a phrase that judges (virgin / tramp), sized up in a glance, objectified. that's what history offers. . . . caught between despair at being nothing ('just' a mother, 'just' a wife - faceless in, as you used to say, 'a thankless job') and the endless effort to live a lie (the loveable girl in the Lovable Bra, the Chanel femme fatale ...) how measure up? (Ana 57)

The ellipses after "femme fatale" literally inscribe the absence and self-alienation experienced when we live "a lie." Marlatt profoundly rejects being "faceless," literally defaced or discredited; at the same time, she ridicules the masculine objectification, fragmentation, and reduction of women to breasts and bra size. She clearly condemns patriarchal reduction of women to appearance, and the male judgemental power that can denigrate the mother/wife experience. She juxtaposes historic, cultural restrictions of women to the home with the inherent devaluation of such labels as "just a mother." Marlatt provokes new scripts by exploring the mother/daughter bonds and understanding the mother's trapped situation. Her writing and self-analysis process creates/births forgiveness and love for her mother.

In what Elaine Marks labels "lesbian intertextuality," many lesbians articulate the devastating, lingering effects of a mother's acquiescence to patriarchal oppression, and the inherent double denial/marginalization of lesbian existence. Chrystos, a native American lesbian poet, condemns her mother's collusive perpetuation of the restrictive supportive female role. Aptly evoking *Not Vanishing*, she notes the limitations of "we women trained / from birth to be decorative / to be amiable / to nurture" (59).

Mary Daly is a lesbian precursor to Marlatt's critique of onerous, patriarchal society. She stresses an awareness of ideological construction in language. Daly records devastating historical and cultural perpetuation of woman's oppression and suppression. In *Gyn/Ecology* Daly notes medical, social misogynic practices in North American society, reflected here by Ina's shock treatment. Daly details the mother's inescapable but guilty role. Daly says, "deceptive myths are acted out over and over again in performances that draw the participants into emotional complicity" (109).

In *Ana Historic*, Marlatt acutely articulates the mother's complicit role in acting out "deceptive myths" and constructing her daughter's split from self. Ina defines "the curse, the blood, the pangs of labour as the punishment for Eve's original sin" (87). Marlatt clearly exposes the destructive role Christianity plays in constructing women's subservience, in repressing women's experience of body and desire as evil and a "sin." The mother teaches her daughter the "truth" of women's inferiority based on a patriarchal "myth" - "Eve's original sin." Patriarchy trains women to pass on the inheritance of hating and devaluing our body and experiences: "the truth is, that's woman's lot. it's what you learn to accept, like bleeding and hysterectomies, like intuition and dizzy spells - all the ways we don't fit into a man's world" (*Ana* 79). Annie and Marlatt write new truths; they joyously experience menstruation and sexuality in a world where women's lived experience and physical realities do fit and are real.

In *Ana Historic*, Ina expresses her own fears and ambiguous feelings toward both life and sexuality to her daughter Annie. Her words articulate dire warnings which hint at Freudian "hysteria" and women denying desire:

but don't go near the water we who say 'yes, but' - who
know the lure and the trap. who are daughter and mother, both.
it is the world outside my door which looks at times insane
and exceedingly dangerous. (78)

The mother's paranoid words produce fear and confusion in her daughter.

The words "yes, but" inscribe woman's role in heterosexual relationships as a "lure" and "trap." Marriage metaphorically traps the woman like a caught and caged bird; suggestively, masculine authority prescribes and limits women's voice and actions. For women, the lure of economic and social security can become a destructive trap. Marlatt duplicitly portrays sexuality as "water," a desired place to experience, but, in heterosexual relations, a potentially deadly site for drowning and losing one's "self" completely. The mother's negative language creates an "insane" world.

Annie's mother/daughter relations re-call Chodorow's observations that a growing girl's "experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries" (*Reproduction* 169). In *Ana Historic*, Annie understands the double sexual message behind her mother's warnings. At the same time, due to her mother's mental breakdown, she knows she must mother her mother, be "daughter and mother, both" (*Ana* 78). Marlatt demonstrates the inextricability of the private and the public; the world both inside and "outside" the family door appears "insane" and "dangerous." Reality, viewed by Annie through her mother's perspective, is frighteningly harsh.

The growing hysteria uncovered in Ina's life, combined with details of Annie's, Angie's, and Ana's socially imprisoning and restricted lives, complexly critiques culturally inscribed marital roles - roles forced upon women or which women are coerced and "lured" to adopt. Annie's lesbian solution, and Ana's imagined relationship with Birdie, avoid these deadly patriarchal lures and traps. The aware reader doesn't visualize either Ana or Annie committing suicide, due to their active agency and self control.

Prescriptive roles for women may potentially result in a psychological reaction of complete withdrawal and finally death. Ina's hysterical symptoms of silence and despair evoke Daly's discourse; institutionalized violence against women appears to be prevalent. Annie recalls Ina's slow withdrawal into nothing. She harshly exposes patriarchal control literally

enacted in medical shock treatment: the message is - woman is "lost":

Harald brought you home, he brought home a new fear (who's there?) that no one was there at all. Mum: mum. wandering around in some lost place, incapable of saying what it was they'd done to you. under the role or robe was no one. (148)

The "who's there" echoes my discussion in Chapter Two on writing and loving as journeys to reclaim the lost self. *Ana Historic* opens with Annie seriously questioning her self and subjectivity: ("who's there"). At the end, in a lesbian relationship, Annie experiences the "luxury of being" (153). In the present mother/daughter context, the child has a "new fear (who's there?) that no one was there at all" (148). In light of Chodorow's theorized close mother/daughter bond, Annie's childhood sense of self is doubly threatened; she fears her mother's absence, her ability to speak and be present. Marlatt presents a simple psychological scenario - if "no one was there" to be her mother, her own presence is in question.

Marlatt relates this to her experiences with her own mother: "I often felt that my mother in particular wasn't even really here. I mean she couldn't or didn't see the place as it really was. . . . I wanted to really be here" (Arnason, "There's" 32). Marlatt records a woman's state which is rapidly changing, but her mother had to fit patriarchal, limiting roles. The image embodies psychic violence; the woman/mother is "mum," and literally silent, "lost" and wandering on a patriarchally-designed stage. The mother acts in a script where "no one" can exist under patriarchally-directed "roles" and "robes." The analogy of writing as a journey or search for the self echoes in the mother's "wandering around in some lost place." Marlatt's writing re-claims her mother's space, and inscribes the basis for Marlatt's own voice of dissent. Re-membering her mother, she re-calls their bonds, and writes/births both of them into being and reality.

Annie continues the shocking tale of patriarchal violence,

they erased whole parts of you, shocked them out, overloaded the circuits so you couldn't bear to remember. re-member. . .

. i hovered beside you, addressed you as if i were your mother, dressed you in rags of patience, comfort. (Ana 148-9)

These lines depict silence, play-acting, and death. Marlatt juxtaposes shock treatment erasing "whole parts" of one woman's life and memories with patriarchal historical erasure of all women's experience. Marlatt bears into being the parts which the mother "couldn't bear to remember." Her retrospective journey through the mother/daughter experience and her writing process re-create her mother's life and create her own reality.

In this scene Marlatt represents the common women's experience of reversing the mother/daughter roles. Annie imagines saying to her mother: "[I] addressed you as if i were your mother, dressed you in rags of patience, comfort" (Ana 149). The daughter assumes responsibility for nurturing support of her mother. In imagination and in writing Marlatt transgresses cultural prohibitions against reunion with the mother.

She critiques sociocultural "orders" which warp women's existence and desires. Annie names patriarchally-emblematic doctors as the force she writes against - for her mother, for herself, and for all women: "that fiction, that lie that you can't change the ending! it's already pre-ordained, prescribed - just what doctor ordered - in the incontrovertible logic of cause and effect" (Ana 147). The mother's "ending" is death; Marlatt's writings bring her mother's experiences back to life, and offer life choices which may "change the ending" for other women. She affirms the need for women to birth ourselves into existence and to actively remember the past. Marlatt reveals the amnesia forced on the mother in the story, and Annie's difficulty in putting the pieces of the past together. Adrienne Rich, in "Resisting Amnesia: History and Personal Life," writes of the need for "Breaking silences": "history is made of people like us. . . . we may find ourselves shut out from our community of origin, as so many lesbians and gay men have been. . . . Historical amnesia is

starvation of the imagination" (145). Rich and Marlatt imaginatively revise history, create spaces and valorize the "mother" as "origin."

"[T]hat lie that you can't change the ending! it's already pre-ordained, prescribed" (*Ana* 147) inscribes Marlatt's belief in language's power to transform society. She links the mother's body and language - "a history of verbal relations (a family tree, if you will) that has preceded us and given us the world we live in" (*Touch* 46). Marlatt integrates her mother's and language's role in constructing her world. She assumes agency and changes the "prescribed" "ending" by continually exploring both roles, and re-membering into reality the strong mother/daughter bond. Marlatt says memory seems to operate "like a murmur in the flesh. . . . There is in memory a very deep subliminal connection with the mother because what we first of all remember is this huge body, which is our first landscape" (Williamson, "Sounding" 49). She re-members this maternal "connection."

Multiple meanings of the mother "lost" and "mum" imply women's place in language. Early in the novel, a two-year-old Annie confusedly deals with the meaning of her mother's truly monstrous and destructive silence:

you said in a low and distant voice i didn't recognize (i did but i knew i wasn't meant to): your Mummy's gone. i burst into tears. don't be silly darling, i'm here, you see how silly you are - as if saying it makes it so. but it does, it did. you had gone in the moment you thought to say it. . . . and now you've made your words come true, making it so by an act of will. (*Ana* 11)

The "distant voice" inscribes patriarchal separation of woman from loving woman, mother from daughter. The child only conceives her mother's death and separation as a possibility when it is verbalized; "saying it makes it so" puts into practical experience Marlatt's theory: "Putting the living body of language together means putting the world together" (*Touch* 49).

Marlatt's Ina literally enacts and perpetuates Freudian and Lacanian theories of mother/daughter separation. Ina deliberately constructs her

own absence. Annie imagines thinking about her mother: "separating yourself as you stood there, making what wasn't, what couldn't be, suddenly real" (*Ana* 11). By analogy, to be "lost," to be absent, to be nothing, is the space/role prescribed by patriarchal, heterosexual society - not only for women, but doubly for lesbians. Language constructs this "truth." Language is reality, the "suddenly real." Marlatt's language "building blocks" birth her mother's life and her own life into reality.

In a Williamson interview, Marlatt delves deeper into the psychology of this moment; she explains how language constructs absence and presence:

I think that's a very primal experience to have the mother turn into this person who denies that she is the mother figure, that she is the one who is always there, always nurturing, always patient, that figure the child counts on as some kind of basis for existence. It's a very early lesson in language, because she is saying it, language makes it real and her absence is suddenly there as a frightening possibility. ("Sounding" 50)

For the child, language frames the thinking process. This evokes Marlatt's theory that language "sustains and contains us. . . . it bears us as we are born in it, into cognition" (*Touch* 45). Marlatt articulates the core (Kore) of the mother/daughter bond; she calls her mother "that figure the child counts on as some kind of basis for existence" ("Sounding" 50). The mother's presence, like language, predicates existence and reality.

The mother's destructive act of death cryptically embodies women's relation to language. Marlatt suggests a psychologically-numbing and containing in using patriarchal language. Word associations link women's self-destruction, death, imprisonment, and psychological paralysis: "and now you've made your words come true, making it so by an act of will (despair). gone. locked up in a box. frozen" (*Ana* 11). The coffin, the "box. frozen," multiply relates the site (sight) of her mother's absence with the daughter's need to lock up her erotic desire for her mother/other women, and culturally induced sexual frigidity (recognizing the "box" as

a patriarchal denigration and reduction of the vagina.) Marlatt conflates language's complex role in constructing life experiences with Freudian and Lacanian psychological prescriptions. Annie consciously resists separation of mother and child: "pulling through. the worst is that it's up to me to pull you through. this crumbling apart of words. 'true, real.' you who is you or me. she. part struck off from me. apart. separated" (11).

Here, Marlatt evokes Chodorow's theory that the female child retains "preoedipal attachments to their mother" and "their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries" (*Reproduction* 169). Annie speaks mother/daughter merging and separation: "you who is you or me. she. part struck off from me. apart. separated" (*Ana* 11). Relevant as a gloss to this passage, in "Women's Time" Julia Kristeva claims,

Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech. . . . The arrival of the child, on the other hand, leads the mother into the labyrinths of an experience that, without the child, she would only rarely encounter: love for an other. (206)

In *Ana Historic* Annie expresses her "experience of self" in relation to her mother; she reflects Kristeva's "redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other." She re-verses physiological maternal processes; the mother is "she. part struck off from me," rather than the child having existence as an extension of the mother's body. Patriarchal ideology and "patriarchally-loaded language" prescribe her separation from her mother; both mother and daughter are "locked up in a box. frozen" by societal prescriptions (11). The daughter must write the mother into being, must "pull" her "through"; this passage also recalls *Ana* and the community of women who assist Jeannie's birthing process.

