

**“SHE MUST WRITE HER SELF”:
FEMINIST POETICS OF DECONSTRUCTION AND INSCRIPTION
(SIX CANADIAN WOMEN WRITING)**

by

Sydney M. Hill

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

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
December 22, 1997



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-26957-4

Canada

Abstract

This thesis compares six texts by Canadian women writers (three English-Canadian texts and three Québécois texts): Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic, Carol Shields's The Stone Diaries, Betsy Warland's open is broken, Madeleine Monette's Le Double suspect, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska's La Maison Trestler ou le 8e jour d'Amérique and France Théoret's Une voix pour Odile. It analyzes, from a poststructuralist feminist perspective, the authors' strategies of deconstructing dominant ideologies which repress women's stories, followed by their inscription of women's experiences. Each chapter is comprised of a cross-cultural comparison of one text by an English-Canadian author and one text by a Québécois author and examines the way in which they deconstruct (and reconstruct) one of the following: patriarchal language, traditional autobiography and History. The analysis of the narrators' subversion of dominant ideologies and discourses is followed by an examination of their inscription of women's experiences which have previously been excluded from the dominant discourses they seek to undermine.

I dedicate this thesis with much love to my mother.
Her faith in me has always made all the difference.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Roots of Language: Excavating the Patriarchal Power Structures.....	11
Chapter Two: Writing a Woman’s Life: The Problems of Fictional Autobiography.....	42
Chapter Three: HIStory - The Language of Power and Exclusion (or Where is HERstory?).....	73
Conclusion.....	106
Bibliography.....	114

Introduction

[W]riting is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.

-Hélène Cixous

Writing can be a subversive act: it can be used as a tool to undermine dominant discourses and ideologies. Writing can be a dangerous act: it can threaten the solid foundation of existing power structures. Writing can be a powerful act: it can speak what has been silenced and make present what was absent. Writing can be a creative act: it can invent new forms of expression and imagine new realities. For the six Canadian women writers in this study, writing is all of these things and more. They each use writing to subvert dominant discourses, challenge patriarchal power and inscribe the female subject in forms of her own contriving. Although the range of discourses these authors seek to deconstruct in their texts is very broad - from patriarchal language, to traditional autobiography to History - their approaches and objectives are similar.

Each of the six writers is attacking the fundamental discourse which seeks to dominate, silence, exclude and efface women. Louise Cotnoir explains that “the act of writing is a form of strike against sexist myths, fantasies, propaganda” (“The Marked Gender” 101) - in other words, patriarchy. Patriarchy is the master narrative which poses the greatest threat to women’s ability to locate themselves as subjects in texts just as it denies women the power to define themselves in the everyday world. Chris Weedon explains that “[t]he term ‘patriarchal’ refers to power relations in which women’s interests are subordinated to the interests of men....Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference. In patriarchal discourse the nature and social

role of women are defined in relation to a norm which is male” (2). The tone of detachment in this explanation nearly hides the horror of its implications for women. Constantly judged against and defined according to a male norm, women are found lacking. Patriarchy’s power structure is based on a binary opposition of man/woman signifying a concealed hierarchy in which woman is always located as inferior.

Paradoxically, patriarchy is not only based on women’s negative position within the system, it is also dependant on the repression of the female and the absence of woman as subject. Silence is the desired state for women under patriarchy. Cixous and Clément write: “Exclue de l’espace de son système, elle est le refoulé qui assure au système son fonctionnement” (123). Irigaray makes a similar observation in Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère when she demonstrates the way patriarchal society is built on the denial and death of the mother:

Le désir d’elle, son désir à elle, voilà ce que doit venir interdire la loi du père - de tous les pères....Toujours, ils interviennent pour censurer, refouler, en tout bon-sens et bonne santé, le désir de la mère....Dès lors, ce qui apparaît dans les faits les plus quotidiens comme dans l’ensemble de notre culture, c’est que celles-ci fonctionnent originairement sur un matricide (15).

This partly explains why the search for the mother (and hence the repressed Imaginary) is common to all texts in this study, although some are more aware and explicit than others in their examination of the role that their mothers play in their daughters’ lives.

In a larger sense, all six writers are extremely conscious of women’s absence from the patriarchal script. Therefore, the initial goal of each writer’s project is to expose women’s absence from the dominant discourse she is investigating and to demonstrate that it is not a natural and acceptable occurrence but one which is contrived to support patriarchal ideology in order to allow it to maintain its position of power and control over the production and dissemination of discourse.

The second step for the writers in this study is to gain control over the representation of their own experiences and the inscription of their own subjectivities. This goal necessitates a transfer of power which is often difficult and painful, not always entirely executed, but ultimately rewarding because it gives women control over self-expression and self-representation. This is part of the feminist practice that all six writers employ. In its most basic sense, feminism “is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society” (Weedon 1). Nicole Brossard underlines that, in order to label herself a feminist, a woman must possess the firm conviction that these power relations must change: “a feminist is a woman who can claim this title for herself because she is convinced within and beyond her own personal experience that this reality has to be changed in order for women to be able to breathe without further fear and humiliation” (“Before I became a feminist” 60). Toril Moi introduces the relationship between power and feminism when she writes that “feminism is not simply about rejecting power, but about transforming the existing power structures - and, in the process, transforming the *very concept* of power itself” (148). This emphasis is crucial to the understanding of the feminist project. It is not a transfer of power whose objective is simply to overturn and invert the power structure so that women can then dominate and control men and the representation of men’s selves and experiences. Instead, it is a transformation of power which comes to signify power and control over the self and the ability to use this power to speak from the position of the subject.

Woman as subject in a text of her own making is a third common thread for these writers. “‘Subjectivity’ is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (Weedon 32). It is her ability to say “I” (or “i” as in the texts of Marlatt and Warland) and to be at the origin

of her own discourse (and not the discourse of others) that preconditions her placement as subject in the text. Once the writers have deconstructed patriarchal discourse and gained control of the narrative, they seek to inscribe the female subject by representing her experiences. Linda Hutcheon examines the relationship between the feminist project and the representation of women: “the history of feminist thought on this topic includes the confrontation of dominant representations of women as misrepresentations, the restoration of the past of women’s own self-representation, the generation of accurate representations of women, and the acknowledgement of the need to represent differences among women...” (“Incredulity Toward Metanarrative” 191). Representation produces rather than reflects subjectivity (Godard “Women of Letters” 266), so women must be in control of the means of production in order to inscribe themselves as subjects.

The authors take a poststructuralist approach in their writing and representation of the subject. Subjectivity is neither fixed nor defined but always in the process of constituting itself dependent upon the discourse in which it is situated. The subject is neither singular nor a coherent whole; instead, it is often the site of power struggles between patriarchy and feminism which produce fragmented and contradictory subject positions. For example, France Théoret must often struggle between the patriarchal order she has internalized and her desire to express her self outside of it. Similarly, Annie in Ana Historic dramatises this struggle in her self by thematically opposing the patriarchal subject in the form of her mother with the lesbian feminist subject of Ana. Poststructuralism also celebrates the plurality of language and the impossibility of forever fixing meaning. This relates to the female subject as she explores the multiple facets of her self, her body and her desire. For example, shifting words and their meanings is central to Warland’s self-inscription in her poetry.

The celebration of the multiplicity of the female body is but one of the strategies used to inscribe the female subject in the text. All six authors are intent on placing women in narrative and filling in the blanks of their absence. To accomplish this, they appeal to *écriture au féminin* to write against the narrative structures which exclude women. They write against the closed linear form of the patriarchal narrative and instead posit a circular, open writing. Louise Dupré notes that “feminism is rather a philosophy, moving, opening, spiralling, which brings an end to the fixed, closed, unary and linear version that has prevailed” (“What We Talk About on Sundays” 133); consequently, their writing practice reflects this thinking. In La Maison Trestler, this is reflected in Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska’s perception of history not as a linear progression but as a fusion of past, present and future. The paratextual comment she inserts at the beginning of her text - “le futur est en avant et en arrière et vers les côtés” (9) - prepares the reader for the journey ahead. In Warland’s poetry, the end is pursued through the repetition of words with subtle changes and shifting significations. Her text thus progresses in a spiralling motion rather than a linear one.

The writers also deconstruct fixed notions of truth, reality, fiction and lie in their texts in order to suggest that imagination is as powerful and valid a means of representing their realities as any strict adherence to fact. Again, they combat the process of fixing meaning and establishing the Truth by suggesting that there is not one but many truths which need to be told in order to glean some understanding of their selves. The appeal to the imagination as a creative force is strong in the texts as it provides a vehicle for seeing and writing women out of the patriarchal script. Daisy in Shields’s The Stone Diaries is liberated from the constraints placed on her life by her ability to picture things differently. Catherine’s resurrection in La Maison Trestler is aided by a combination “de quelques documents et d’une imagination démente” (192).