Annie contemplates the early period in her life when she felt whole and not split into parts, before she experienced societal construction by

such psychoanalytic traps as the Oedipus complex. Here, Marlatt confronts the Lacanian notion that woman must split from the mother, and the imaginary, in order to enter the patriarchal symbolic world of language. She evokes the loss involved in this split of one woman from another:

she, my Lost Girl. . . what i did when i was she who did not feel separated or split, her whole body trembling with one intent behind the knife. and it was defense (as they say in every war). no. it was trespassing across an old boundary, exposing my fear before it could paralyse me - before i would end up as girls were meant to be. (11-12)

"Girls were meant to be" split from other women, subservient to men, and "lost." "Lost" may mean lost on the journey to self, lost from identity and community support among women, or it may mean the complete loss of selfhood in death - the way Ina achieves absence. Marlatt rejects these scripts of loss. Trespassing "across an old boundary," she articulates mother/daughter bonding and inscribes Chodorow's "permeable ego boundaries." She crosses boundaries between the imaginary and symbolic.

Annie explicitly and erotically re-members when "i was she. . . her whole body trembling with one intent" (*Ana* 11-12). Annie's words literally put Marlatt's theories on language into practice: "i was she" exemplifies "shoving out the walls of taboo and propriety, kicking syntax" (*Touch* 49). She breaks "taboo" suggesting both lesbian sexuality and permeable mother/daughter bonds. Marlatt re-claims her right as a woman to investigate and name her childhood development. She also subverts the "standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority, subject through verb to object" (47), assuming agency and making herself subject of her discourse. She circles around her own and her mother's past and present experiences, sensually records their "repeated cycles," and destabilizes patriarchal "dominance . . . hierarchies and differences (exclusion)" (47). Marlatt subversively makes "our multiplicity whole and even intelligible" (46).

Annie literally takes up the knife/pen and refuses to "end up as

girls were meant to be" (Ana 12). She confuses the role of mother/daughter by referring to herself as "my Lost Girl," implying she is mother to herself. Annie assumes active female agency while playing the assertive masculine role: "do, do. she my Lost Girl, my Heroine, wanted something to do not something that might be done to them" (Ana 12-13). She names herself a "Heroine"; Marlatt subsumes masculine power to name and to act.

In the same scene, Marlatt inscribes the mother's complicity in the patriarchal denigration of women. She exposes language's role in gender construction. Ina criticizes her daughter's spirit and her behaviour: "tomboy, her mother said. tom, 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" (13). Annie is her own Heroine. She actively refuses patriarchal erasure and passive, submissive absence. She refuses to be trapped in her mother's oppressive, dispiriting script.

Annie's memories clearly support Chodorow's theories on the primary bond between the mother and child. Annie speaks the ambivalent and sensual emotions involved in separation from the mother, : "my mother (whose) . . . voice. . . . soft breast under blue wool dressing gown, tea breath, warm touch . . . gone. I-na" (10). "I-na" suggests that the "I" is negated, the "I" is not. Fixed patriarchal positions prescribe lesbian paralysis and silence, women's denial of love for women. Avoiding this silence, Marlatt articulates exciting fluid connections with the mother, other women, and the imaginary: "soft breasts," "tea breath," and "warm touch" sensuously exude mutually nurturing mother/daughter bonding, evoke lesbian sexuality. The word sounds "initiate thought by a process of association"; recalling the warmth of motherly love, the reader experiences "a pulling toward. a 'liking'" for the love enacted (*Touch* 45). Marlatt pulls the reader into experiencing the loss of mother love, and the desire to retain close bonds between women. The "warm touch" echoes in Marlatt's title *Touch To My*

Tongue. Experience of language metaphorically resembles the nurturing "warm touch" and "soft breasts" of mother and lesbian lover; she conflates memories of the "feel" of the mother's body and making "sense" through language: "the 'feel' of words has something to do with the feel of that body, of the contours of early memory" (Williamson, "Sounding" 49).

Marlatt theorizes that the daughter is giving birth to the mother through her writing. At the same time Marlatt blurs the mother/lesbian lover experience. Annie thinks, "Ina i would give birth to, enter her into the world. but it is Zoe's hand that rests beside mine on the table. . . . as if i see myself through her eyes - stuck in the unspoken, unenacted - half born" (132). Marlatt presents the pre-Oedipal stage, where woman can still recognize and see woman, free from masculine erasure, but is still inarticulate. Not to have language is to be "half born." At this point in the novel, both Annie and Ina are similarly inarticulate. Zoe's patient love prompts Annie to birth/write herself, her mother, and Ana into being.

Marlatt foregrounds the interplay of reality and imagination with the pervasive ongoing cultural erasure of women's bodies and experiences:

the real history of women, Zoe says, is unwritten because it runs through our bodies: we give birth to each other. . . . we give birth to boy babies and men make men of them as fast as they can. . . . it's women imagining all that women could be that brings us into the world. (131)

Active imagination can make women's historical and present experiences a reality. By analogy, Zoe declares that woman's body is essential to actual birthing into being, and to self-discovery. Accepting bodily sensations and experiences, Zoe enacts Marlatt's theorized epistemological priority of the body. Zoe names and claims the maternal "link" between "the body's physicality" and "verbal communication (contact, sharing)" (*Touch* 46).

Julia Kristeva comments on the maternal relationship and language:

by giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same

continuity differentiating itself. She thus actualizes the homosexual fact of motherhood, through which a woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory. . . . *The homosexual-maternal facet* is a whirl of words, a complete absence of meaning and seeing; it is feeling, displacement, rhythm, sound, flashes, and fantasied clinging to the maternal body. (*Desire* 239-40)

In *Touch To My Tongue*, Marlatt quotes Kristeva's thoughts on the pre-Symbolic, pre-verbal, sensuous world of rhythm, tone, and color. For Marlatt, Kristeva's semiotics facilitate expression of "the un verbalized body" and immediate sensations (*Touch* 48). Semiotics explain connections of sound and rhythm to the meaning-making process. Associated with the bodily contact with the mother, semiotics precedes the Symbolic paternal order of language which separates subject from mother, and woman from her experience and desires. Marlatt links Kristeva's semiotics with "the call so many feminist writers in Quebec have issued for a language that returns us to the body, a woman's body and the largely, presyntactic, postlexical field it knows" (*Touch* 48). Kristeva's semiotics voice the importance of pre-verbal experience and instinctual desires. Kristeva values women's culturally repressed maternal/bodily "primary processes"; she claims that "milk" and "tears" are "common" sources of nonverbal signification:

they are the metaphors of non-speech, of a 'semiotics' that linguistic communication does not account for. The Mother and her attributes, evoking sorrowful humanity, thus become representatives of a 'return of the repressed' in monotheism. They re-establish what is non-verbal and show up as the receptacle of a signifying disposition that is closer to so-called primary processes. ("Stabat" 174)

In a Williamson interview, Marlatt laments the absence of "primary processes" in writing; one central aspect of her theoretical connection of language and the erotic body entails articulating the socially repressed. Depicting two desiring women's bodies endlessly meeting in literature, Marlatt displays the never-ending orgasmic process of writing presence:

Desire as moving towards, and specifically moving towards that

arrival point of being together. . . . There's always this longing to go where she is, but also there is this conjuring of the actual lovemaking which is a presence that is triumphant because it combats the absence of yearning. . . . It's not 'simply a representation of transgression' because that overlooks desire which is ongoing in this movement toward the other woman's body - it fails to be erased finally when that movement is concluded, it's never concluded, that's the point with desire, especially women's desire. ("Sounding" 51)

Marlatt frequently compresses her ongoing engagement with the influence of her mother in her life with her journey to wholeness through coming to love and coming to language. Alice Jardine's observations also support Marlatt's strategy. Jardine says, "For Lacanian theorists, it is the subject's never-completed break away from the holistic space and rhythm of the maternal body into the time and syntax of patriarchal language that brings about the recognition of sexual difference" (*Gynesis* 106-7). The "never-completed break away" reflects "movement" - the circular mother/daughter/lesbian continuum - and connects to Marlatt's theory: "language thus speaking (i.e., inhabited) relates us, 'takes us back' to where we are" (*Touch* 49). Jardine speaks of the "non- or not-yet-subjects who are seen as closest to the presubjective, maternal space" (*Gynesis* 107). Language takes Marlatt "back" to her mother and her lover.

Audre Lorde sensuously connects mother and her experience of language:

bubbles up from chaos that you had to anchor with words. . . . I really do believe I learned this from my mother. . . . The important value of nonverbal communication, beneath language. ("Interview" 715)

Lorde's writing exploration of her past evokes Marlatt's search for lost and hidden connections with her mother and her self. Lorde parallels Marlatt's examination of the interrelationship between mother/daughter bonds and language. Lorde's narrator claims, "I am a reflection of my mother's secret poetry as well as of her hidden angers" (*Zami* 32). Both Lorde and Marlatt articulate the mother's crucial role in constructing their childhood and adult relationships to language and to love.

In *How Hug a Stone*, Marlatt examines her complex and troubling relationship with her mother. The speaker articulates the meaning this mother/daughter relationship has for her writing:

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

Marlatt posits the mother/daughter bond as the "ground and source," a precursor to "all possible relations." She displaces the Freudian Oedipus Complex and incest prohibitions which recognize only father, mother, and son. Marlatt transgresses cultural prohibitions against reunion with the mother. She values the "possible" relationship between two women, the mother and daughter, the lesbian lovers. Marlatt articulates the mother's role in creating space - in historic time and in psychosocial relational space: "the space after the colon, the pause (between the words) of all possible relations" (73). Re-claiming her "space" as woman, lesbian lover, and mother, she refuses silence. She echoes "ground" while provoking a feminist "revaluing" and "re-visioning" of society: "they're essential for a woman's coming to speak out of her hitherto absent body, absent desire, and muted voice within a public context. To do this she has to valorize the ground out of which she speaks" (Carr, "Between" 106). Marlatt grounds herself materially and historically, citing/siting the female body and the maternal body of language as spaces inside which and out of which she writes. Frank Davey builds a causal connection between "repressed" woman and historical silence. He notes Marlatt's resistance to the "gaps":

The 'ruined' circle of Avebury is posited as the repressed female story, as exemplifying in its 'lithic' silence and fragmentary structure the existence of woman's story in the gaps, contradictions and fractures in masculine discourse. The 'lost' daughter finds her own story in the 'lostness' of both her mother and the wild dancer of the stone circle. (45)

However, Davey perpetuates women's "silence." He finds Marlatt's approach

"problematic (as) the narrator. . . continues to effect what power she has through words. . . . The reader remains in language rather than with some 'first love that teaches a possible world'" (45). Is the empowerment of words a male prerogative? Are women to be limited to physical actions, not words? Marlatt's writings refute "the gaps, contradictions and fractures in masculine discourse" (45), a discourse which Davey well represents.

In *How Hug A Stone*, the narrator evokes a sensuous coming into being through naming the self. She can "stand in my sandals & jeans unveiled, . . . dance out names at the heart of where we are lost, hers first of all, wild mother dancing in the waves" (78-9). "Dancing" evokes the rhythms of lovemaking, the rhythms of the waves, the poetic rhythms in the artistic process; "dancing" also suggests the sensuous interdependency of movement and music, sight and sound. Joyously dancing "out names" and unveiling desires, Marlatt proffers words for women to articulate our experiences.

She privileges her mother by dancing out her name "first of all." Feminist discourse claims territory so that fewer women need experience being "lost" or must experience patriarchal denial of our past losses. Dancing words "at the heart of where we are lost" (emphasis mine), Marlatt metaphorically re-claims women's body and emotions; she also inscribes women's stories into the heart or core of history and present reality. Other women may read Marlatt, walk in Marlatt's shoes, "stand in [her] sandals," and dance into connection with her experience and her mother's.

Marlatt echoes Kristeva words, "estranged from language, women are visionaries, dancers who suffer as they speak" ("Oscillation" 166). As Marlatt's words "dance," she assumes the visionary, prophetic role; she tells crucial stories which speak a new "possible world" for women. "Wild

mother dancing in the waves" embodies Marlatt's fluid, rhythmical style and alludes to the amniotic bliss in the womb. Writing her experience, she defies rigid, prescribed heterosexuality. Marlatt's pleasure in sexually/textually "mothering" other women's reality appears in "waves," in the erotic repetitions and orgasmic pulses echoing throughout her works.

How Hug a Stone evokes the politics of writing, the transformative power of language to subvert traditional narrative structures. Marlatt writes, "the old slow pulse beyond word become, under flesh, mutter of stone, *stane*, *stei-ing* power" (75). Maternal "*stei-ing* power" inscribes strength through women's connections. The erotic pleasures in the cyclical arousal of lesbian sexual desire and the rhythm of childbirth parallel the pleasures of using language; each practice births women's empowerment.

The "slow pulse beyond word" and "under flesh" erotically embody maternal experience and lesbian sexual arousal. These phrases transgress biblical damnation of homosexual activity as well as biblical authority of masculine naming: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. . . . All things were made by him. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (*John* 1). Marlatt refuses to participate in repressive biblical sexism; as a woman, she makes the "word" "flesh" and claims women's agency and power to speak. Marlatt's works embody what Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa name the "physical" realities of our lives: "a theory in the flesh. . . fuse[s] to create a politic born of necessity. . . [women gain subjectivity by] naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words" (23). In another example of lesbian writers' intertextuality, Phyllis Webb connects with Marlatt's *What Matters*: "growing, birth / of the world / feathery / flesh or love / what matter?"