The objective of this study is to pull together all the preceding elements - under the rubrics of language, autobiography and History - which to date have largely been examined separately in critical studies. They are, in fact, closely linked and interdependent aspects of the process of deconstruction and construction engaged in by feminist writing. While the deconstruction of the patriarchal order and the dominant discourses of language, traditional autobiography and History is a necessary precursor to the construction of the female subject, it does not precede it in the text; rather, the two occur simultaneously. Yet as the narrators gain control of the narrative, there is a marked progression from object to subject and from absence to presence of the female character in the text.

This is a comparative study of six Canadian women writers' texts from a feminist poststructuralist perspective and has been structured accordingly. The pairing of one Canadian and one Québécois text in each chapter was intended to provide a symmetrical cross-cultural comparison not often found in literary criticism of Canadian works. More often than not, texts are segregated according to the language in which they are written, deterring critics from crossing the perceived boundaries between French and English. While theoretical and critical texts, as well as anthologies and collections of articles, have become more inclusive and are increasingly devoted to the investigation of the works of both English and Québécois writers, they still often maintain the division within the articles and resist any close comparison between works from the two cultures.¹ The journal *Tessera* is one of the outstanding collaborative Canadian/Québécois projects which "constitutes a space for women to exchange images and ideas in writing" (Godard "Women of

¹A noted exception is Lori Saint-Martin's article "Nicole Brossard et Daphne Marlatt: la fascination de l'écriture" which compares Le désert mauve and Ana Historic.

Letters” 258). It provides a forum for women writers and critics to discuss women’s writing across English/French cultural boundaries and the panel discussions included in the journal attest to its success in bridging the critical comparative gap. Nevertheless, an in-depth comparative study is sadly lacking.

There are, however, general comparisons on the development and practice of Canadian and Québécois women writers. The development of Quebec feminism was largely tied to the nationalist movement in Quebec in the late 1960s, giving “many feminists a political and theoretical language with which to formulate their desire for collective liberation and radical social change” (Gould Writing in the Feminine 12). Because of the absence of any such movement in English-speaking Canada, the feminist culture took longer to develop, with women finally looking to their Québécois counterparts for direction.² Daphne Marlatt explains that women were “inspired by the evidence of a feminist culture in Québec that is vital, affirmative, visionary and firmly rooted in an analysis of language and culture” (“In the Feminine” 13). She stresses that the Quebec feminists, particularly Nicole Brossard, helped the Canadian feminists understand women’s relationship to the experimentation and exploration of language (Fragments of a Conversation on Language). Furthermore, when English Canadian women writers were unable to find a critical forum open to their own experimental writing, they “found both exemplary texts and supportive readers among Quebec writers for their own neglected language-centred writing” (Godard “Women of Letters” 266). It is not surprising then that this profound influence has resulted in a very similar approach to language and writing in Canadian and Québécois women’s texts. Barbara Godard even goes so

²Interestingly, all the Québécois texts in this study were published prior to their English Canadian counterpart.

far as to say: “There is not really a gap between the two literatures” (“Theorizing” 60), the supposed division between them being produced by the critical focus of the literary institution at any given time.

While there is perhaps no great difference between Canadian and Québécois approaches to the writing of their texts, particularly when Marlatt and Warland openly credit the influence of Québécois feminists in their own writing, there is undoubtedly a cultural tie based in a linguistic reality that is strongly felt by Québécois writers. As Gwladys Downes explains: “The geographical space and the psychic space are co-terminus, for even when disagreeing violently with the characteristics of her society, [the Québécois feminist writer] can still feel herself part of a continuing culture in the broadest sense, defined by its language and its political opposition to the English fact” (118). The Québécois writers are extremely conscious of their linguistic and cultural marginalization within the larger context of English Canada. This surfaces in their texts as the writers’ identities are strongly linked to the French language and their Québécois heritage. They struggle with a sense of oppression that their English counterparts do not feel, particularly in the texts of Théoret and Ouellette-Michalska. In Théoret’s text, the division between English-speaking and French-speaking residents of Quebec is played out on the level of social class, and her text is interspersed with English words which mark the negative influence of the English over the French. Ouellette-Michalska’s text is more blatant in its criticism as the narrator struggles to come to terms with the entire history of Quebec’s domination as well as the way in which her own sense of identity is connected to it. The Quebec feminists are thus doubly marginalized, first as women in the dominant patriarchal order, and secondly in the legacy of domination of their linguistic and cultural heritage.

This comparative study begins with two texts which investigate women's relationship to patriarchal language. In Chapter One, France Théoret's Une voix pour Odile and Betsy Warland's open is broken expose the way in which women are coded negatively in language and always occupy the position of the other. They examine the way in which women are trapped by the representations of the patriarchal script while their realities are excluded and fictionalized. In order to escape the script, they need to shatter the images reflected by the male gaze and assert themselves as the creators of their own selves. Writing the body is an important strategy they use to break patriarchal control of the script so that they can be originators of their own text. By using *écriture au féminin*, Théoret inscribes the female body, its rhythms and cycles while Warland writes the desiring lesbian subject in her intimate and erotic moments. Both writers refuse to be contained within one subject position and are in constant motion as they unearth a feminized language rooted in the Imaginary.

Chapter Two explores the process of life-writing as two women seek to write their lives. In Le Double suspect by Madeleine Monette and The Stone Diaries by Carol Shields, the principles of traditional autobiography are deconstructed and a feminized autobiographical discourse is put in its place. Women are unable to satisfy the tenets and conditions of traditional autobiography. Consequently, they are unable to use it to express their realities. Monette and Shields demonstrate that women are excluded from a genre based on men's texts and on a public/private dichotomy. They revolutionize the traditional self/other paradigm to convey a more relational and intersubjective form of inscription. They destabilize boundaries separating fiction and reality so that the power of imagination can be employed to fill in the blanks of women's experiences. Through a split subject and a doubled subject, they succeed in writing themselves into a feminized autobiographical text.

Chapter Three analyzes women's relationship to the dominant master narrative of History.

Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska's text La Maison Trestler and Daphne Marlatt's text Ana Historic illustrate the way women are absent from history. They demonstrate how women's experiences are excluded from the official record because everyday activities are not considered valid subject matter. By inserting intertexts from the dominant discourse into their own works, the authors subvert the notion of history as an objective discourse, exposing its theme of power and control as well as its patriarchal ideological bias. They also use historiographic metafiction to deconstruct the opposition of History and story and to suggest, much like Monette and Shields, that imagination is a powerful means of rewriting the patriarchal script. They rewrite history based on love, maternal memory and the female body and succeed in inserting the female subject into the historical record. Through a doubled subjectivity, they use their historical characters to explore possibilities for women outside the patriarchal script so that history truly becomes herstory.

The message from all the writers is clear: to rely on the facts, the language, the discourse before them is to fall into the patriarchal trap and reproduce the patriarchal script. Incorporating the weight of the real into the texts is important and the writers do not dismiss this; however, they understand that while giving voice to the real is an important step towards self-inscription, *only* reproducing the real of women's experiences in patriarchy will cement them further within it. If power is not given to the imagination, nothing will change. It is not enough simply to subvert the dominant power structure; it is essential that faith be placed in the power to imagine life differently and to believe in the truth of it. Thus the writing project rests on the strength of the authors' imagination: it is a question of power, of agency, of voice, of language, of subjectivity. Above all, it is a question of inscribing women's experiences and women's selves, of learning to speak and of being unafraid to say "I".

Chapter One

The Roots of Language: Excavating the Patriarchal Power Structure

Qui forcera les portes de la langue?
Qui foncera?

- France Théoret

Invaded enough in every way,
why hand over the blueprints too?

- Betsy Warland

The struggle for language is a struggle for power. As Chris Weedon points out: “Once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power, then language becomes an important site of political struggle” (24). Both Betsy Warland and France Théoret are well aware of this, and engaged in a battle for words (and thus power), they seek to shift the balance of power to give women the voice(s) and the opportunities to speak and to be heard that they have been so long denied. The focus of this struggle is the liberation of language such that words are freed from “fixed” meanings which enclose and negatively define women’s selves and experiences; instead, words are opened to the generation of new and multiple meanings which allow for women's self-definition and self-discovery. The writers’ goal is thus not only to deconstruct patriarchal language but to transcend and transform it so that women’s language is given the opportunity to emerge, creating a space for the construction of female subjectivity outside the dominant patriarchal order.

Warland’s open is broken and Théoret’s Une voix pour Odile choose to first excavate

language to its very roots, exploring a patriarchal power structure that makes the writing of women's experiences and the positioning of women as subjects in language impossible. Both writers examine the difficulty of speaking through a language that both displaces and fixes women. They turn language in on itself to engage notions of subjectivity, the female body, marriage, desire and sexuality, deconstructing the patriarchal power relations which dominate (the writing of) these experiences. While both authors must explore their relation to language through linguistic structures, they see themselves as living both inside and outside language; paradoxically, they are excluded even while they are included in the structures of patriarchal language. Their solution is to disrupt, rupture and fragment traditional linguistic (power) structures and to find an alternative means of inscribing women's experiences and subjectivities in the spaces between or outside those to which women have been relegated as silent objects.

Language, the female body, sexuality, desire and the central role of writing are inextricably intertwined as Warland and Théoret search for a voice to speak their lived realities. In the erotic poetry of open is broken, Warland inscribes the lesbian subject, closely linking body and text, writing the two as one while imbuing old words with older (original) meanings and creating new associations. Similarly, Théoret pursues a writing of body and text in the prose poetry of Une voix pour Odile as she struggles to represent the realities of her own experiences as well as those of other working-class women in Quebec. A close examination of both texts will thus follow the writers' descent to the depths of language to recover its roots and expose its sexism, to break the silence and find a voice for women's experiences and subjectivities through *écriture au féminin* and the feminization of language.

It is essential to first understand that language, as the foundation of the patriarchal power

structure, does indeed constrain, deny and silence women. Women's negative representation in language or their absence from it altogether is so ingrained as to be almost missed. As Gail Scott notes: "We may use the English language our whole lives without noticing the distortions" ("Red Tin + White Tulle" 34). Yet the English language (and, for that matter, the French language) is not gender-neutral or ideologically indifferent; sexism, while often subtle and difficult to identify, are entrenched within it, and the universal, supposedly constructed to include and represent both male and female, is nevertheless always male (Fragments of a Conversation on Language).¹ The feminine is thus subsumed by the masculine in language and disappears silently into its construction in much the same way the silent "e" used to designate the feminine in French can be removed without a trace. Patricia Smart writes about:

...la loi selon laquelle le féminin est codé par le <<e>> muet, une terminaison silencieuse qu'on peut enlever à la phrase sans que la syntaxe en soit le moindrement modifiée. Le féminin dans la grammaire française est un élément accessoire, l'embellissement silencieux d'une structure signifiante axée sur le masculin. À l'intérieur de la langue, il ne s'agit pas d'une symétrie, mais plutôt d'une a-symétrie entre masculin et féminin (Écrire 27).

This asymmetry is manifested in the hierarchization of language in which women are judged as lacking against the male norm and in which binary oppositions privilege the male and "serve to subordinate the feminine to the masculine order" (Weedon 66).² "Female is male-minus, for the

¹There is some discussion revolving around whether the feminine is more repressed in the English or the French language (see Fragments of a Conversation on Language, for example). Although there is disagreement on the issue of degree, everyone is indeed of a consensus that it is repressed in both.

²See, for example, Hélène Cixous' and Catherine Clément's La jeune née which explores the binary oppositions based on the man/woman dichotomy on which, they argue, patriarchal society, and hence the repression of women, is founded.

major rule of our grammar and syntax is male-as-norm" (Godard "Writing and Difference" 123).

Not surprisingly, then, women feel alienated and incapable of functioning in what Louky Bersianik sees as "this patriarchal invention of a language so inhospitable to women" ("Women's Work" 164) it cannot possibly represent women's realities. As Sharon Thesen rhetorically posits: "how can woman write out of, or into, her own truth when language and syntax support and reproduce the consciousness of patriarchy" ("Poetry and the dilemma of expression" 380). Indeed, the ideological codes of patriarchy and male authority have seeped into language in such a way that by speaking through it without questioning it, women are participating (un)willingly/(un)knowingly in their own entrapment; thus, challenging their position and representation (or lack thereof) in language, while difficult, is essential to their liberation. In a poststructuralist sense, language becomes the site of competing patriarchal and feminist discourses. It "is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested" (Weedon 21).

A similar battle for language, and exploration of women's relationship to it, occurs in contemporary psychoanalytic discourse. According to French language theorist Jacques Lacan, entry into language is a movement away from the Imaginary associated with the unconscious and the mother, into the Symbolic Order in which the Law of the Phallus and the Father prevails. This Phallogentric Order is largely inaccessible to women for, as Donna Bennett explains: "[A]s a female she cannot truly join the Symbolic State, since by its nature it is male-centred and has relegated the female to the margin. Since language, in Lacan's myth, is paternal, not only is the female displaced, she is silenced" (238).

Building upon Lacan's work, French feminist Luce Irigaray theorizes that a suppressed

feminine language exists in the pre-symbolic order of the Imaginary where women can access and express their desires and experiences. As Irigaray writes: “Cette civilisation très ancienne n’aurait sans doute pas le même langage, le même alphabet... Le désir de la femme ne parlerait pas la même langue que celui de l’homme...” (“Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un” 25). Men’s and women’s languages come to be perceived in terms of either the Symbolic State or the Imaginary and the views of male and female sexual organs associated with each. In the Symbolic Order, “the phallus signifies power and control...through control of the satisfaction of desire” (Weedon 53); men’s writing is viewed by feminists as privileging “la linéarité, la logique et une conception de l’identité qui est close, distanciée, et rassurée par la présence de frontières, c’est-à-dire qu’elle se déploie dans un rapport de proximité (de Même) avec la Loi” (Smart Écrire 26). In the Symbolic Order, men are positioned as subjects while women are constructed as objects in relation to masculine sexuality, defined by their lack of a penis as an empty hole devoid of value. By reclaiming the Imaginary as a site of women’s language and female eroticism, Irigaray and others are seeking to inscribe women as subjects of a discourse grounded in the language of a female body no longer perceived in terms of what it does not possess but in its value as a source of multiplicities, its own desires and language.³ Consequently, and in contrast to men’s writing, women’s writing is often characterized by its “circularity, spontaneity, playfulness, diffuseness, novelty and a tolerance for overlapping - or fuzzy - categories” (Bennett 236).

There are many questions which arise from this brief synopsis of the division between the

³It is at this point that Irigaray becomes very poststructuralist by moving away from binary oppositions towards a privileging of multiplicities, the plurality of language and the impossibility of strict definitions.

Symbolic Order and the Imaginary and the categorization of men's and women's writing. Essentially, the above can be read as a metaphor for the situation of society in sexual terms; in other words, it illustrates how language and sexuality reinforce one another in order to devalue female sexuality, and, consequently, the feminine. But, as Louise Dupré points out: "la féminité de l'écriture n'est pas la conséquence directe d'une détermination corporelle - le fait d'être née femme [le fruit d'une inscription biologique] mais bien de rapport au symbolique, au langage" (*Stratégies* 22). As a (not THE) solution, writing the female body becomes a means of deconstructing the phallogentric conception of sexuality and writing while at the same time viewing sexuality, desire and subjectivity in a different and more positive manner for women.

Writing the body is not without its problems. First, it is important to note that while these women writers are attacking patriarchal forms of writing and language, they are not doing so because these forms are wrong for men, but because they do not allow a space for women's self-representation. As Marlatt so eloquently phrases it: "how can the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority, subject through verb to object, convey the wisdom of endlessly repeating and not exactly repeated cycles her body knows?" ("Musing with mothertongue" 55). The need to write from the body stems from a need for different representation through the invention of a new form. However, by identifying the body as a source of women's language and writing, there is a risk of "reduc[ing] women to a version of their sexuality" (Weedon 65) and of defining them solely by their bodily functions. It seems necessary, then, to differentiate between women being positioned as objects in a (sexual) discourse that does not originate from them and women positioning themselves as subjects who choose to write from this biological location; it thus becomes a question of choice, not prescription, of "who," as Kathy Mezei says, "defines

these processes” (239). And while writers such as Irigaray and Cixous repeatedly insist on the necessity of writing the body, it is more a strategy for breaking strict patriarchal definitions of feminine inscription in language and a way of inscribing female subjectivity than a fixed model for women’s writing.⁴ The proposition that women writers must adhere to a particular writing style in order to express themselves negates the very goal that they are striving to attain by moving beyond boundaries; consequently, it would serve only to restrict women’s writing to a different set of conventions (yet no less stifling *because* of the limitations) and would “bind the feminine to multiple rules and constraints....Proposing a model for women’s writing can only haze their liberty to imagine and write themselves outside the code, outside the norm...” (Massé 218 and 219). If women’s writing is often observed as being open, fluid, circular and pluralistic, it is not because it strives to satisfy some pre-set conditions but because these techniques work against what is perceived as the dominant phallogocentric discourse.⁵ Hélène Cixous writes:

It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded - which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the

⁴Karen Gould makes this comment in relation to the development of *écriture au féminin* in Quebec: “[T]he notion of an *écriture au féminin* has developed as a political project, that is to say, as a **potentially useful strategy** for subverting conventional literary forms, deconstructing patriarchal thought, and asserting the centrality of women’s experience in writing” (*Writing* 35, bold emphasis added).