(*Vision Tree* 137). Readers can create meaning from the "field where words mutually attract each other, fused by connection" (*Touch* 48). Through communications "beyond word," Marlatt tacitly interrelates a material body (erotic "flesh") and the corporeality of language with a "mutter," with a mother's "stei-ing" (staying) power. "Beyond word" recalls Kristeva's semiotics, and Marlatt's "largely unverbilized. . . field" (*Touch* 48).

Nancy Chodorow also posits an erotic element in the girl's struggle for a sense of relationship to the mother, and a preoccupation with "mother-child" issues (*Reproduction* 168). Marlatt plays upon this erotic element, recognizing "imaginary / sensory language of the Mother as matrix of being-in-relation"; she articulates relational experience in language and celebrates language's potential for birthing multiple meanings:

in a writing that has to concentrate first on language, questioning the formulated, the already-said every step of the way, form comes second. . . [it is] a struggle that is one with the struggle to subvert the rational / lawful language of the Father as patriarch & reinstate or recreate the imaginary / sensory language of the Mother as matrix of being-in-relation. if the language is one of multiple meanings rather than the one (right) meaning, then the form it takes will tend to be open, to come into being swimming upstream against the fixed. ("Writing in" 67)

Marlatt's metaphoric orgasmic coming in waves of thoughts and writing overflows the boundaries of "fixed" patriarchal positions; she reclaims pre-Symbolic sensory relationships with language and with the mother. She articulates the continuum of woman-to-woman loving experience and writes specific lesbian eroticism in her desire to "recreate the imaginary" and struggle against "the already-said" and against oppressive patriarchal laws. Marlatt engages postmodern notions of the relational nature of being always-in-process and in language. In an interview with me in May 1991 Marlatt suggested, "the self is not a unity. It is fractured

and multifaceted. 'I' is always constituted by the construct of writing - it changes as the context changes. Different 'I's' may be in conflict."

Marlatt values maternal roles because they offer life and a dream of multiple possibilities, just as "language is one of multiple meanings." Marlatt critiques the patriarchal reduction of woman to physical sexual attributes alone, to restrictive roles of either madonna or whore:

mother is not desire but the registered mark of womanhood, initiated in a system of exchange, she is the visible mark, the easy drupe, dowl, doude (slut). 'slit.' once picked. in the monoculture. she was dreaming babies sliding out, dreaming inside out. the maker and the made, re-maid. dreaming with what was bigger than her. . . she wasn't al(1)one & the mothers those other multiples reaching out their hands their arms & minds a network for her coming into doubleness a blooming on & on. ("An Economy of Flowers" 34).

Marlatt defiantly makes female anatomy, the "slit," visible. She celebrates the continuum of women's experiences - birthing women and loving women: "their arms & minds [form] a network for her coming." The "maker and the made," she is both mother and daughter, writer and written about, constructed in society and powerfully constructing society through her agency as writer. Her mother constructed her reality when she was a child; now, as an adult, she can re-member her mother's existence and probe her influence. "Arms & minds a network" conveys Marlatt's belief that the reality of women's sense of self must be articulated within the integration of body and mind, and within a nurturing community of women. "She wasn't al(1)one" (all one) conveys women's psychological/emotional fragmentation, and the sense that women are not alone if in a community.

Marlatt compresses her movement beyond the pervasive patriarchal mind/body dichotomy with her transgression of the patriarchal "system of exchange." She configures loving lesbian relationships outside this sexual economy and articulates lesbian realities which move beyond "monoculture." Marlatt celebrates the possibilities of female dreams, transgressing

Freud's refusal to consider either woman's anatomy or our dreams as worth perceiving. Marlatt muses on Kristeva's observations: "dream language and unconscious. . . the biological and social program of the species would be ciphered in confrontation with language, exposed to its influence, but independent from it" (*Touch* 48). She speaks the enabling "network" and connections between women, and the creative nurture of love. "Coming into doubleness" erotically provokes woman's coming into being through maternal experience, our sexual economy of orgasms without end, and plural visions and multiple, growing possible roles in life. Luxuriant "flowers blooming on & on" multiply promise women life, pulsing sexual pleasure, and voice.

In one of the many echoes which incrementally enrich Marlatt's interwoven works, "she was dreaming babies sliding out" reverberates in *Ana Historic*; Ana observes "a massive syllable of slippery flesh slide out the open mouth" (126). Marlatt's "slippery" voice births or slides "out" into view both lesbian and maternal experience. Her writings make dreams, mother/daughter bonds, and lesbian love a reality. Phyllis Webb once again provides an illuminating intertextual discourse; she writes, "my own name fascinates me / with its slippery syllables. / I live in a mysterious book" (*Vision* 154). Writing the self, if lesbian and therefore marginal, demands a certain "slippery" and playful use of language. "Slippery" equally doubly connotes the fluid sexual arousal of writing and sexuality.

In this chapter I explored Marlatt's maternal metaphor for her relationship to language. I concentrated on her complex exploration of her experience of the mother/daughter bonds, and the analogy she creates with her experience of the body of language. Profoundly critiquing pervasive patriarchal psychoanalytic theoretical negation of mother/daughter bonds and experiences, Marlatt corresponds to other feminist theorists. The next chapter extends my discussion to Marlatt's complex interplay of the erotic experience of language and mother/daughter/lesbian lover relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR: 'HER ON MY TONGUE. . . WE GIVE PLACE, GIVING WORDS,
GIVING BIRTH, TO EACH OTHER': BIRTH OF SELF THROUGH THE (M)OTHER/LOVER

When Annie enters Zoe's house, and meets Zoe's female friends, she is overwhelmed by "this world of connection. . . . their shared life" (Ana 151). These words recall Marlatt's statement: "All my poetics are, is connections" (Bowering, "Given" 46). The novel concludes with Annie's empowerment through language and through lesbian love. She can finally articulate and enact her desire for another woman, Zoe, and write them both into the story: "her on my tongue. . . . we give place, giving words, giving birth, to each other - she and me. you. hot skin writing skin" (152-153). With "you," Marlatt gestures to her readers, provoking lesbian community. In this chapter I address the analogy Marlatt creates between the erotic pleasures of/in language and lesbian love. My analysis proceeds through her views on the corporeality of language, erotics, subjectivity, perspective and the gaze, the imaginary, historical tradition, and memory.

"The body's physicality" informs her language (*Touch* 46). Implicit in the words "Her on my tongue," Annie, Zoe (and Marlatt) birth each other through erotic words and sexual experience. A mutually ecstatic "her on my tongue" occurs physically in lesbian lovemaking and metaphorically in lesbian speaking/writing/translating/collaboration. Marlatt provokes the nurturing continuum of a mother nursing child, lesbian oral sexuality, and life birthed into being through loving use of language. "Giving words" evoke Marlatt's writings; they are gifts which allow other women to "be."

In *Touch To My Tongue*, lips both speak and make love, as two lesbian lovers become one: "(i am coming to you. . . . here i am you) lips working towards undoing (*dhei*, female, sucking and suckling, fecund)" (23). Words such as "female, sucking and suckling, fecund" recall women's nurturing continuum. "Here i am you" evokes reciprocity and mutual subjectivity. Repetition and desire - "i am coming to you" - recall how Marlatt connects

the "fluency" of sexuality and language; she notes "the connection between the language and the sexuality, between the two mouths. . . . it's a perfect word for women's sexuality, women coming" (Wright 4). Lesbians "come" into being through making love and writing, mingling bodily and linguistic tongues. Discussing their writing/loving collaboration, Marlatt and Warland interplay tongue and voice; they say it is difficult

to use the word collaboration with its military censure, its damning in the patriot's eyes (the Father appears here with his defining gaze, his language of law). collaboration implies that who we are collaborating with holds all the power. the lines are drawn. but perhaps it's the very subversion implicit in collaboration that i might see in our favour were we to move between the lines. when i see us as working together reciprocally, then what i see us working at is this subversion of the definitive. running on together (how I love prose). reciprocal in this, that the holes we make in such a definite body leak meaning we splash each other with, not so much working as playing in all this super-fluity, wetting ourselves with delight even, whetting our tongues, a mutual stimulation we aid and abet (entice) in each other. ("Reading" 81)

Marlatt's explicit sexual imagery interplays seductive pleasures of language and the pleasures of love. These pleasures unfold in a mutually erotic w(h)etting of tongues; orgasmic and linguistic meaning results from mutual and reciprocal stimulation. The phrase "a definitive body leak(s) meaning we splash each other with," embodies Marlatt's belief in the corporeality of language, in language's inseparability from material experience. She multiply credits her relationship with Warland: "our sexual relationship released a lot in my body. I love Betsy's work, her word fluency, in which she takes it right back to its original sexual connotation" (Wright 4). Insisting on the materiality of language, Marlatt subverts patriarchally-prescribed disembodied discourse. She integrates body and mind, inner and outer, writing and loving, public and private.

Luce Irigaray also celebrates the metaphorical meeting of linguistic and sexual lips; Marlatt's "vulva and voluble" "comes" to mind (*Touch* 46):

'equals'; she who loves, she who is loved. Closed and open,

neither ever excluding the other, they say they both love each other. Together. . . . We - you/I - are neither open or closed. . . . Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth. One is never separable from the other. . . . how can one dominate the other? Impose her voice, her tone, her meaning? (*This Sex* 209)

Marlatt and Warland speak as "equals. . . never separable." Marlatt says,

the power dynamic between us is different from a heterosexual power dynamic. . . . Other than my own self-censorship from long years of being careful with men, there were no obstacles to the expression of passion, because the passionate feeling 'runs between us'. . . and the us that it's between are two equal selves. One is not the property of the other. (Williamson, "Speaking" 26)

They "open" their lives and bodies to each other, and "use several ways of speaking" to erotically "open" up their lesbian experiences for readers.

A mutual enjoyment negates patriarchal notions of power and appropriation.

In the same interview with Janice Williamson, Marlatt says the tongue:

is the major organ which touches all the different parts of the mouth to make the different sounds - tongue as speech organ. Also, the tongue is a major organ in making love between women. . . an erotic organ. [There is an] intertwining of eroticism and speech - lovemaking as a form of organ speech, and poetry as a form of verbal speech. ("Speaking" 28)

Pamela Banting reviews Marlatt's theories on the corporeality of language, and Marlatt's analogy between verbal speech and body language/lovemaking:

Marlatt is using the word 'speech' metaphorically in order to point to the signifying capacities of the body itself. . . . As readers, we must become oriented to traces of the body in the text. We must remember that the word 'body' is just that, a word. 'Body' is no more referential to the human body than it is, for example, to the body of language. ("Translation Poetics" 251)

Banting explicates Marlatt's interplay of sexual/textual experience, and Marlatt's insistence that experience/body and articulation are interwoven.

While Marlatt sites the corporeal body as a major ground from which she speaks, she emphasizes the social and linguistic contexts which most definitely construct our bodily experience. Hélène Cixous says, "By

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" ("Laugh" 250). Morag Shiach suggests that Cixous "does not, however, equate the bodily with nature. She sees it as distinctly cultural, as caught up in representation, in language" (18). Marlatt echoes the necessary conflation of language and bodily experience: "we are truly contained within the body of our mothertongue" (*Touch* 47). As Barbara Freeman notes, "It is precisely the assumption of a non-textual body outside of language, of a linguistic domain which is not itself corporeal that Cixous's reformulation of mind-body relations in a feminine economy calls into question" (62). Marlatt theorizes that "language structures our world"; she defies patriarchal separation of body and mind, emotions and thought. Marlatt erotically interplays language and the body.

Tongue imagery, connecting erotic pleasures of voice and sexuality, features repeatedly in Marlatt's works. In "Musing With Mothertongue," she enunciates the body's relationship to language and the multiple ways we communicate with each other: "language and tongue; to utter and outer (give birth again)" (*Touch* 46). Hélène Cixous uses "tongue" metaphors to provoke action and to write women's experience into being; she claims,

If woman has always functioned 'within' man's discourse, a signifier referring always to the opposing signifier that annihilates its particular energy, puts down or stifles its very different sounds, now it is time for her to displace this 'within,' explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers, take it in, take it into her women's mouth, bite its tongue with her women's teeth, make up her own tongue, to get inside of it. And you will see how easily she will well up, from this 'within' where she was hidden and dormant, to the lips where her foams will overflow. ("Sorties" 95-6)

"Her foams will overflow" reverberates with Marlatt's sexual/textual orgasmic coming to being; she articulates and reveals Marlatt's "hidden."

In Marlatt's lines "to mouth (speak) and the mouth with which we also eat and make love" (*Touch* 46), eating, making love, and sensuous flowing

words constitute a timeless, continuous, tidal, nurturing process. Marlatt echoes this process in a poem about mutual lesbian desire and fulfilment:

eating / a kiwi at four a.m. among the sheets green slice of
cool going down easy on the tongue/ extended with desire for
you and you in me it isn't us we suck those other lips tongue
/ flesh wet wall that gives and gives whole fountains inner
mountains... desire is its way through walls swerve fingers
instinct / in you insist further persist in me too wave on
wave to that deep pool we find ourselves / in. . . (Touch 24)

Stressing the corporeality of language, and furthering her maternal metaphor, Marlatt blurs the "flesh" of the kiwi, aroused genitals, *giving* walls of the vagina and the womb, and the reader's erotic response.