⁵Donna Bennett observes that the characteristics of writing so often described as “feminine” are in fact similar to those of other oppressed/disenfranchised groups (236), thus illustrating the fact that they are as much (or more) a method to oppose dominant forms of expression as an inherent feminine quality. Similarly, Betsy Warland notes that word play and language-centred writing is not exclusive to women; male authors are also engaged in experimenting with language. However, the difference between the two groups lies in their motives for playing with language: “For the woman writer, it is a matter of necessity and survival...For the man writer, it is often a matter of game and innovation” (“The breasts refuse” 291).

phallogocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination ("Laugh" 253).

In summary then, both the psychoanalytical discourse and the poststructuralist discourse provide the framework for Warland's and Théoret's investigations into women's (re)positioning in language. Viewed from a poststructuralist perspective, women's position in language must be examined as competing with dominant power structures. Because language is not transparent and words have gained their meaning (and hence their power) through their usage within these discourses, these writers are able to expose the way in which patriarchal language has silenced women by forcing them to speak with a "borrowed" tongue and invalidating their own forms of self-expression. The knowledge that meaning is not fixed or stable but is constituted within language and as such is subject to change and open to multiplicities allows these writers to pursue their project of disrupting and subverting masculine language and meaning. Once they have deconstructed patriarchal language, they are then free to inscribe the feminine as they experience it and wish to express it; they thus follow their desire "de désarticuler le discours dominant, de fissurer la syntaxe, de laisser passer dans le signifiant le débordement féminin, de réinventer le vocabulaire, de le réinvestir de nouveaux signifiés" (Louise Dupré "Une poésie de l'effraction" 29-30).

Enter the psychoanalytic discourse in which the process of inscribing the feminine is not a manufacturing from nothing but an excavation into the deep recesses of pre-Symbolic memory where a silenced women's language resides. At this point it might appear that the poststructuralist discourse and the psychoanalytical discourse are conflicting, even contradictory, discourses because the former stresses multiplicities and the impossibility of fixing meaning while the latter

subscribes to the existence of a concrete and essential women's language. Yet the psychoanalytical discourse will be interpreted from a poststructuralist position such that women's language is pluralistic and refuses definitions. Consequently, the two work together to encourage the inscription of women's experiences. Women have become archaeologists, scraping away at the patriarchal power structure with their finger nails, digging on their hands and knees towards the recovery of the long-lost artifact of women's language.

The journey to the roots of language begins by locating Théoret and Warland not only as women writing within and against the patriarchal power structure but also by identifying the positions from which they write (*the politics of location*). As Théoret indicates: "J'écris d'où je viens. Je parle d'où je suis" (9). Their poetry is grounded in their experiences and as a result the subjectivities produced are derived from those realities. Théoret and Warland are doubly marginalized; first because they are women, and second because of class and sexual orientation respectively. Théoret's focus on working class women in her writing stems from her own background, and she stresses the need to ground her writing in this reality which is so often left unspoken. As Karen Gould explains:

No doubt because of her own working-class roots and personal struggle to overcome sex-role stereotyping and subjugation as a woman, France Théoret has...been preoccupied in her writing with the cultural myths, physical and psychological abuse, and real economic barriers that have lowered the professional aspirations, undermined the self confidences and potential sense of self-worth, and hindered the intellectual development of working-class women in Quebec (Writing 9).

Her explorations through language of the position of working class women at the margins of society play out the difficult and painful struggle these women must go through in order to pass from silent object to speaking subject. Similarly, Warland explores her reality as a lesbian at the

periphery of a patriarchal society which privileges heterosexuality and often denies and degrades homosexuality. She writes: "As I became more grounded in my life as a lesbian, and my vision as a lesbian, I came smack up against the reality that there were no words for my experience - my erotic, sexual and spiritual experience" ("f.) is sure" 34). It is thus her goal to reclaim language and words that can give voice to her experiences and allow her to performatively inscribe her reality as an erotic lesbian subject. While both Théoret and Warland write from the margins of mainstream patriarchal discourse, what is most interesting about their projects of inscription is their unwillingness to move to the centre of this discourse even as they deconstruct it. Instead, they emphasize the spaces in between or outside the traps of both the dominant discourse and the margins as possible sites of escape and self-expression. Thus begins the process of opening up a "closed" linguistic system, of digging down to the roots of language and of reclaiming subjectivity.

Both Théoret and Warland begin by examining the way in which women are alienated from patriarchal language. They underline the impossibility of expressing women's realities through words that are not their own in a patriarchal power structure that posits them as Object, as Other. "Je suis prise," (10) writes Théoret, "Je suis barrée" (37), "Je suis autre....Je suis manque,...polluée par toutes les idées, images, mythes que la société se fait de toutes les femmes, et par conséquent, de moi" (59), "Je m'oblitére mille et une fois par jour" (66). Through her writing, Théoret reveals that the speaking female subject, the *je*, views herself as an object, trapped in the images of women patriarchal society has constructed for her. She is thus caught in the paradoxical position of being subject and object simultaneously. By saying *je*, she positions herself as subject; however, by identifying herself as lacking, obliterated, negative and non-

existent, she illustrates the way in which her subjectivity is denied and she is relegated to the position of object in a discourse that does not originate from her.⁶ This recognition is an important first step in the journey from object to subject as she undertakes the necessary “process of reviewing and renaming the repressive conditions under which she and other women have been obliged to live” (Gould Writing 212).

While she succeeds in her struggle to articulate the negative semantic space she occupies, she ends by reinforcing her marginalized position. Society offers her few “legitimate” roles to play; she has little choice but to participate in “la reproduction complète du modèle” (52) which allows adult women to assume only one of three (un)acceptable identities in society.⁷ Théoret explains the difficulty of resisting these deeply engrained categorizations: “Le poids de cette vocation est énorme quand on a eu une éducation catholique très suivie et quand tous les modèles féminins se répartissent en trois: la mère mariée, la religieuse et le déchet de la société, la célibataire appelée par tous et par elle-même bien souvent, la vieille fille” (51).⁸ In this context,

⁶Louise Dupré writes: “Chez France Théoret, “je suis,” apparaissant d’abord suivi d’un attribut, nom ou adjectif, rend compte de la duplicité de la femme. Car si celle-ci affirme son existence, les attributs connotent la plupart du temps un état de non-existence, l’impossibilité de se constituer comme sujet véritable” (Stratégies 40).

⁷Denise Boucher also makes reference to the female trinity of “la vierge, la mère et la putain” in “Les Fées ont soif”, while Aritha van Herk writes about women’s “prescribed choices: mothers, saints, whores” in Places Far from Ellesmere.

⁸While Théoret identifies these three roles, she only engages in detail that of wife in this text. Consequently, the other two will remain unexamined. What is of interest, though, is the role sexuality, desire and the body play in the lives of the other two who essentially exist outside of the heterosexual economy of marriage. As virgins (the nun because of her vow of chastity, the spinster - old girl - due to her negative status as a single woman therefore lacking value because she does not have a man (ie, does not belong to any man)), both are perceived as a-sexual (and hence lacking desire), and both are denied the (pleasure of the) female body.

these roles (as prescribed, not chosen) become symbolic of women's imprisonment and self-effacement. The wife/mother exists only in her relationship to her husband and children; she has no identity as an autonomous subject and is only validated in her role as caregiver to others. In Une voix pour Odile, the wife is represented as an object of a capitalist exchange from father to husband: "Mollesse d'obéir et de se conformer, des oui de la tête vide....Fille à marier, femme mariée: de seize à dix-huit ans, le passage. De la maison du père à celle du mari..." (32-3). Marriage is a realm in which she learns to obey and reproduce the father's law and reality: "Mon mariage, le rapport prof-élève....La reproduction des idées. La reproduction pour un seul. Des interdits, des interdits si subtils, à la manière des intellectuels" (62-3), and in which she is used and abused as a sexual object: "Marchandise d'amour. Capital d'amour" (17), "Qui veut te fourrer? Qui veut te bourrer? Sois ici. Sois ici. En gorge dans la peau épaisse. Vire objet de pores" (38).⁹ There are very few positive visions of interactions between men and women on any level (sexual, intellectual, marital, etc) and the solidarity Théoret is searching for is nearly impossible because women still occupy and represent an inferior or object position in these interactions.¹⁰ Furthermore, women are often complicit in their objectification as they have

⁹This last citation, depicting the sexual violence against women, is so painful it hurts to read it. It calls up more radical views on women's relationship to patriarchal language. Maroussia Hajdukowski writes: "l'homme viole ce que la femme voile: son corps et son langage" ("Le Dénoncé" 55). This rape metaphor serves a dual purpose as it demonstrates how this violent crime against women is one of power dynamics and recalls how women have often internalized their own victimization ("it was my fault").

¹⁰ Théoret explains the problem in an interview: "Entre homme et femme, une forme instinctive d'attraction-répulsion joue presque toujours alors que la solidarité ne peut naître que d'une conscience....Il faut également que femme et homme se reconnaissent comme des égaux. Actuellement, pour beaucoup d'hommes, l'autonomie des femmes est perçue comme une catastrophe. Ils se vengent" ("Entrevue" 22).

internalized their roles in the patriarchal order, incarcerating themselves in a “*prison d’une prisonnière métamorphosée tout aussi bien en géôlière*” (46). The interiorization of the roles they have been conditioned to play is doubly difficult to resist because these roles offer women an identity in an otherwise self-effacing situation. As Jane Gallop explains: “*la loi du père lui donne une identité, même si ce n’est pas son identité à elle, même si cela efface sa propre spécificité féminine. Abandonner cette identité n’est pas une chose ‘facile’. Il faut le faire encore et encore*” (in Gould “*L’écrivaine*” 31). Thus women become imprisoned as objects inside the patriarchal power structure through the limited roles they may occupy, their own internalization of these roles and the language which pins them from within while denying them the possibility of positive self-expression and subjective affirmation.

Paradoxically, women and women’s experiences are excluded by the same linguistic structures that seek to contain them, placing them outside patriarchal language and possible representation. Thus Théoret’s inability to express herself as speaking female subject is also due to the fact that she has no language through which to speak. For Théoret, there is only one certainty: “*celle de n’avoir pas de langue*” (10). She goes on to write: “*CE QUE JE VOIS, je suis incapable de l’écrire. Je n’ai pas les mots. Je diffracte la réalité à travers des représentations données, importées, avalées d’un savoir que je n’ai pas fait mien*” (53). There is a gap between what she wants to say and what she is able to say in a language that denies her subjectivity, her reality. The pain involved in attempting to speak is almost unbearable and she is effectively silenced.

Elle est muette ou bégayante ou écrasée par le cri du dedans ou déparlante ou disant l’exact contraire de ce qu’elle veut dire. Autant qu’elle se rappelle, elle a toujours connu la difficulté de parole, la pensée difficile, lui a-t-on dit. Une jonction qui ne se fait

pas: la terreur, à chaque fois, que ça sorte tout de travers (30).

She finds herself exiled from language - “Hors temps. Hors lieu. Hors discours” (54) - encased in the margins of a discourse that does not allow a space for women’s voices, women’s bodies.

It is the language of the female body that Théoret views as suffocated, as silenced, since her birth into the linear structures of patriarchal language. She acknowledges her ritual baptism into the Symbolic Order when she writes “[j]e suis de la logique affirmative du sujet-verbe-complément” (53) and then exposes the way in which this supposedly self-affirming structure negates her very reality by denying her the possibility of expressing herself through other forms and rhythms (10). She stresses the need to inscribe the female body, **her** body, on the page, in order to oppose and subvert the cultural forms of writing which privilege the singularity of the phallus and invalidate the plurality of female sexuality. As the female body is consistently portrayed as a sexual object or as something to be ashamed of in this internalized order, and has been “si longtemps bafoué par les idéologies et condamné à la reproduction de l’espèce et des codes de la domination” (Smart Écriture 318), it is indeed very difficult for women to conceive of themselves and their bodies as realms of creative possibilities or as keys to other linguistic structures. The first step to opening up language, then, comes with the recognition that a new form is essential to her emancipation from her own complicity. Théoret writes: “Refus du linéaire, fendue en deux comme mon sexe, deux et plus, ni logique de la dualité, ni discours de l’ordre (intérieurisé) que j’ai pourtant appris par coeur” (58-9). By refusing to express herself via these prescribed linguistic structures, Théoret begins the process of disrupting the patriarchal power structure and of displacing the male symbolic system. As Karen Gould observes, “this discursive transformation [the female body] involves...a striking change of focus from

victimization to self-affirmation, from the forces acting upon women's bodies to the power women possess to reposition their bodies as active agents in the political, social, and artistic spheres" (Writing 44).

Théoret's investigation of and challenge to patriarchal language, to its construction of women as silent objects and its denial of the female body as a site of creative possibilities, is carried out largely on the level of linguistic power structures. Warland, like Théoret, also believes that the story of women and language is a story about power, its loss and its reappropriation. However, in contrast to Théoret's approach, Warland begins her examination of women's loss of language and power by focusing on the building blocks of patriarchal language: words. She writes:

open is broken is about the words i abandoned. ABANDON: "(to put) in one's power; a, to, at, from Latin ad, to + bandon, power." so, when we abandon words, it isn't a simple matter of leaving them behind but rather a turning over of our power to those who keep them: speechlessness the consequence (10).¹¹

She emphasizes that "language is a value system" ("f.) is sure" 34), that words are laden with meanings they have acquired over time, imbued with the power to silence, dismiss and condemn through negative connotations, derogatory values and fixed meanings that may be far different than the original (and often more positive, or at least not negatively charged) sense of the word.

Much like Mary Daly, who, as Marlatt explains, "did a primary job of renewing certain words for women and showing how they had been turned from their original usage, which didn't involve a negative value, as the oppression of women increased" ("When we change language...")

¹¹This is a particularly troublesome quote because it implies that women's relinquishing of their power (by their (forced?) entry into language and the symbolic order?) was a conscious, voluntary act.

186), Warland traces the etymologies of words, peeling away their outer layers of signifieds to reveal at their core the kernel of a different nature and the possibility of generating new signifieds, new associations from their original meaning. She links etymology with eroticism, saying that “in tracing words back, i have found that etymology nearly always re-members the feminine sensibility of our inner landscapes” (10). For Warland, “the truth is in the roots” (10), and her process of excavation is transformed into one of liberation, of decoding and recoding, of “open[ing] up language and writing...to break the constraints we have all suffered from, creatively, psychologically, and socially” (“in companionship” 198, emphasis added). This process is introduced in the first poem of her text in which she presents the reader with a list of words all currently possessing negative connotations that are conventionally used to describe lesbian love. She exposes the cultural codes which negatively qualify the lesbian relationship¹² and then subverts their foundation by revealing the more positive, possible meanings of the last word “evil” which is originally defined as “*upo*, under, up from under, over, uproar, open” (17). Thus the site of her enunciation is located below the many layers of culturally inscribed meaning, outside the negative semantic space used to confine and define homosexuality in traditional patriarchal language. As a key to her poetry, “evil” comes to signify a chaotic overthrow of the negative construction of lesbian love and an opening up to new signifieds, new possibilities for lesbian self-definition.

Ultimately, this necessary redefinition must be preceded by the recognition that women are not yet speaking (with) their “mother tongue” and that lesbians have often been denied the

¹²Carolyn Hlus writes that lesbian love is “slander[ed]...for defying patriarchal, biological, moral, metaphysical and theological codes” (290).

right to name themselves and their experiences (certainly in patriarchal realms but in feminist realms as well). The ability to name (which conjures up visions of Adam in the Garden of Eden as he proceeded to name everything for both men and women) is crucial for self-definition. Being falsely named, named by someone else or denied a name or the right to self-naming closes the route to subjectivity. By losing the name, the word, Warland relinquishes the experience and the means to convey it. She writes: “we [lesbians] are enraged when our disparate names are denied” (“difference” 75) because this renders them invisible, absent. She needs to be named and to name herself in order to mark her presence: “I must be named....for me, I must have my name because it is who I am” (“f.” is sure” 45). Yet she is unable to do so in patriarchal language which either misnames her or doesn’t name her at all. Like Théoret, Warland identifies women as foreigners: “we have not named this planet / this is a second language we speak” (19).¹³ Again positioned as other, again alienated from a language through which they are forced to awkwardly and furtively operate, women must also struggle against the internalization of the patriarchal code.

Warland remarks how women themselves fear the words and the power they have abandoned, illustrating what Gail Scott sees as “the internalized struggle between coded male values and under-articulated matriarchal memory” (“Red Tin” 38). Warland writes: “words her tongue never trusted / words from another place, old place, vaguely remembered” (42). The act of travelling to the roots of the word becomes essentially an act of remembering what was lost (“homesickness without memory” (45)), an act of reclaiming that abandoned and hidden language

¹³This is a view shared by many feminist writers (in Canada). Gail Scott speaks of “the forced doubleness of our speech” in which women must navigate through the language of the father (ex: media, law, education) and the need to speak the silenced mother tongue (“Shaping a Vehicle For Her Use” 184). See also Louise Dupré, Pamela Banting (translation theory).

and power that lies beneath the patriarchal power structure that for Warland, as for Théoret, resides deep in the female body. However, for Warland, it is not Théoret's vision of the female body as an autonomous and distinct subject but a desiring female subject in a relationship of exchange and pleasure with another woman that gives the possibility of self-inscription.