Her multiple movements provoke herself and her reader to journey and "find ourselves" by way of coming into and through the lesbian lover and writing the lesbian self into being. Marlatt gives "those other lips tongue" to lesbian experience. In multiple layers of meaning, the ongoing, natural processes of lovemaking, writing, and eating contribute to lesbian recognition and propagation of self - "extended with desire." This is a repetitive process requiring "leaps" over cultural and historical walls. The "flesh wet wall that gives and gives whole fountains" ecstatically speaks pleasurable "coming" through vaginal stimulation. Marlatt directly refutes Freud's denial of vaginal sensations in women. Jane Gallop condemns Freud's insistence that "in the phallic phase, little girls only get pleasure from their clitoris and are unfamiliar with the rest of their genitalia" (69). Freud centered female sexual desire in the clitoris, thereby setting up a definite lack in comparison to the penis; Marlatt's "fountains" of sexual/textual lesbian response displace Freudian theory.

As an intertext with Marlatt, Nicole Brossard radically connects the energy created through love with lesbian empowerment through language:

The lesbian takes part in all *tongue energy* each time she finds with the tongue of another lesbian the energy of language. A lesbian is *radical* or she is not a lesbian. A lesbian who does not reinvent the word is a lesbian in the

process of disappearing. (*Aerial* 122)

In *Touch To My Tongue* Marlatt's explicit, physical inscription of lesbian desire radically defies patriarchal marginalization, censure or erasure. She presents the desiring lesbian body and lesbian subjectivity in a shared language. She conveys an ecstatic sensual celebration of two physical bodies sharing pleasure: "one my tongue burrows in, whose wild flesh opens wet, tongue seeks its nest, amative and nurturing. . . . *yu!* cry jubillant excess, your fruiting body bloom we issue into the light of, sweet, successive flesh" (23). Marlatt explains in her notes that "*yu*" is an orgasmic cry of personal sexual satisfaction; at the same time "*yu*" reciprocally implicates the other in sharing the pleasurable joy of "*you*" (36). Marlatt emphasizes mutual pleasure. As "*we issue into the light,*" together they mutually enjoy "*coming*" into being through language and through the knowledge of lesbian sexual experience (emphasis mine). For women, to physically and emotionally open up to a searching lesbian tongue provokes orgasmic coming into being. Voice and subjectivity interconnect.

Marlatt ends *Ana Historic* with a vision of lesbian love, a "luxury of being" (153). By "giving words, giving birth, to each other - she and me. you," she "leaps" patriarchal boundaries between mother/daughter/lesbian lover. She claims new territory (linguistic, emotional, socioeconomical) and redefines the possible fusion and birth of self by women loving women. Offering a choice, a lesbian script for women, she subverts heterosexual boy-meets-girl-and-gets-married scenario. Lola Tostevin criticizes this ending. She claims, "while lesbian-maternal texts are crucial in exploring the unrepresented, the unthought, it is important they not be prescriptive in their attempt to describe women's writing and lives" ("*Daphne*" 38). Her criticism fails to appreciate Marlatt's politically-motivated, deliberate, self-conscious challenge to patriarchal, heterosexual scripts. Marlatt, in "*Changing the Focus,*" emotionally notes she advised Tostevin that:

i thought the difference between herself as a heterosexual reader and myself as a lesbian writer needed to be accounted for. She wrote back that she didn't understand why she would need to account for it: "Are those boundaries that defined? That pure? Isn't your labelling somewhat presumptuous?" (128)

Marlatt comments on Tostevin's remarks: "I don't feel we can have a dialogue without her recognition of my difference as a lesbian. To assume there is no significant difference in the ways we read the world is to assume a false unity" (128). Adrienne Rich similarly decries heterosexual appropriation of her works; Rich expresses "anger at having my work essentially assimilated and stripped of its meaning, 'integrated' into heterosexual romance" (Bulkin 58). If Tostevin herself would explore "the unrepresented, the unthought," she might tolerate a single novel without a heterosexual resolution. While Tostevin critiques *Ana Historic* as "centered in traditional symbols of the feminine, making it difficult to disassociate them from over-determined associations" ("Daphne" 36), other writers affirm the need to write specific female experiences and erotics.

Adrienne Rich attacks the erasure of lesbian experience in the patriarchal society; she writes, "Heterosexuality as an institution has also drowned in silence the erotic feelings between women" ("Women and Honor" 190). "The physical passion of woman for woman which is central to lesbian existence" is an "erotic sensuality" which Rich claims has been "the most violently erased fact of lesbian existence" ("Compulsory" 57). Rich and Marlatt base negation of lesbian reality in discursive practices.

Marlatt refuses "silence" and violent erasure. In a discussion of Inanna, Jane Marcus evokes a time before this negation of lesbian erotics:

It is Inanna's anteriority - 2,000 years before the Hebrew biblical narrative - that is part of her aura. . . . young women will read aloud to one another Inanna's stirring celebration of the power of her vulva under the apple tree. . . a powerful ethos of sisterhood and a sexuality both oral and genital. . . . ask why succeeding cultures inscribed, over and over again, female sexuality as evil. (83)

Marlatt struggles to find a language adequate to express her lesbian experience and body, to celebrate and bring into perception "the power of her vulva." In a roundtable exchange, she notes her integrative strategy:

what I was working with in *Steveston* was very much an orgasmic feeling of trying to gather up everything and move it out - right out of the mouth of the river. I mean, the syntax and body and landscape became totally interwoven. (nichol, 27)

Discussing the "erotic as power," Audre Lorde says, "as women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world" ("Uses" 53). Speaking to Ellea Wright, Marlatt similarly says:

Women writing out of their bodies. Women's bodies have been a lack, a negative space in our language, and have had no real presence. And writing is seen as male, rational, logical, the domination of spirit and thought over the material body. (4)

Audre Lorde speaks of erotics as "an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving" ("Uses" 55). She invokes empowerment through reclaiming lesbian desire:

the erotic has been used against us, even the word itself, so often, that we have been taught to suspect what is deepest in ourselves, and that is the way we learn to testify against ourselves. . . . we cannot fight old power in old power terms. The only way we can do it is by creating another whole structure that touches every aspect of our existence. (emphasis mine, "Interview" 730-1)

Marlatt takes part in this empowerment through her writing. Participating in a lesbian dialogue which provokes a new writing and a new vision, she responds to Rich's evocation to transform society: "two women, eye to eye / measuring each other's spirit, each other's / limitless desire, / a whole new poetry beginning here" (*Fact* 268). Refusing fragmentation and negation, Marlatt engages in a poetics inscribed with specific lesbian erotics, integrating both the body and imagination. She participates in a lesbian dialogue - a "whole new poetry," and "another whole structure that

touches every aspect of our existence." Marlatt's emphasis on wholeness and relational connections destabilizes divisive patriarchal hierarchies.

Claiming the "lifeforce" in her lesbian "desire," Marlatt complies with Teresa de Lauretis's evocation to construct "another frame of reference, one in which the measure of desire is no longer just the male subject" (*Alice* 8). Marlatt suggests "another frame of reference":

the problem is that when women have been reduced in the dominant culture from being subjects in our own rights to being objects of male desire, then it becomes necessary to try to 'deculturate' ourselves in order to imagine what it could be like for us to be acculturated otherwise in a woman-affirmative culture. (Carr, "Between" 105)

De Lauretis quotes Brossard's "If it were not lesbian, this text would make no sense" when she interrogates the "critical space" of voice,

conceptual, representational, and erotic - in which women could address themselves to women. And in the very act of assuming and speaking from the position of subject, a woman could concurrently recognize women as subjects and as objects of female desire. ("Sexual" 155)

Paralleling Marlatt's call to "'deculturate' ourselves" and "imagine" a "woman-affirmative culture," Luce Irigaray provokes imagination to represent woman as subject in relationship to desire:

Subjectivity denied to woman: indisputably this provides the financial backing for every irreducible constitution as an object: of representation, of discourse, of desire. Once imagine that woman imagines and the object loses its fixed, obsessional character. (*Speculum* 133)

Marlatt consistently connects subjectivity, erotic power and "lifeforce": "the erotic as i actually experience it, as i imagine any of you do, is raw power, a current surging through my body surging beyond the limits of self-containment, beyond the limits of syntax and logic" ("Lesbera" 123).

Lesbian texts frequently articulate lesbian desire metaphorically as "surging beyond the limits" - as "torrential" in force. Lesbian desire has been dammed up for years by societal disapproval; self-repressing desire

for another creates a force with explosive potential, if released. Annie asks, "what does a woman do with her unexpressed preferences, her own desires? (damned up, a torrent to let loose)" (Ana 35). At the end, she powerfully "names" herself "Annie Torrent"; Zoe asks, "so, Annie Torrent - she took my hand - what is it you want?"; Annie leaps into speech and voices her lesbian desire: "you. i want you. and me. together" (152). Unexpressed desire is no longer "nothing (sliding over the inadmissible, a dark river)"; as she watches Zoe - "she looked up from the water she was floating something on in the dark, white robes or words" (152). Claiming her desire, Annie fluidly and fluently gains grace, "robes," and voice.

Fluid movement interweaves the water landscape image, language, and lesbian lovemaking. Lesbian desire overflows boundaries and prescriptive societal roles. Marlatt articulates the fluid, continual process of coming into being through language and love. In our May 1991 discussion, Marlatt further defined her subversive use of syntax; she seeks a language which will avoid "patriarchal fixed positions" and will express instead "the fluidity of lesbian love - the mutuality, the repetition with a change, the processual nature of arousal and satisfaction without end."

Hélène Cixous also rejoices in expressed desire: "I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard of songs. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst" ("Laugh" 246). Cixous condemns men's "greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies"; she denounces patriarchal tricks which paradoxically make women feel guilty "for having desires, for not having any" (250). Referring to Cixous's manifesto, Marlatt claims, "You can't really separate sexuality from language"; Marlatt's project is to "sound how everything is related and to reconstruct the web, the network, the continual flux, the flowing, from one aspect to another aspect" (Williamson, "Speaking In" 27).

In lesbian sexuality, acceptance/knowledge of each other's reactions and physiology gestures towards denying patriarchal erasure. Marlatt says,

Woman's body is never present in its own desire, so if you start writing about it, you have to combat a kind of fear that you feel because you know you're breaking a taboo. . . . the only way you can bring the significance of our sexual being into the language is by making it so present that you can't get around it, you can't deny it. (Williamson, "Sounding" 50)

Writing a continuum of mother/daughter/lesbian experience, Marlatt shoves out cultural "walls of taboo" to make women's desire "present" (*Touch* 49).

In lesbian love, body and reactions are known: "i am following, the already known symmetry of your body, its radiant, bow-woman arched over me" (*Touch* 20). A useful intertext, Nicole Brossard speaks lesbian desire in a sexual/textual connotation as "an intuition of reciprocal knowledge / women with curves of fire and eiderdown / fresh-skinned - essential surface" (*Lovhers* 61). Women's curves and arches replace masculine linear, fixed sentence structure and the phallic "long-straight." To Williamson's comment that "Your lesbian body is excessively present," Marlatt replies,

I feel language is incredibly sensual. The more musically we move in language, the more sensual it is. . . . lesbian eroticism involves this incredible fusion, this merging of boundaries, because our bodies are so similar in their way of touching, of sensing each other, so I'm always wanting my language to somehow bring that into itself, that opulence of two incredibly sensual bodies moving together. I want that movement there in the way the words move. ("Sounding" 51)

"Reciprocal knowledge," "merging boundaries," and "touching" echo in Marlatt's woman writer inhabiting language: "in having [she] is had, is held by it, what she is given to say, in giving it away is given herself" (*Touch* 48). The shared lesbian pleasure involved in having and being had, in giving and accepting the gifts of pleasure and voice, destabilizes the unequal male/female power dynamics. Lesbian sexuality replaces power-laden physical positions dominant in heterosexual behaviour - penetrator and penetrated (which Marlatt playfully mocks: "o sheath o vagin"), possessor

and possessed, dominance and submission, valued and valueless - with a knowing, mutual desire for each other's pleasure and well-being (Ana 82).

The circularity of lesbian erotic desire, encompassing this absence of sexual power politics, flows through the poems in *Double Negative*: "wanting not to get there but getting there pleasure goes around in circles evades the end. . . your mouth mine mouths us in suspense the evercoming trembles on" (56). "Your mouth mine mouths us" embodies the "evercoming," multiple processes of loving/writing/speaking lesbian desire. Similarly, Phyllis Webb, in *Naked Poems*, leaps beyond straight lines and separateness. She conveys the circular diffusion of sites of arousal through two lesbian bodies: "AND / here / and here and / here / and over and / over your mouth" (np). "Here and here" speaks multiple possibilities for unending coming into being in lovemaking, voice, historical time, and geographical space. Webb's form, syntax, and content embody Marlatt's "merging boundaries"; the "mouth" is a source of arousal, and, metaphorically, a source of speech. In a theoretical work, "Lesbera," Marlatt also depicts lesbian lovers who mutually experience and "mouth" the "subject" rather than object position; she extols the empowerment of:

The lesbian subject: the woman-mouth that pushes out to assert its touch, its reach for the other's hidden mouth shouting through all its aroused lips, *lesbian*. A mutual recognition, anarchic and wild these images we have that run against the social grain of straight culture: l'Amazone, dyke, witch. . . women who have too much - power, strength, knowledge, sense of ourselves, of our own desire. (124)

The multiply connotative lesbian "reach for the other's hidden mouth shouting" associates lesbian sexuality with the political need for lesbian writers to shout out lesbian experience. Recognizing and naming "wild" images - "l'Amazone, dyke, witch" - Marlatt reclaims historical presence; she exposes language's power to name and condemn strong, different women.

Lesbian lovemaking is often represented as a mutual continuum of

orgasms and further arousal; this contrasts with heterosexual behaviour, in which "man remains at the center of this activity, being on the whole, the subject as opposed to objects that he perceives and instruments that he manipulates" (de Beauvoir 414). Female sexual response is more complex and whole-bodied: "it may be referred to as psycho-physiological, because it not only involves the whole nervous system but also depends upon the whole experience and situation of the individual" (de Beauvoir 417).

Marlatt provokes integration of heart/mind and sexuality/rationality. Speaking "woman in her entirety," Marlatt claims, "How else can you speak except from your body? We don't want another abstract, theoretical project. . . [we must] delight in celebrating our own sensuality" (Wright, 5). Speaking lesbian desire, she refuses culturally prescribed destinies: "the vessel she is - (full)filling her destiny" (*Ana* 118). Often *Ana Historic* appears to respond directly to de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*:

'Anatomic destiny' is thus profoundly different in man and woman, and no less different in their moral and social situation. . . . From primitive times to our own, intercourse has always been considered a 'service' for which the male thanks the woman by giving her presents or assuring her maintenance; but to serve is to give oneself a master; there is no reciprocity in this relation. The nature of marriage, as well as the existence of prostitutes, is the proof: woman gives herself, man pays her and takes her. (417-18)

Marlatt directly resists Freudian closure of female destiny, such as notions of women's psychological stress at "lacking" a penis. Valorizing "reciprocity," lesbian lovemaking effectively eliminates any need for male participation. As Cixous says, "In one another we will never be lacking"; she calls for a "love that rejoices in the exchange that multiplies" ("Laugh" 264). Annie refuses to be "a character flattened by destiny"; through making "connections" she can "break the parentheses and let it all surface" (*Ana* 150). Marlatt rejects any walls or parentheses limiting her territory. She rejoices in a journey of self discovery - through love and

writing: "i am going, beyond the mountains, past the Great Divide where rivers run in opposite direction i am carrying you with me" (*Touch* 25).

In Marlatt's works, the multiple, fluid space lesbians occupy avoids predominant ideologies positing women's lack, and domination by men. Lesbian reciprocated feelings and shared experiences negate political/sexual power struggles in the masculine economies of exchange. Irigaray exhorts a complementary vision of nearness, destroying ownership notions:

[woman] always remains several, but she is kept from dispersion because the other is already within her and is autoerotically familiar to her. Which is not to say that she appropriates the other for herself, that she reduces it to her own property. Ownership and property are doubtless quite foreign to the feminine. At least sexually. (*This Sex* 31)

In *Ana Historic*, as in *Double Negative* and *Touch To My Tongue*, the "other is already within her and is autoerotically familiar to her," physically and emotionally. Marlatt articulates lesbian experience as indeed outside of the power plays of institutionalized heterosexuality and the inherent socioeconomic marketplace space for women. Her resistance to subjugation parallels de Lauretis's provocation to "recreate the body":

the struggle with language to rewrite the body beyond its precoded, conventional representations. . . . is a struggle to transcend both gender and 'sex' and recreate the body otherwise: . . . certainly also sexual, but with a material and sensual specificity that will resist phallic idealization and render it accessible to women in another sociosexual economy. ("Sexual" 167)

Marlatt resists "phallic idealization." With "sensual specificity" she insistently represents the female body and its processes. Her erotic discourse articulates lesbian desire in an ecstatic erasure of male presence. Lesbian life, as Marlatt inscribes it, avoids servitude and domination by men - sexual, economic, political. Sue-Ellen Case claims lesbian couples "both inside and outside ideology inhabit the subject position together. . . . These are not split subjects, suffering the torments of dominant ideology. They are coupled ones" (56). Marlatt

challenges heterosexual ideology and valorizes lesbian mutual pleasure.

Monique Wittig foreshadows Marlatt's condemnation of the "social domination" in heterosexuality; she writes, "Heterosexuality is a cultural construct designed to justify the whole system of social domination based on the obligatory reproductive function of women and the appropriation of that reproduction" ("Paradigm" 115). *Ana Historic* depicts "nameless women who are vessels of their destiny. . . [who] ride into history as stars on board the mute matter of being wife and mother - ahistoric, muddled in the mundane" (121). Marlatt denies namelessness and 'anatomy as destiny.' Her ecstatic voice and erotic lesbian play transgress cultural prescriptions of woman as "mute matter of being wife and mother." She articulates desire to mother/birth/bear lesbian desire and life experiences into being. She writes and creates a world where lesbians do create our own destinies. As lesbians assume agency and subjectivity, we control our own destinies.

Through an elaborate strategy of doubling in writing, dialogue and sexuality, Marlatt and Warland transgress society's denial of lesbian desire, speech and imagination. The complex doubling underlying *Double Negative* appears to respond to de Lauretis's suggestion that women are:

doubly negated as subjects: first, because they are defined as vehicles of men's communication - signs of their language, carriers of their children; second, because women's sexuality is reduced to the 'natural' function of childbearing Desire, like symbolization, is a property of men. (*Alice* 20)

Marlatt and Warland demand imaginary and symbolic and real space for lesbian desires - desires which erase notions of being the "property of men" or "vehicles of men's communication." They persistently speak desires from the position of lesbian subject and address their speech and desires to other women. Brenda Carr finds it significant that Marlatt and Warland "both" mother the text of *Double Negative*. Carr acknowledges the important "mutual" lesbian desire expressed in their writing and loving together:

the monolithic Subject is opened up to allow for the birth of

a twinned subject: two women in a train berth giving birth to each other as de-sired and desiring subject in and for each other's writing. ("Collaboration" 119)

"De-sired" may allude to un-fathered subjectivity, to women's birth into subjectivity free from patriarchal dominance and direction. "De-sired" recalls desire to overturn notions such as "Barthes maintaining narrativity not possible without Law and History (immaculate conception no partheno-genesis)" (*Double* 54). Marlatt and Warland speak a "narrativity" which gloriously defies patriarchal "Law and History." They ecstatically write the birth of self of two women - two women come into being - without male intervention. Lesbian reciprocal subjectivity and multiple speaking positions belie a unique, absolute Male Subject. Together, lesbians constitute a "twinned subject"; two similar beings recognize each other's subjectivity and mutual desire. Absence of male approval or participation in this joyous sexual/textual birth through writing visualizes lesbian lives as not just the film's reel two, but "Real 2" (*Double* 40). Opening up the lesbian subject through writing and loving creates our reality.

The erotic poetry in *Double Negative* embodies a collaborative subject position; Marlatt and Warland love, write, and read each other's bodies/texts. They subversively defy erasure of lesbian desire, lesbian existence, and lesbian place in language as a signifying system: "i sign your V / PROHIBITED AREA / CONS: 'French, cunt' / the imaginary / two women in a birth" (*Double* 21). Transgressing patriarchal oppression of women's experience and voice, they reclaim the meaning-making experience of women's "imaginary"; they posit sense (sensual and meaning) which pre-exists the masculine symbolic realm. Marlatt provocatively muses on "a language that returns us to the body, a woman's body and the largely unverballed, presyntactic, postlexical field it knows" (*Touch* 48).

In the context of "two women in a birth," two lesbian lovers birth/write their desires into being. They inscribe desires in the body of the

text and in the body of self. Transgressively refusing silence and erasure, they CON-tradict patriarchal labels of female sexuality and female physiology as CON, criminal, or absent. Doubly creating meaning, sexual and textual, the "hands a manual alphabet" interplays manual sexual stimulation of the already discussed Mound of Venus, with sign language - both "open up the Subject" of lesbian desire. Voicing pleasurable sensual arousal invokes the "imaginary," a time before the culturally prescribed mother/daughter split. Cixous joyously provokes writing all experience:

Women's imaginary is inexhaustible. . . . Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. . . . Now women return from afar. . . from beyond 'culture'; from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget, condemning it to 'eternal rest.' ("Laugh" 247)

Marlatt and Warland refuse to accept cultural prohibitions separating the lesbian self from her desires, her body, and her writing. They reclaim from men the "PROHIBITED" territorial female body space and the right to name the body. Through etymological investigation, they expose patriarchal contradiction and denigration of the "CONS: 'French, cunt'." Reclaiming the word "cunt," they denounce patriarchal devaluation and erasure of the female body; they write, "we use their words for things, places / and they are different in our mouths" (*Double* 14). Their writing is firmly grounded in the body and demonstrates the physicality of language. They deny harmful patriarchal metaphysical compartments which disengage life from writing. Physically, each lesbian touches with her tongue and her hands to fill the mouth, the V, the cunt, the vagina, the desire of a female lover. Literally, she fills sociocultural and historical gaps. Wittig writes,

I require your presence, I seek you, I implore you, I summon you to appear. . . . M/y clitoris m/y labia are touched by your hands. Through m/y vagina and m/y uterus you insert yourself. (*Lesbian Body* 37)

Appearance, touch and voice embody reality. Like Wittig, Marlatt rejects Freudian and Lacanian theories which posit woman as "nothing to be seen,"

lacking presence, experiencing no desire, and signifying death. "M/y clitoris m/y labia are touched by your hands" recalls Marlatt's persistent integration of erotics of language and the erotics of sexual satisfaction.

Marlatt evokes the patriarchal barriers that restrict a reader's mind and position woman as absent - barriers which position lesbians as doubly erased from view and recognition: "but don't you think we read with a different eye? Zoe asks. like MR & MISS ILES. . . / i know the street, the precise wall. like WE ARE A SIGN THAT ISN'T READ? and she is grinning" (*Ana* 108-9). Many lesbians know and understand homophobic walls and the heterosexual inability to imagine lesbian existence. Basic life survival, knowing and reading lesbian signs, requires a "different eye," a different perspective which doesn't see the phallus as the Primary Signifier. Marlatt's bodies and texts are signs and missiles that must be perceived.

Double Negative foreshadows *Ana Historic's* harsh critique of women's patriarchally-inscribed socioeconomic inferiority. Marlatt and Warland energetically struggle to reverse and supplant patriarchal "reality," the premise that the lesbian is doubly negated in society. They write their experience, their selves, into being. Writing lesbian reality requires active strategies: "(Imagine a nation uncommitted to surplus profit) working for love not pay imagination is at home with emptiness . . . deriding the end point of the Final Product (she is not for termination after all)" (*Double* 50). A metaphorical train-ride without end, analogous to writing without end and lesbian sexual arousal without end, avoids the psychological/literal death of lesbian experience and desire. Evoking lesbian lovemaking mutuality, "working for love not pay," they foreground a love not paid for by money, psychological, or physical domination. They respond to de Lauretis's call for "another sociosexual economy" ("Sexual" 167). "She is not for termination" speaks lesbian resistance to erasure, as well as lesbian ongoing sexual/textual desire without an "end point."

"De-riding the end-point," they support de Beauvoir's observation:

there is no doubt that for man coition has a definite biological conclusion: ejaculation. . . . [but] coition is never quite terminated for her: it admits of no end. . . . Feminine sex enjoyment radiates throughout the whole body. . . no definite term is set . . (441-42)

Marlatt and Warland suggest the lesbian's place in the heterosexual world is analogous to aboriginal people who are trying to regain their rights. On the train journey, they are "bordering the largest aboriginal 'occupied lands'" (*Double* 19). Punning on "coming" in this poem, "coming into Port Pirie," they multiply enact subversive movements involved in active lesbian resistance to patriarchal norms. Their writing and their love become "signs mutating like mixed metaphors"; they suggest, "if language could / it would flash TILT TILT GAME OVER CONS: 'conjunx, wife'" (19). Declining to play the heterosexual game, they now actively refuse to be CONned into conjunction or joining with a male in marriage. They refuse an inherently crippling self-erasing role of "wife."

Cixous likewise humorously provokes women to "see more closely the inanity of 'propriety,' the reductive stinginess of the masculine-conjugal subjective economy" ("Laugh" 259). Marlatt and Warland "doubly" resist this masculine economy by metaphorically/physically leaving patriarchal territory: "now turned around we head for outback" (*Double* 19). Two women lovers subvert compulsory heterosexuality and leave behind the colonized territory of "wife." Writing together, they transgress patriarchal single authority over the written text, as well as notions of one authoritative version of any story. They decolonize language and re-claim their space.