Near the beginning of open is broken, in her poem “‘The map is not the territory.’”, Warland examines the position of women's bodies in patriarchal culture by equating body with country, weaving a metaphor of colonization and oppression, as women are simultaneously alienated from their own self-definition and are confined by the “boundaries of viciousness” (19) which seek to dominate and contain them in their objectification. Yet the map - as words, as a symbol, as a “faithful” representation made by the colonizer - fails to capture, to represent, the territory - as the actual, as the woman, as the body. It is the binary oppositions of them/us, colonizer/colonized, other/self which account for this failure because it is based on an unfavourable hierarchy rather than the position of equality and sameness that Warland seeks to inscribe in her description of lesbian love and the female body. She thus begins her exploration of the body and its relationship to language and subjectivity with the tongue.

In its triple association of sexual organ, organ of speech and language itself, the tongue functions as word-breaker and word-maker, as (re)namer; consequently, because of these multiple meanings which are contained and expressed in the one word “tongue”, Warland is simultaneously able to explore her lesbian subjectivity on its sexual, linguistic and ontological levels. She writes: “kissing vulva lips / tongues torque way into vortex / leave syllables behind // sound we are sound / original vocabulary/ *language*: “lingua, tongue” / not separate but same / this is how we came” (40). Much like Théoret who refuses to write in a linear, singular fashion, so too does Warland

escape the confines of fixed definitions by exploring the possible pluralities of meaning generated by multiple visions of the erotic relationship of two women's bodies entwined. "There is an absolute rejection of any phallus function in language creation. The tongue, substituting Lacan's phallus. The phallus reduced to a non-entity. Absented. Disappeared. Completely out of the picture" (Hlus 295). By invoking the tongue as both symbolic and real creator of words and language, Warland reclaims her right to name herself.

La langue, as language and organ of speech, is equally important for Théoret. She also makes allusions to regaining her voice by recovering her matriarchal memory, a difficult process she knows she must attempt even though she fears it will end in failure. She writes: "Une langue à retrouver que je suis sûre de ne pas retrouver. J'ai changé de langue dans la même langue mais pas tout à fait changé dans une faille, une mémoire qu'on retrace....Je, langue, mère" (13). This inter-dependent triadic relationship of the self, tongue (language) and mother recalls Irigaray's psychoanalytic foray in search of the mother in Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère as a necessary means of tapping into that buried female language that she needs in order to explore her subjectivity. While excavating pre-Symbolic matriarchal memory is certainly partially Théoret's goal, she is also concerned with the reality of her relationship to the women of her family, and the need to write about/through these women in a very real way in order to come to an understanding of herself as a woman within the Québécois culture. The narrator writes:

Ma grand-mère, ma mère et moi. Je ne me rappelle plus d'Odile....Je "avais pas deux ans lorsqu'Odile est morte. Elle disparue il y a la voix à inventer l'écho de la voix le rappel de la voix qui se noie. Eaux de la naissance. J'y remonterai j'y viendrai au travers

la mère hystérique, la tante ouvrière et même les vieilles filles religieuses (24-5).¹⁴

The drowning voice is reborn as it traces its origins through the maternal line of the lives of other female relatives, lending an important component of the real to Irigaray's symbolic mother.

Théoret also seeks to inscribe the real of her mother tongue (*langue maternelle*) in her writing, recognizing the working-class culture of her family's roots. Yet again she is split between the language of her origins and the "corrected" language she has been forced to speak.

Karen Gould explains:

The central issue here...is her marginal position in language, in two languages in fact: the language of her working-class childhood and family ties, and the language learned in public institutions and perpetuated in the universities. Both languages have been imposed on her; neither conveys her personal and public experience as a woman (Writing 213).

Théoret herself acknowledges that her language is "bastardized, very limited, half rural, half urban...constantly corrected, questioned" ("Writing in the feminine" 365); consequently, she neither abandons her origins nor adopts entirely the language of the public realm but writes between the two, creating a hybrid which articulates this struggle to locate herself in language. Through the rupture of grammar, syntax and punctuation, the use of colloquialisms, rhymes from childhood, slang, oral language and even *anglicismes*, she subverts the notion that only "proper" forms of writing are valid and acceptable art forms. She molds language to express her reality and the realities of other working class women in Quebec.¹⁵ This is essentially the goal of her

¹⁴ As the title of both her poetic work and the first section of the text suggests, Une voix pour Odile is about removing the shroud of silence which surrounds the narrator's aunt Odile and allowing her experiences to be written. However, it goes beyond her life to incorporate the voices of many women, allowing them to express their pain and suffering, their joys and desires.

¹⁵ Théoret writes "in the feminine...seeking to integrate the weight of reality into the weight of the texts" ("Writing in the feminine" 365). As a particularly strong example of the very harsh

text, and she writes: “On a jamais si bien dit qu’est-ce que ça qui parle une femme d’une province française comme le Québec dont l’articulation des luttes n’est jamais vraiment mise de l’avant” (15-6). She strives to give the voiceless women a voice, to make the subject speak through languages that are both foreign and familiar.

The last both symbolic and real barrier to confront and overcome so that women can evolve from object to subject is the mirror. Women are imprisoned and objectified by the roles patriarchal society expects them to fulfil, their voices trapped in their throats the way they are trapped by the images reflected by the mirror, symbol of the internalized male gaze. Louise Dupré problematizes women’s positioning as object reflected in the mirror as she writes:

Je n’est pas un être qui a su franchir avec succès le stade du miroir pour en arriver à se poser comme signifiable. Je n’a pas réussi à traverser le miroir, il y est resté accroché, pris dans l’image qui lui a été renvoyée par l’Autre, piégé par l’éducation, par les représentations où la femme entre nécessairement dans le regard social (Stratégies 36).

Mirrors play a significant role in both Théoret’s and Warland’s texts as the writers confront their image in the mirror (society), learn to recognize themselves and then construct their own reflection.

For Théoret, it is a question of breaking the internalized male gaze, particularly apparent in the section “Miroir, miroir, dis-moi qui est la plus belle” in which “la fille du bar n’a qu’à bien se tenir” (33), silently submitting herself to the scrutiny of male clients...and potential husbands. The ideal woman is a silent woman - “L’écran femme-idéale: l’image de glace retournée” (34) - a reflection never speaks. There is no subjectivity to be found in the patriarchal mirror: “le moi

and violent reality of many women, Théoret writes: “D’où je viens, les mères s’arrachaient le ventre d’être enceinte. J’écoute: derrière la porte, on bat un enfant” (71).

en miroir projeté s'est absenté" (28), and it becomes necessary then to refuse the image which is already there in favour of constructing her own image outside of it. As Patricia Smart explains: "...pour qu' <elle> cesse d'être l'objet immobile et silencieux soutenant l'édifice d'une culture érigée sur son absence, il lui faut la possibilité de se reconnaître dans le miroir d'un regard autre que celui du Père-censeur" (Écrire 296-7). Thus near the end of Une voix pour Odile as Théoret finishes her text, she comes to recognize her self as subject, no longer imprisoned by the male gaze, no longer reflecting patriarchal culture's image of the silent woman/object. As writing subject, she is no longer reproducing the image in the mirror: "Moi, France Théoret, je suis capable d'écrire depuis que mes mains m'apparaissent, qu'on m'appelle souvent madame et que le matin, il me reste des yeux cernés ou enflés. Je ne me dédouble plus dans le miroir de ce que j'écris: je ne me vois pas écrivant" (69). "[L]'enfant sage, douce et timide entrée folle de rage dans la glace" (72) has succeeded in shattering the mirror, emerging from her silence to speak and write her self.

Warland's relationship to the mirror is quite different from Théoret's. While Warland also perceives herself as a silent and speechless object trapped by a "one-way screen from which we are / seen not heard" (21), it is not a pre-constructed image that she is trying to escape but the absence altogether of any recognizable representation of her erotic life as a lesbian. She writes: "fear of narcissism. though few mirrors stand in which we can see our eroticism reflected, we are terrorized by the thought of this accusation" (9). She must overcome much of the fear and the shame associated by society with the pride of such close self-examination in order to confront and create an image faithful to her own self-representation. Yet, for Warland, the subjectivity she will discover in recognizing herself in the mirror is not the construction as object by the Other as in

the patriarchal mirror but a recognition of the Same leading to “a new, relational subjectivity; a plural feminine subject, a collective subject in the feminine” (Sojka 359). Warland writes of her emergence into the subjective realm: “an eye alone trembling / an image among / images *without meaning except in relation*” (35 - emphasis added). The “eye” (an equivalent of the gaze) can be substituted for its homonym “i” (the self, the subject); yet the gaze in this instance is not detrimental but positive, as it is the gaze of the woman who constructs herself through the mutual recognition of another woman, the Same. Warland explains: “the mask i met mirror i saw / my own in / double reflection / a living in parenthesis / recognized, released” (30). The male gaze, which refused to recognize a woman’s subjectivity is supplanted by the liberating sameness of voice and image of the female gaze. It then erases any hierarchization, binary opposition or domination of the former construction while still allowing for a difference in the expression of individual subjectivity. Once recognized, she is released to write her self in a safe space that allows her to do so.

Essentially then, both Théoret and Warland pursue their projects of deconstructing patriarchal language and its subsequent power relations in order to illustrate the way in which women, both heterosexual and lesbian, are simultaneously trapped and excluded by these patriarchal linguistic structures. Their excavation leads to the discovery of a long repressed matriarchal memory in which the roots of words contain more positive meanings for women and the language of the mother tongue (the female body) is spoken. By choosing to write through the female body, its associated circularity, rhythms, cycles and multiplicities, and by disrupting current linguistic power structures, Théoret and Warland engage in a feminist/poststructuralist inscription of their subjectivities, seeking to rectify the power imbalance created by patriarchal

language through their own forms of self-representation. By reclaiming words and language for women, Théoret and Warland open up a new space for exploring the female self that has women at its origin. Writing is essential to this self-discovery, for, as Louise Dupré notes, “l’écriture devient un *lieu* où se chercher, où trouver sa langue, son corps *se* retrouver” (Stratégies 36). Thus begin the projects of (re)construction and inscription of language, the body and the self in which Théoret and Warland succeed in becoming authors of their own subjectivities.

Women’s subjectivities, indeed the very identification of women as subjects, are denied by patriarchal discourse. Not surprisingly then, writers such as Théoret and Warland refuse to operate within a language that suppresses their experience; instead of taking up a position in the centre of patriarchal discourse, they consciously choose to locate themselves even beyond its borders. In fact, there is an attempt to dissolve boundaries altogether, and to open up the previously unexplored spaces of the “in between” so as to disrupt the binary of margin and centre. Théoret’s overt exploration of the need to speak from a different space leads her to write: “La voix se fait circulaire périphérique vectorielle parfois. Le centre est vide. Il n’y a pas de centre....La marge me sert de cadre” (11). Yet her entrapment in the margins (“l’inlassable piège des marges” (32)) and her absence from the centre are indicative of the destructive nature of a structure which seeks to categorize and confine individuals to static roles and rigid definitions. Consequently, Théoret feels a need to explode the totalising notion of a centre whose goal is to enclose only one, fixed identity: “Tout désir du centre, de l’identité, de la totalité ou de la fixation me gêne, m’exaspère et me tue. Je ne me suis pas vécue excentrée pour retourner vers je ne sais quelle source” (64). Earlier she explains: “je vis pour m’excentrer et lentement, j’ouvre grandes les contradictions” (56). In an interview, she elaborates further on the notion of “excentrer” and

the need to avoid the centre: “je ne cherche pas à m’enraciner, j’emploie le mot excentrer depuis les tout premiers textes pour marquer la nécessité d’agiter les coordonnées, d’aller vers l’extériorité” (“Entrevue” 11). She uses her alienation from the centre to abolish it from her text,¹⁶ opening up the boundaries to become more inclusive, to disrupt the fixed meanings a stable centre reassures and to subvert the codes guaranteed by the division of margin and centre. In erasing any hierarchization of power, she allows herself space to (re)construct multiple subjectivities from positions of her own choosing rather than those she has learned and internalized in the dominant patriarchal order.

Théoret’s refusal to occupy the centre leads to a displacement of the notion of the unary subject with a fixed and stable identity. The question of writing and the subject is central to the text, and she opposes the notion of the unary subject with a subject always in the process of constituting herself - never fully realized so as never to become permanently fixed. In tune with the notion of the poststructuralist evolving subject, Théoret explains: “Pour acquérir cette <<identité>> [une identité qui ne soit pas construite par la domination], il faut apprendre, désapprendre, réapprendre. La subjectivité n’est pas une donnée déjà là. Ce qui est donné est là pour être déconstruit, reconstruit, je suis constamment dans le mouvement d’un acquis” (“Entrevue” 17). To convey this feeling of movement and the continuous evolution of the

¹⁶ This does not in any way mean that Théoret isn’t fully aware that as a woman she occupies a space in the margins, as discussed in the first part of this chapter. However, in her rewriting of the power structures which govern her self-expression, she subverts the notion of centre. This paradoxical presence (patriarchal structure) and absence (Théoret’s feminist poststructuralist perspective) is certainly contradictory, so it should be noted that Théoret herself was well aware of the intentional contradictions she created in writing *Une voix pour Odile*. Need it be said then, that Théoret, who is so concerned with injecting the “real” into her texts, knows that reality itself is also full of contradictions.

feminine subject, Théoret's writing style is marked by its rhythms, word play, (lack of) punctuation, fragmented texts, circularity, disrupted syntax and speech and shifting subject positions. The voice of the speaking subject cannot be fixed for long and therefore many women's voices are given the opportunity to speak, "undermining the concept of a "unary subject"..., displacing it with an exploded, heterogeneous subject in an exploratory writing" (Godard "New Forms of Subjectivity" 119). It is most often the rhythm of the words strung together than any transcendental meaning or image generated from them that characterizes the creation of a "different" subjectivity. As Karen Gould points out: "For France Théoret, the feminization of language does not so much involve the invention of new idioms or the relating of a particular physical sensation as it does the displacement of the male symbolic system" (Writing 49). To accomplish this, Théoret writes from a fusion of language and body that disrupts the phallogentric order and her position as commodity/object within it. In this way, she is able to satisfy her (body's) most urgent need: her desire to voice a subjectivity of her own creation.

Théoret writes that "[i]l faut que tout passe par mon corps" (15) in order for her to assimilate her experiences. Subsequently, the experiences can only be transmitted by writing them through her body: "...ma culotte se mouille lettre blanche. Mon corps écrit d'un souffle chaud une langue. Un silence, j'y suis. Je rattrape mon corps" (12). This metamorphosis of body into text becomes a means of simultaneously (re)claiming a subjectivity and a language which are woman-centred. Nevertheless, Théoret must still battle the contradictory emotions she experiences in relation to her own body. Caught between the shame of the female body the Law of the Father has instilled in her, and the pleasures of the female body she is discovering, she concludes: "Il faudrait hurler toutes contre toutes normes annulantes du corps" (16). The battle

takes place most overtly in “Le Sang” where she struggles with the internalized feelings of embarrassment, disgrace and even hate of her own body and its processes. Interestingly, as the onset of menstruation is met with relief, release and even pleasure, the flood of blood is transformed into a flood of words, which, while once blocked, now flow freely through the body and onto the page. Tundē Nemeth makes a particularly salient point about Théoret’s connection of body, language and writing when she says:

The voice and breath that come from the body itself give her a way of talking about writer’s block and other difficulties centred in language and writing through the metaphor of pre-menstrual tension....From the beginning, and throughout, she links the two by using language of one, then the other, then language describing feelings that could apply to either (“Present? or Re-Present?” 90).

For Théoret, the female body is an entry point into the imaginary: “Du même, du corps des mots de l’imaginaire” (70). Her ability to access words through her body is extremely self-affirming because it is grounded in a process of recovery of words, body and language that she has long been denied. Francine Bordeleau notes: “France Théoret lance ses personnages à la conquête de leurs mots et de leur corps” (91) in all its forms. It is in this way that Théoret is able to make the slow, often excruciatingly painful transformation from object to subject.

Warland also uses the female body to ground her subjectivity and her language, creating an inseparable fusion of body and text, her “inhertextuality” (15). She performatively inscribes the female body in the text, the one becoming the metaphor for the other. She writes: “text the tissue one long / sentence no period we are menses flow / *period*: ... “going around in circles”” (14). Like Théoret, who also explores her own particular relationship to writing and the menstrual cycle, Warland uses the latter to signify the reading and writing practices of her text. As a means to rupture syntax, she dispenses with most punctuation, hence “no period”.

However, her text becomes period/menses, flowing across the page, engaging in circular writing and rewriting of words in much the same way a woman's body's cycles are subtly altered each month. In her first poem "induction", Warland identifies certain words' etymologies (for example, text and warp) which she then precedes to use throughout her poems, altering their use slightly, constantly forcing the reader to physically turn the pages back to the beginning in order to recall the other meanings these words have generated. To emphasize the cyclical and circular nature of her writing, she uses words and phrases (such as "evil ring open ring / the snake uncurls" (18), "she turns toward me / rings me in" (28)) which evoke such images of return and repetition. Yet the repetition is not without movement or progression as she insures that the meanings of words are never stable or fixed. For Warland, like Penelope, "weaves and unweaves [her text as her tapestry] so no one can claim her" (21).