In their writings, lesbian experiences and mutual relationships deny patriarchal powerplays; love without end is the end desired, not profit or power. They craftily and fluidly manipulate and interrogate language and articulate lesbian desire beyond heterosexual movements: "De-railing the 'long-straight'. . . (surrounded does not mean surrender) . . . she is

desert come in waves the waves she rides she rises up and overflows the words a round around the word *surround*" (*Double* 50). They subliminally connect the lesbian process of coming "in waves," rising above patriarchal and heterosexual boundaries, and claiming space for lesbian sexual arousal and socioeconomic experience. Playful derision of the "end point" and the "long straight" definitely brings to mind Cixous's "laugh" at the thought of "we the maternal mistresses of their little pocket signifier" ("Laugh" 261). Marlatt echoes the New French Feminists by denying phallic power and by celebrating woman's cultural value and our empowerment through writing:

in a time when language has been appropriated by the Freudians as intrinsically phallic, it seems crucial to reclaim it through what we know of ourselves in relation to writing, writing can scarcely be for women the act of the phallic signifier, its claim to singularity, the mark of the capital I (was here). language is no tool for us, no extension of ourselves, but something we are 'lost' inside of. finding our way in a labyrinthine moving with the drift. ("Writing Our" 49)

Lesbian mutual, moving sexual and writing pleasure replaces "singularity." "Finding our way" occurs "inside of" language, which must be reclaimed.

The very existence of lesbian relationships and the open discussion of sexuality contributes to the empowerment of all women. Marlatt notes, "To speak of what has been excluded from the world of literature, which is women's desire, and to make that present in a language of presence is a big challenge" (Williamson, "Sounding" 52). Her erotic writing concretely epitomizes her central analogy between the fluidity of lesbian love and the erotics of language. Engaging lesbian reciprocity and openness to the other, she interplays unending, ecstatic lesbian sexual pleasure and the lesbian writer continuously giving birth and presence to her experience:

We feel in flight and risky with relief from the temporal, we could hazard aerial acrobatics ground deep in each other's groins, we will birth ourselves apparitional and strange, the mouth that groans a shout, the vulva that pushes out to touch/ be touched, legs that gape wide to embrace the subterranean rush of coming. ("Lesbera" 123-4)

"Vulva that pushes out to touch/be touched" embodies her erotic connection of mutuality in lesbian sexuality and language, and her emphasis on touch. In Marlatt's works, "touch" reverberates, integrating multiple areas of touch - child being born, child at the mother's breast, sexual contact, and - a lesbian writer's touch of the erotics of language and body.

In our May 1991 discussion, I inquired if Marlatt could articulate a difference between heterosexual and lesbian lovemaking. She foregrounded lesbian's familiar knowledge of the female body and its reactions, which enhances sexual satisfaction. She praised the trust that grounds lesbian love - the mutual trust involved in fluidly exchanging roles, in literally and metaphorically placing our very body and existence in the hands/mouth of the woman we love, in comparison to heterosexual power-laden positions. She referred to the "vulval sensation" which she expresses in her ongoing work, *Steveston*. In her writing, "female eroticism is foregrounded as itself, not in service to male eroticism. Writing itself is a creation of reality, on our own terms." Readers can enter into this erotic bearing of our common experience through Marlatt's language; Marlatt provides a major service: readers no longer must struggle to reconstruct lesbian experience from ill-fitting heterosexual scripts. Sameness facilitates understanding.

Donna Bennett associates language, writing and lesbian sexuality:

language-based feminist criticism is most visible in lesbian writing, because the physical basis of female homosexuality is parallel neither to male homosexuality nor to heterosexual experience and thus is clearly a physiologically unique matrix from which to derive an aesthetics. ("Naming" 230)

Marlatt's language-based theories stress the lesbian "physiologically unique matrix." She links "verbal communication (contact, sharing)" with the body's physicality" (*Touch* 46); "Body, form; like, same" associates erotic experience of the lesbian body and writing (*Touch* 45). "Like" and "same" exemplify her insistence that meaning-making, through the analogy of sexual satisfaction, is enhanced in lesbian relationships. The lover's

body and form are known, loved and experienced as alike. Frequently in her writing, one word carries multiple connotations. "Like" can function as an adjective (similar), a preposition (without demur, willingly), an adverb (so to speak), conjunction (as), noun (counterpart, equal), and verb (feel attracted, be pleasing). Each definition and each function accumulate to bear more and more meaning. For lesbians, verbal and bodily contact and sharing are enhanced by associations and likeness. "Body, form; like, same" links form and content, and verbalizes same-sex love and writings.

Sensuous words of "coming" echo: "kinetic at all points in touch / with coming incessantly / into / THIS, this" (*Double* 18). *THIS* line emphasizes an urgency, an immediacy, and an all-embodied lesbian experience; it evokes Adrienne Rich's words in "The Floating Poem, Unnumbered": "your strong tongue and slender fingers / reaching where I had been waiting years for you / in my rose-wet cave - whatever happens, this is" (*Fact* 243). "This is" lesbian experience, a woman discovering her body and her being through sexual stimulation by another woman.

By association, "THIS" is reality; it is "unnumbered" and "coming incessantly." Both Marlatt and Rich came to lesbian love after long self-denial during marriage. Marlatt finds herself through discovering her lover and discovering her body, after "waiting years": "exultant, wild, i felt the river pushing through, all that weight of heartlocked years let loose and pouring with us out where known ground drops away" (*Touch* 25). Marlatt explicitly links lesbian orgasmic response, which pushes "through" in release, with pushing lesbian experience into view, birthing it into reality, through words. In the mouths of Rich and Marlatt, the "river" and "rose-wet cave" symbolize fluid, "coming incessantly," lesbian desire.

"Kinetic at all points in touch," Marlatt's empowering discourse joins with Cixous's; Cixous articulates the "multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body"

("Laugh" 254). Multiplicity of lesbian desire is embodied in an infinitude of erogenous zones. In fluid, continuous process, lesbian lovers discover new territory, new presence, and new sexual ecstasy. These writers speak lesbian desire "openly" and "rush" towards coming into being and naming their experiences. Enacting lesbian mutual subjectivity and uninhibited openness to another woman, they transgress heterosexual power dynamics.

Marlatt and Warland comically comment on straight society's inability to perceive/conceive of two women as a couple; "negative feminine space" is forced into view in the train diner: "'are you ladies alone' 'no' 'we're together'" (*Double* 20). Togetherness experienced both in language and in love creates a new being. Marlatt connects the erotics of language and love: "words evoke each other in movements we know as puns and figures of speech (these endless similes, this continuing fascination with making one out of two, a new one, a simultitude)" (*Touch* 46). Two women live and write together in a shared, non-appropriative space. Words of immediacy and continuity defy erasure of our lesbian "simultitude" of experiences.

Marlatt discusses their train experience in sexual/textual metaphors:

we didn't contrast how we were experiencing the train, from the inside, with how it's so often imaged from the outside as this powerful industrial monster whose rhythms and approach are seen as very much like the male orgasm. . . . We talked about the coming but made it female coming and the cyclical nature of female orgasm is really different from the on-track crescendo of male orgasm. (*Double* 37)

Double Negative literally embodies the "cyclical nature of female orgasm" and the sexual/textual mutual dialogue and cooperation possible between two women. It links specific erotic lesbian sexuality with the coming into being (birthing) of the self through the lover. A maternal metaphor interplays "seeing" as perceiving and knowing with the biblical inference that sexual arousal proffers "knowledge" of the other:

in your hands my shutter opening and closing X posing
negatives in the womb obscura night i/s focus through another

window lens camera within camera womb within womb. . . . Jane writing of Evelyn first seeing the desert as 'empty' (negative space) how can this barrenness teem with life how can this once have been sea bottom - the desert unbelievable, dangerous (what is woman?). (46)

"Womb within womb" implies women's physiological/psychological continuing knowledge of each other, sexually/textually loving and creating other women. Referring to Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart*, the words gesture towards the embodied tradition in the lesbian writing community. Evoking Rich's need for societal re-vision, "another window lens," and a new perspective, they envision the "unbelievable," a lesbian environment "teem[ing] with life." Their graphic physical representation of lesbian sexuality - "in your hands my shutter opening and closing x posing negatives" - flouts psychological and philosophical theories which cast woman, our genitalia, and our desire, as an absence, negative, and nothing to be seen. "In your hands my shutter opening and closing" embodies two lesbians bringing each other into being, physically and perspectively.

In the total framework of vision in *Double Negative*, lesbians do subversively see and value each other. Marlatt and Warland defy sexist society's reduction of women's desire to male desire, and the double negation of lesbian desire. Marlatt links this negation to language:

Women know the slippery feel of language, the walls that exclude us, the secret passageways of double meaning that conduct us into a sense we understand, reverberant with hidden meaning, the meaning our negated (in language) bodies radiate. bodies that possess no singular authoritative meaning but a meaning that is multiplicit, multilabial, continuously arrived at. ("Writing Our" 47)

"Multilabial" lips, physical and figurative, sexual and vocal, erotically ground Marlatt's sexual/textual metaphors and give presence in body and "(in language)." Marlatt insists on making lesbian experience visible and heard, in multiple facets - aesthetic, physical, emotional, and political.

In Chapter Three I discussed Marlatt's journey into being through

writing the mother. In this chapter I extend the voyage to bring into view and re-cognition her female lover and writing collaborator, Betsy Warland. Together, they "continuously" arrive at multiple meanings, and stress the corporeality of language. Namascar Shaktini notes the important position Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* holds in embodying lesbian tradition: "We are able to see the world from the lesbian point of view; we are able to 'mean' and 'represent' in terms of the lesbian symbolic order" (298-9). In "the lesbian symbolic order," the lesbian subject views, perceives, recognizes and values herself and her experiences. Ownership of the gaze and power are not male preserves. In Marlatt's works, the female is not a passive object of the male gaze, nor is her body or her labour property to be owned, as the heterosexual economy would prescribe. E. Ann Kaplan examines dominance-submission patterns in the complex gaze-apparatus:

men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and possession that is lacking in the female gaze. Women receive and return a gaze, but cannot act on it. Second, the sexualization and objectification of women is not simply for the purposes of eroticism; from a psychoanalytic point of view, it is designed to annihilate the threat that woman (as castrated, possessing a sinister genital organ) poses. (311)

In *Double Negative*, lesbian love negates patriarchal erasure and condemnation of the female body and bodily processes. Lesbians do see and value the bodies of female lovers. Warland and Marlatt's work explicitly represents physical lesbian erotic experiences, rejecting erasure: "soft mound of hill lost/ dip or cleft a / V to view/ / 'this little entry' / / 'mine take forever' /... this the imaginary / we enter" (*Double* 18). They playfully engage in a lesbian dialogue about sexual experience. The words "mine take forever" multiply suggest mutual freedom to discuss their sexual responses, as well as women's difficulty in re-calling and entering the imaginary. They re-claim the "imaginary" as a joyous space we "enter," a space pre-existing the symbolic world of language. In "this little

entry," lesbian hands, textual and sexual, write, love, and enter culture.

In context of lesbians and the lesbian body as "nothing to be seen," Marilyn Frye explores the complex dynamics of the lesbian activating the gaze and subversive possibilities this gives for authoring "perception":

If the lesbian sees the woman, the woman may see the lesbian seeing her. With this, there is a flowering of possibilities. The woman, feeling herself seen, may learn that she *can be* seen; she may also be able to know that a woman can see, that is, can author perception. . . . seeing undercuts the mechanism by which the production and constant reproduction of heterosexuality for women was to be rendered *automatic*. (172)

Marlatt and Warland strategically theorize about their subversive use of language to bring their presence into view; their mutual ecstasy is a space where "all points of view converge" (55). The "mound inverted," Mound of Venus, is a "giant" space where lesbian desires "meet":

rails meet on the horizon /\ form a giant caret from 'there is lacking' from 'kes-, castrate, caste, incest'. . . writing the not here inverts turning perspective upside down writing morphogenic lines. (*Double* 54)

"Writing the not here," the lesbian love, speaks lesbian subjectivity and overturns institutionalized heterosexuality. Lesbian "writing" denies masculine definitions of women's lack. Marlatt and Warland actively reject Freudian notions of "penis envy." Freud presents female castration as a fact, while lesbians experience the female genitalia as present, viewable, and desirable. Speaking lesbian desire and erotics, Marlatt and Warland critique pervasive male power over language, signification, and the gaze.

Marlatt's joyous, discursive view of female genitalia refutes the Lacanian theory of the phallus as the privileged signifier; she overturns the problematic phallocentric relationship of the female subject to language. These lines offer a smooth intertext with Cixous. Cixous derides Lacanian notions of "the sanctuary of the phallos 'sheltered' from *castration's lack!* . . . We don't fawn around the supreme hole. We have no womanly reason to pledge allegiance to the negative" ("*Laugh*" 255).

Marlatt and Warland represent a woman seeing and desiring another woman: "you send me kisses from the end of the seat"; their words refute and deny a "negative feminine space. . . nothing looking at nothing" (*Double* 20).

Margery Fee claims doubleness operates in their collaborative work:

Here are the two female negatives that make a positive, two Lesbian lovers who rewrite the train from inside as a womb, rather than from the outside as a phallus thrusting through the 'empty' desert, which, since there was 'nothing there,' could be used for nuclear testing. This writing is a 'word for word fight for defining/whose symbolic dominates whose'. (132)

Marlatt's strategic goal is to present lesbian relationships to society; she reclaims a "positive" territory from patriarchal, destructive visions of women as "empty" and "nothing." Lesbians must actively work to be seen and accepted. Our perception is inevitably blurred by cultural demands; "the impact of colliding realities. . . . the power of a culture shapes the substance of our eyes" (*Double* 44). Truly, seeing is believing.

In *Double Negative*, lesbian lovers valorize the mutuality of their sexual/emotional connection. They erotically "sign" and signify sexual desire in the ongoing process of lesbian coming-into-being: "the V-U be/coming our REFLECTION: 'to bend back' / convex con-cave.../ i sign your V" (*Double* 20-21). Reciprocally, they mentally reflect on and physically reflect/mirror each other's Mound of Venus, and sign the other's self. They depict the erotic close association of the "i" with self, with the lesbian lover, and with the "i" writing. Merging and blurring self and other, they offer new configurations of sexual desire and language; they critically explore traditional components of subjectivity - of self/other. They playfully allude to Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*, in which Irigaray claims Lacan can only see women as lacking: "fixed, and framed that concave mirror. . . makes a hole - sets itself up pompously as an authority in order to give shape to the imaginary orb of a 'subject'" (144). Irigaray suggests a new view, one which can penetrate the interior.

Marlatt and Warland write and make love together, refusing silence and invisibility: "into. one another. your ka crosses mine to all intents and purposes invisible. . . . the mouth groans sings its fervid blue note, 'you you'" (*Double* 43). "The mouth groans" erotically voices a lesbian sexual response frequently not achieved in heterosexual activity. Sexually entering "into. one another," they subversively defy cultural sanctions against homosexuality. Interweaving their poems, they also enter "into. one another" textually and sexually, subverting patriarchal singular authority over the text. They "sing" lesbian ecstasy - "fervid blue note, 'you you'"; this echoes the orgasmic ecstasy, "spurt/ spirit opening in the dark of earth, yu! cry jubilant excess," in *Touch To My Tongue* (23).

The speaker mocks patriarchally authoritative Law and History which distort and erase women's body and experience. Biblical myths, such as the "immaculate conception," deny women's sexuality and doubly negate lesbians as "not here." Lesbians must dream and write and create existence; we must

turn Barthes maintaining narrativity not possible without Law and History (immaculate conception no parthenogenesis) caret u of the not here steel yourselves . . . *this* is where the v inverts. . . finally present (threshold to dreaming, creation, spiritual vision). (*Double* 54-5)

Lesbians must re-claim the view "where the v inverts" and birth ourselves without masculine intervention; we must "steel" ourselves, have the strength, to steal our own space, desires, dreams, and "spiritual vision."

Luce Irigaray suggests that "the law that orders our society is the exclusive valorization of men's needs/desires" (*This Sex* 171). She urges lesbians to speak desire together: "It comes from everywhere at once. You touch me all over at the same time. In all senses. . . . We are not lacks, voids" (*This Sex* 209). Marlatt's writings make lesbian experience "finally present"; touching "all senses," she defies patriarchal "Law and History" which posit woman as absent and lacking. She provokes us to "sense our way into. the sentence. ('life') making our multiplicity whole" (*Touch* 46).

"Making our multiplicity whole" involves re-cognizing the historical tradition of mother/daughter/lesbian bonds. The first poem of *Touch To My Tongue* blurs elements of the mother/daughter relationship and the lesbian lover relationship. References to Danish, Indian and Indonesian life bring these lesbian lovers together in their present locale; they also include geographical locations relevant to Marlatt's and Warland's mothers' lives.

The poem locates their lesbian life within a continuing historical, literary, and mythical feminist perspective. Virginia Woolf comments on women's tradition: "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (*Room* 79). When the two lovers meet at the diner, "it's Sappho i said, on the radio," brings a past lesbian voice into present hearing. The location is "Mumbai, meaning great mother" (*Touch* 19). Marlatt's notes clarify: "Mumbai is the vernacular name for Bombay, after the Koli goddess Mumbai" (35). The speaker explicitly and erotically voices lesbian mutual knowing; she implies her birth of the self through sexually experiencing her lover:

i'm watching you talk of a different birth, blonde hair on my tongue. . . . i see your face because i don't see my own, equally flush with being. co-incidence being here together we meet in these far places we find in each other. (19)

In oral sex, other lips speak a "different birth" and a new view. "Flush with being," excited about being and having presence together, they find sexual and emotional space and "far places. . . in each other." Through lesbian experience, they discover their bodies. They are excited to feel a new being, a new relationship to their world. The words "equally" and "co-incidence" suggest mutual reciprocity experienced in lesbian love.

In "hidden ground," Marlatt voices metaphorical lesbian experience; she finds her self through the other and opens this experience up to light. In relationship with a specifically "lust-y" other, naming the self powerfully evokes the Demeter/Persephone mother/daughter myth:

wild and running everywhere along the outer edges. lost, *lost*i, lust-y one, who calls my untamed answering one to sally

forth, finding alternate names, finding the child provoked, invoked, lost daughter, other mother and lover. (27)

She re-vises a primary patriarchal myth to accommodate lesbian reality. Experiencing lesbian love and maternal love both provoke the speaker into self-discovery and into explorations of language. Significantly, the reader is unable to distinguish between the mother/daughter/lover in the roles of Demeter and Persephone; content and style embody the mutuality and reciprocity of lesbian love. Marlatt acknowledges that she created a "deliberate confusion" between the Persephone and Demeter roles which they "each get to play" (Williamson, "Speaking" 26). They both "call" to each other and find names to articulate their "lost," marginalized experiences. This sensuous play of language imaginatively celebrates self-birth through a "wild" and "lust-y" other and through actively assuming lesbian voice.

Rich suggests that "there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive. And a certain freedom of the mind is needed" ("When" 23). Nicole Brossard's poetics similarly valorize lesbian imagination. She repeatedly confronts society's erasure of the reality of lesbian experience; she writes, "lesbianism made my world absolute fiction in a patriarchal heterosexual world" ("Poetic" 78). With Beverley Daurio, Brossard expands on these comments: "The reality we live in is fictional for women because it is only the fantasy of men throughout history who have transformed their subjectivity into laws, religion, culture" (20).

In "kore," the speaker is coming, in several senses, to connect with the mother/lover figure: "(amba, amorous Demeter, you with the fire in your hand, i am coming to you) amative and nurturing (here i am you) . . . your fruiting body bloom" (23). An erotic warmth, nurture and joyous pleasure overcome both mother/daughter and lesbian lovers. "[I] am you" implies sexual role reversal and mutuality. "[F]ruiting" and "bloom," intimates ongoing luxurious growth through lesbian love. These lines echo

the "Economy of Flowers," in which "her coming into doubleness [is] a blooming on and on" (34). Stylistically, "fruiting body bloom" confuses adjective, noun (subject) and verb, evoking subjectivity and activity by both lesbians as they creatively "bloom" into being and a view of others.

Marlatt demonstrates her theory: "the nature of the universe cannot be portrayed in a language based on the absolute difference between a noun and a verb" (*Touch* 47). For lesbians, the "nature of the universe" can only be portrayed by subversively "kicking syntax" (49) and articulating the "fire" in the lover's hand. Lesbian being and mother/daughter/lover bonds can be read by different eyes in an affirmative female perspective.

Other women also specifically refer to the erotic sensual relationship between mother and child in the context of lesbian experience. In Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Celie and Shug become both mother and daughter to one another; Celie says, "Then I feels something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies mouth. Way after while, I act like a little lost baby too" (97). Adrienne Rich poetically asks:

Remind me how we loved our mother's body
our mouths drawing the first
thin sweetness from her nipples
our faces dreaming hour on hour
in the salt smell of her lap Remind me
how her touch melted childgrief. (emphasis mine, *Dream* 48)

In her theorized "lesbian continuum," Rich includes "the grown woman experiencing orgasmic sensations while suckling her own child, perhaps recalling her mother's milk smell in her own" ("Compulsory" 54). Rich conflates the female gaze with the erotic sensations of lesbian love; she recalls when she realized "each of us was fastened to the other, not only by mouth and breast, but through our mutual gaze. . . I recall the physical pleasure of having my full breast suckled" (*Of Woman* 31).

In *Of Woman Born*, Rich quotes the lesbian writer Sue Silvermarie:

In loving another woman I discovered the deep urge to both be

mother to and find a mother in my lover. . . . When I kiss and stroke and enter my lover, I am also a child re-entering my mother. I want to return to the womb-state of harmony, and also to the ancient world. I enter my lover but it is she in her orgasm who returns. I see on her face for a long moment, the unconscious bliss that an infant carries the memory of behind shut eyes. Then when it is she who makes love to me. . . the intensity is also a pushing out, a birthing. (233)

The "womb-state of harmony" perfectly articulates lesbian relationships and echoes Marlatt's maternal metaphor for experience in/with language.

Representation of lesbian desire, presence, and the female body are historically absent from or distorted in heterosexual writing. We must activate memory to integrate past and present experience. Marlatt and Warland connect memory with fully enjoying present experience: "the memory of your hot-soft flesh / unfurled last night" (*Double* 33). Both writing and lovemaking re-call past pleasures into presence. Women's "collective memory" provokes us to "see differently. . . . the muscles between the eyes & tongue straining to translate stutter bewildering syntax synapse" (44). Nicole Brossard, like Marlatt, articulates the need for memory of past lesbian realities, an active imagination, the body, and voice:

Memory is a theatre of the *body*, representation's first theatre. It repeats itself endlessly. . . . *Writing* is of the *body* that lets go, but it is also of the *body* that comes, for when memory's *body* meets the *desiring body*, we may then believe that *memory* works its own legend. . . . It is only when we can speak the legend of our lives that we are able to engender new scenes, *invent* new characters, produce new replies. (emphasis mine, "Memory" 43)

Brossard's words parallel Cixous's sexual/textual evocation to write desire, for women to come into self and "invent for herself a language to get inside of" ("Laugh" 257). Analyzing "memory" and the interrelationship of mother/daughter/lesbian experiences, Jane Vanderbosch echoes Chodorow:

It is a precedent in a Proustian way: the first memory of these sensations will connect all future sensations of this sort back to the first experience of them, back to the woman with whom they were first shared. . . . The child's consciousness of the mother as a separate but similar being

dramatically culminates in her 'birthing' the mother into an existence apart from her own. (125)

Relating women's sexual experience to the rhythmic sensations of birth and nursing a child, like Marlatt, these writers articulate shared, common lesbian experiences - birthing the other into being, rhythmic orgasm, and "sucking" at the breast and the genital area in oral/genital sexuality.

In *Double Negative*, the speaker notes that historical manuscripts only record one percent of "her gender's memory"; she continues, "her hand moves across the page spiral movement (imagin-a-nation) here she can rest here she can play encounter her anima(l) self pre-sign pre-time touching you i touch kangaroo words" (51). For Marlatt, "touch" and sensations are active as meaning. Imaginatively, we can write/create a society which does recognize us. Playfully encountering the self "pre-sign pre-time" engages Kristeva's sensuous semiotic space - a space of self-knowledge which pre-exists the world of "patriarchally-loaded language" (*Touch* 47), and fixed, linear time. Marlatt's lesbian "memory" fluidly floats and merges her life experiences within temporal space. Erotic word "play" helps the lesbian "encounter" and "touch" her desire and language, exposing our experience to others. This defies the erasure of lesbians from writing and from view commonly experienced "in the name of see-vill(ain)-I-say-tion" (*Double* 19). Marlatt's and Warland's combined voices perceive the villain; they name and expose the destructive sociocultural negation of lesbian being.

In the next chapter I extend my deliberation of mother/daughter/lesbian connections to include Marlatt's reading/writing within a loving community context. Following Marlatt's theoretical and aesthetic lead, I strategically avoid a conclusion by engaging this lesbian spiralling movement without end. Marlatt writes herself into community, "on that double edge where she has always lived, between the already spoken and the unspeakable" (*Touch* 48). I join Marlatt's communal dynamic oral spiral.

CHAPTER FIVE

"WE AFFIRM OUR SPIRALLING DOMINOING WANDERING SHE-SPEECH":**MARLATT EROTICALLY PROVOKES A READING/WRITING/LOVING COMMUNITY**

Marlatt "connects" with Brossard, Rich, Chrystos, Lorde, Daly and other radical lesbian writers who create new modes of being in space - cultural, geographical, conceptual. My final chapter briefly investigates Marlatt's celebratory writing within this spiralling, supportive writing community. The spiral, a powerful recurring structural image, represents unending lesbian movement in desire, writing, dialogues, translations, and intertextual quotes and allusions. The multidimensional spiral displaces patriarchal fixed, linear/binary thinking, single authority over the text, and hierarchical, unequal power dynamics within heterosexual culture. The spiral's fluid, moving dimensions offer new ways to configure subjectivity and meaning-making. Marlatt's lesbian writings turn back on themselves; she continually re-visits and re-vises old texts. Crucial phrases echo and reverberate between her works. Her creative writing space locates and nourishes a spiralling ongoing lesbian experience which integrates the body writing with the body written, past and present.

Marlatt's and Warland's loving, reading and writing together embody a spiral. They occupy collaborative subject positions in *Double Negative*:

all writing is collaboration here we question the delineation between the collectivity of conversation and the individual's ownership of the written here we *affirm our spiralling dominoing wandering she-speech* in the talking we do between the sheets between the lines. (emphasis mine, "Reading" 87)

They blur sexuality and textuality, since they communicate through loving and writing together. In our May discussion, Marlatt stressed the pleasure both she and Warland receive from the fact that even their best friends can't decide who wrote each poem. "[I]n the talking [they] do between the sheets," they assume a subject/subject position ("Reading" 87). Their writing collaboration embodies this. Defiantly refusing adherence to

patriarchal linear subject/verb/object style, they also denounce "authority" or ownership of the text. They revel instead in the mutual dialogue and empowerment of both participants and by implication, the lesbian reader. The "spiralling dominoing wandering she-speech" reflects the ongoing, circular process of women's writing. "Dominoing" suggests an accumulative, interactive process; each movement stimulates the next.

Marlatt and Warland speak lesbian subjectivity through the image of the spiral in *Double Negative*. Their spiralling moving frame of reference encompasses writing, reading, viewing from the train, loving, and self-understanding: "the train begins to roll as her hand moves across the page spiral movement (imagin-a-nation) here she can rest here she can play" (51). They self-reflexively record the immediate physical writing process and playfully link writing with birthing self through encounters of love.

In Marlatt's *Touch To My Tongue* she suggests that "hidden in the etymology and usage of so much of our vocabulary for verbal communication (contact, sharing) is a link with the body's physicality. . . to relate to somebody, related (carried back) with its connection with bearing (a child)" (46). In the doubleness of two authors, two lesbian lovers expressing their desires physically and in words, *Double Negative* rejects patriarchal authority, prescriptive heterosexuality, and male definitions of female sexuality. Marlatt and Warland politically open their lives and their desires to their readers, offering "light" to the lesbian community.

In *Touch to My Tongue*, a timeless spiralling space reinforces Marlatt's reverberating images of light and vision in lesbian love:

draw close, i am so glad to see you. . . . primitive flicker
on the rim of eons. . . . white, radiant healing in various
brilliant colours, *blanda*, to mingle and blend: the blaze of
light we are, spiralling. (*Touch* 31)

Continually creating "light" and space for the lesbian self requires spiralling movement. "Radiant" light and "primitive flicker on the rim of

eons" invoke lesbian experience preceding cultural marginalization. Women "mingle and blend" and spiral in a visionary space which precedes the patriarchal rational symbolic realm; this recalls Kristeva's semiotics. Adrienne Rich, condemning women's enculturated physical and mental passivity, suggests, "Patriarchy would seem to require, not only that women shall assume the major burden of pain and self-denial for the furtherance of the species, but that the majority of that species - women - shall remain essentially unquestioning and unenlightened" (*Of Woman* 43). Marlatt questions the patriarchy and writes lesbian love into the light.

The spiral image proliferates in lesbian writings. In *Trilogy*, H.D. writes about Mary Magdalene and her "message / through spiral upon spiral of the shell / of memory that yet connects us / with the drowned cities of pre-history" (156). Marlatt's spiralling memories echo H.D.'s. Mary Daly also fervently evokes a spiralling lesbian time and space; a tradition of past and present lesbian voices can be heard weaving throughout history:

Genuine Spinning is spiralling. . . . Hags hearing into the labyrinth beyond the foreground hear new voices - our own voices. We learn to sense our own new position and motion. . . . Hearing/moving through this intricate terrain we find our way from the entrance of the labyrinth deeper into the center of the homeland, of the Self. (*Gyn/Ecology* 405)

Marlatt's writings journey in "this intricate terrain"; she seeks "the homeland" - "the Self" constructed within language. Her words fluidly move within interrelated spaces, such as history, geography and sexuality. Marlatt writes of Ana's "coming into place. . . her country she has come into, the country of her body. // to be there from the first. indigene. *ingenuus* (born in), native, natural, free(born) - at home from the beginning. * she longed for it" (*Ana* 127). Hélène Cixous also exhorts rapturous movement without end and acceptance of the female body. Evoking writing our way into more cultural space, she defiantly comments on "we":

the repressed of culture. . . we the labyrinths, the ladders,

the trampled spaces. . . . extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; and we're not afraid of lacking. ("Laugh" 248)

Daly, Marlatt and Cixous "extend" themselves and write against repression and oppression. Critiquing patriarchal values which posit women's lack, they celebrate movements "deeper into the center of the homeland." The "homeland" includes women's space of self, body, language, and community. Marlatt joins this spiralling call for women to compose our own space in a dialogue and community of love; her works "utter" and "outer" lesbian life in her spiralling "articulation: seeing the connections" (*Touch* 49).

Marlatt often conflates the spiralling and reciprocal reader/writer relationship with the mutuality of lesbian sexuality, and with the process of coming into being of the self. The reader is invited to participate and play a co-creative role. In *Double Negative*, Marlatt and Warland emphasize the power of vocalizing and writing lesbian experience to make it present. Directly addressing each other and the reader, they interweave Cixous's notion of "stolen words": "spelled out/ / i say them to you/ . . ./ stolen words graffitied on our / northern minds" (9). "Graffiti," an ancient drawing and writing on public walls, spells out lesbian presence for all to see. Cixous also recommends that women steal back patriarchal language: "she makes another way of knowing circulate. . . . To fly/steal is woman's gesture, to steal into language to make it fly. . . breaking in, emptying structures, turning the selfsame, the proper upside down" ("Sorties" 96). Women breaking and emptying patriarchal structures offer new perspectives. "Words graffitied on our / northern minds" embody the corporeality of language and recall the interplay of knowledge, vision, and language.

Marlatt acknowledges the importance of being able to read the writing in any medium: "reading us in what is out of place out/standing ... we bilingual reading rock reading sand word reading us in" (*Double* 56). She integrates the landscape of the mind with the natural and sociopolitical

surroundings; as she theorizes, our experience of these spaces is constructed in language. Lesbian writers must write other lesbians into discourse, turn patriarchal discourse "upside down," so that we may enter the empowering ongoing cultural process of writing and "reading us in."

Nicole Brossard articulates the double process continually at work:

it seems to me that for lesbians to come abreast of who they are, what they need is a bed, a worktable to write on, and a book. A book we must read and write at the same time. This book is unpublished but we are already quite familiar with its substantial preface. In it, we find the names of Sappho, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Adrienne Rich, Mary Daly, Monique Wittig, and others. (*Aerial* 136)

Brossard and Marlatt assume agency in this ongoing spiralling historical lesbian dialogue. Discussing her cooperation with Brossard when they translate each other's work, Marlatt expresses her feelings in erotically loaded terms. She writes about her translation of Brossard's *Mauve* as,

Conversion, transmission, neural seepage, transgression of boundaries, connection and communication. . . there is the leap beyond that borderline of words, beyond the edge of the page, which i came to see as a leap beyond the separateness of two languages, two minds. ("Translating" 29)

Her "leap beyond" separateness articulates lesbian love as an all-encompassing orgasmic experience which produces a unified body of pleasure and understanding. A "leap beyond" separateness multiply implicates erotic reader/writer/translator intertextual relationships. Nicole Brossard also speaks of the "page" in sexual/textual terms: "fresh-skinned - essential surface / you float within my page she said" (*Lovhers* 61). Floating thoughts replicate the way Marlatt connects the fluid mutuality of love-making and the erotics of language. Brossard also writes, "I don't want to have to possess anything or anyone, text or persons, unless it's by mutual pleasure" (*Aerial* 43). These lesbian writers transgress patriarchal notions of the authority over the text; together they joyously celebrate a mutual leaping into being of the lesbian self. They replace heterosexual

rigid power and control with fluid lesbian mutuality and reciprocity.

Lesbians, experiencing and writing "contradictory images," spiral into writing subjectivity. Marlatt attacks the hierarchical male/female binaries and their inability to bear lesbian "truth." She critiques the paradigms linguistically inherent in the authorization of capital I:

when we write I we discover that this singular column with its pedestal and cap, this authorized capital letter, far from being monolithically singular is full of holes a wind blows through, whispering contradictory images, echoing others' words. I am not myself, or we are not myself, or each of us is our selves in plural struggling to speak the difference we sense through rigid assumptions of sameness and identity in the language we have inherited. ("Difference" 192)

"Echoing others' words" in community, a lesbian word whispers a "plural struggling to speak." Wittig, like Marlatt, stresses language's importance in creating women's subjectivity: "It is when starting to speak that one becomes I. . . . For each time I say I, I reorganize the world from my point of view" ("Mark" 6). She provokes active construction of our worlds.

Marlatt evokes trust between writer and reader, analogous to the trust of two women in a loving sexual embrace. The co-creative process of the involved reader evokes this trusting ecstatic experience. Discussing *Double Negative*, Marlatt and Warland describe how they rewrite and re-interpret their texts: "eroticizing collaboration we've moved from treason into trust. a difficult season, my co-labial writer writing me in while we are three and you is reading away with us" ("Reading" 88).

Marlatt seeks a language adequate to communicate her experience. In "Cartographies of Silence," Adrienne Rich dreams of a common language. Her desired aesthetic relationship with her lesbian readers is transparent:

If at the will of the poet the poem / could turn into a thing
/ If it could simply look you in the face / with naked
eyeballs, not letting you turn / till you, and I who long to
make this thing, / were finally clarified together in its
stare. (Fact 235)

"Clarified together" parallels Marlatt's desire to write in and create

lesbian community. Marlatt discusses lesbian writing and conversation:

The mutual quality of conversation is embedded in its very roots. . . in the play of intertextuality, for instance, do we have an extended conversation? ("In Conversation" 7)

Intertextuality encourages dialogue and community through broader access.

These lesbian writers, Marlatt, Brossard, Daly, Wittig, and Rich, each voice the erotics of the reading/writing act. They communicate common shared experiences through lesbian love and language. This recalls Marks and de Courtivron's discussion of *jouissance* as sexual bliss and pleasure:

(it) carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration. . . in the world of orgasms, a giving, expending, dispensing pleasure without concern about ends or closure. One can easily see how the same imagery could be used to describe women's writing. (37)

These writers "come" to pleasure through words and love; they evoke mutual abandonment and "giving" of self with the other. As they "mingle and blend," lesbians offer a model for a poetics of dialogue; Marlatt writes in this continuum of loving, storytelling, reading and writing (*Touch* 31).

Their lesbian reality claims space denied by patriarchal, heterosexual culture. Cixous incites women "To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become at *will* the taker and the initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process" ("Laugh" 250). Marlatt's writing equally provokes other lesbians to assume agency, both in language and in everyday life experience. She rejects silence.

Michelle Cliff, a black writer who for years lived with Adrienne Rich and co-edited the periodical *Lesbian Wisdom*, says: "Passing demands quiet. And from that quiet - silence" (*Land* 22). Cliff speaks of "a dual masquerade - passing straight/passing lesbian [that] enervates and contributes to speechlessness - to speak might be to reveal" ("Notes" 7).

Marlatt's writings "reveal" her specific lesbian experience in a defiant strategy against silence and repression. Her writing sustains and contains lesbian community. Marlatt's words offer a new life and a new

possibility to her female readers, a life in which women do truly value other women and do make the political and personal choice to bond with other women. The immediacy of her language and the autobiographical nature of her experiences pull me, as a reader, in as co-creator. In my thesis deliberations, I realize I metaphorically mother her texts; but, at the same time, Marlatt offers me space, indeed encourages me, to contribute to the vibrant community of lesbian-feminist writers, and to help create acceptable environments for others to flourish in. I join in Marlatt's love of language, and in her efforts to write women into history and the present. I respond to her political desire to transform woman's oppressive role in heterosexual society.

Marlatt presents lesbian desire as continuous and uncontainable. As she articulates her journey of discovery, she makes space without end for her readers. In a relevant interview, Marlatt discusses *Ana Historic*. She notes the complex spiralling relationship between continual reading and writing of our lives without end, and the unending experience of lesbian desire. These words illustrate Marlatt's ongoing poetics of connections:

Annie is a very sexual woman, the writing kept moving towards her actually making love with Zoe, and yet that could only come at the end of the book, because she had to go through all these shifts of identity and coming to consciousness of what the latent desire really was. Yet I didn't want that final scene to be the end of the story, because it's never the end, it's always the beginning of new stories.... The only way I could honour that was by moving back into the writing and the reading, using the metaphor of the continual turning of the page as the working of desire. (Williamson, "Sounding" 52)

Erotic lesbian journey to self through language and love never ends. I desire to continually turn every Marlatt "page." But, since my thesis deliberations must close at some point, I conclude with Marlatt's emphasis on new "beginnings"; her erotic, forward-spiralling words never end: Marlatt provocatively writes, "your lips open under mine and the new rain comes at last, lust, springs in us beginning all over again" (*Touch* 32).

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