Warland avoids being pinned down and hemmed in by meaning. Words in her poetry always have multiple signifiers and thus can "mean" and be interpreted in more than one way. She is engaged in the process of destabilizing meaning by disrupting the sign, forging new links between signifier and signified which explore her lesbian subjectivity. In VIII, she writes: "when she began she used words like moon, egg / words that did not startle" (42).¹⁷ As the woman (Warland) begins to explore her subjectivity, she invokes traditional words that are safe and conventionally associated with the feminine and (the cyclical nature of) the female body. Warland explains: "until now i have been content to avoid or replace them [abandoned words] with other

¹⁷ This is very self-reflexive poetry as it talks about its own creation. Warland is the "she" who begins with these words in "open is broken". Warland is placing herself in her texts as "she" in order to describe her own awakening, her own process of subjective "becoming" as "she" slowly learns to write "i".

words, safe words, which had continued to perpetuate a language untrue (“Surrendering the english language” 176). These words do not upset (“startle”) the traditional power (im)balance their generally accepted connotations imply; consequently, the subject still occupies a soft, meek and non-threatening position in the semantic space of these words. However, this changes with the evolution of “egg” to “eye” to “i”, a question of image which has been previously discussed. She also links moon with eye, saying as she does about “egg” that “it knows about breaking” (35). By making these new associations (eyes/i’s, and breaking), she disrupts the previously inscribed meanings and alters the position of words in language.

This new way to use these words gives her the power to break the previous meanings and social structures they guaranteed. By reclaiming these words for her own purpose and using them in alternate and unusual ways, she pursues a subjectivity of her own design. The next set of words that she unwittingly chooses to code her reality - “*claim, surrender, sow, manure*” (42) - is also interesting, as they are words which are not at all conventional in their use to describe women. These words also make their way into other poems, slowly displacing the negative connotations with positive ones. She transforms these words in a very personal way so that they speak of her reality and her project of unearthing the language of her desire. Sow and manure, linked to soil through filth, stain and sin (46), emerge as earth and land where “things grow, flourish, thrive” (47) and finally lead her to the home soil and native soil she finds between the legs of her lover’s body. This “homecoming” overturns the negative meanings encoded in the words she has reappropriated for her own use.

Warland is very concerned about the codes of language, both the patriarchal codes that she seeks to subvert in order to demonstrate “how male power and authority are inscribed in them”

(Sojka 358) and the more secret and self-affirming codes of the lesbian community which are also “a symbol of oppression” (“Where our loyalties lie” 198) because they are still only part of the closed, insular and private sphere of lesbian culture. For Warland, in writing open is broken, it was extremely important “to break open the code and reclaim a lesbian erotic language which was public and accessible” (“Where our loyalties lie” 198). She succeeds in her goal by positing a relational subjectivity derived from a reciprocal movement between sexuality and textuality, desire and etymology, herself and another woman. In IX, she writes: “you claim me with your tongue / speak my skin’s syntax / know my desire’s etymologies... /... / the code broken by your fluency” (43). Body becomes words “texts of our bodies (tongue come)” (44); the sheets and covers of the bed that is witness to these two women’s desires and intimacy are also the sheets of paper and the covers of a book that is the text of their shared experiences in love. The text comes alive, “each line a wave/blood/pulse” (52), its rhythms and music drawing the reader in. She is not afraid to name her self or her body, reclaiming words that give weight to her reality; her eroticism gives her a sense of power, and while like Théoret, she does not inhabit the centre, she writes: “we enter our horizons and do not vanish” (39). Through her resistance to and subversion of patriarchal codes and meanings, and her insistence that her body be inscribed and read, she creates a linguistic space in which to explore her own subjectivity.

In the end then, we must return to where we began, with the two quotes (one from Théoret, one from Warland) which sparked this investigation into the relationship among women, words and language. Quotes of the nature of a double-edged sword, they illustrate the battle in which women are engaged to reclaim power through language. Théoret’s first questions: “Qui forcera les portes de la langue? Qui foncera?” (40) address the need to break open patriarchal

language and to create a new viable language for women's self-representation. Warland's question speaks of the fear of finally succeeding in coding a new language for women's self-expression. She asks: "Invaded enough in every way, why hand over the blueprints too?" ("Far As the I Can See" 93), wondering whether exposing the code of this new language will again put women in the vulnerable position from which they have escaped, making them accessible to invasion, domination and oppression. Essentially, the authors have provided their own answers to their questions through the writing of their texts. It is up to women themselves to break the silence and open up language so that their voices can be heard. The risk is well worth it, for it is only through language that the patriarchal power structure which contains women as objects can be subverted and overthrown. It is not easy, as Théoret's testimony to her conflicting emotions of despair and hope indicates. Nevertheless, she writes: "L'identité, le savoir, la fiction et la lutte politique tracée à même nos coordonnées femmes devenues sujets fera éclater les vieilles structures" (52). Warland also recognizes the need to write and the power to change that she gains with it when she recognizes herself as saying "consider me dangerous" (34). Women writing to change language pose a threat to the patriarchal power structure because if they succeed in constructing themselves as subjects, they initialize a process that will shake its very foundation. By reclaiming language, words and a space in which to write, Théoret and Warland have come to inscribe their own subjectivity and have taken the first steps to give a voice to women's experiences in a positive and self-affirming way.

Chapter Two

Writing a Woman's Life: The Problems of Fictional Autobiography

Autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist.

- Georges Gusdorf

[Le sujet] est partout à la fois: en manuscrit, en photocopie, en livre, en note, il clignote au bout de la ligne sur l'écran cathodique.

- Nicole Brossard

Giving a voice to women's experiences in an effort to allow feminine subjectivities to emerge through writing is indeed the primary goal of the writers in this study. While Théoret and Warland took the first steps towards inscribing the female self by deconstructing patriarchal language and (re)constructing a feminized language, Carol Shields in The Stone Diaries and Madeleine Monette in Le Double suspect take up the challenge of simultaneously deconstructing traditional autobiographical discourse and (re)constructing a feminized autobiographical discourse within fiction.¹ While traditional autobiographical discourse contains certain ideologies of selfhood which operate on a very specific self/other paradigm that often does not include women as they perceive themselves, such a feminized autobiographical discourse offers an alternative self/other paradigm through which women can explore their own subjectivities as they experience

¹It should be noted that both texts are fictional; therefore, a discussion of autobiography (as a non-fictional genre) is occurring within a discussion of a fictional text. This will be particularly relevant for the examination of the crossing over of the boundaries between fiction and "reality", as the referent in both cases will always be a fictional one.

them. Autobiography, as founded upon principles of identity and selfhood, is primarily concerned with subjectivity, self-definition, self-discovery and self-inscription. By playing (on) the *je(u) autobiographique*, Shields and Monette use their female protagonists to explore women's relationship to the basic tenets of traditional autobiography even as they push past its generic boundaries and male-identified concepts of selfhood and suggest more relational means of inscribing the autobiographical "I".

The narrators of the two novels explore the constraints placed on women's lives and the desire to inscribe women's experiences and assert their subjectivities on two levels. The first is one of genre and its boundaries, particularly those separating autobiography from fiction, which leads to a discussion of the relative claims of truth, fiction and authenticity in the telling of a life. In constructing the autobiographical subject's life, both narrators emphasize a writing process that alternately fills in the absences, silences and blanks or leaves vast gaps and voids in the life-story. This process, which is remarkably akin to fictionalization (Monette's narrator goes so far as to label her diary a novel), serves to call attention to autobiography as a narrative construction. Nevertheless, while this tactic problematizes autobiography as representing a supposedly objective "Truth" about reality, it does not detract from the narrators' belief in the truth and authenticity of their own stories.

At the second level of investigation lies the autobiographical subject, and in particular her construction of her self in relation to others. The narrators of both texts oppose the unitary, consistent and rational male self of traditional Western autobiography with a more post-structuralist view of the self in the process of constituting itself through multiple subjectivities. Through a split subject in The Stone Diaries and a doubled subject in Le Double suspect, the

narrators explore their selves with an extreme consciousness of their connection with others. This self/other intersubjectivity is one of the defining characteristics of women's autobiography for, as Mary Jean Green points out, "women's sense of self is continuous with others and [...]. Unlike men, women experience themselves relationally" (123-4). This "other" which occupies a privileged position in women's autobiography will be examined here in three ways: self as other, reader as other and secondary characters as other. While the last self/other paradigm is often problematic, particularly when the self is constituted and defined by others, thus eclipsing the autobiographical subject's own voice, it is an important dimension of the expanded relational subjectivity presented in women's autobiographies.

This foregrounding of the autobiographical subject and her relationship to the other, coupled with an examination of autobiography as a genre and its relationship to fiction, will be the primary aspects of Shields's and Monette's works explained in this chapter. First, however, before an examination of the authors' deconstruction of traditional autobiography can occur, it is necessary to establish the defining characteristics of what is denoted as "traditional autobiography",² beginning with its development as a genre constructed solely on the basis of men's texts. Genre can be generally defined as "a set of historically constituted norms that serve

²Although all the theorists in this study stress the difficulty of defining autobiography, there are sets of textual principles which are considered as constituting the genre. For example, Philippe Lejeune gives a very rigid and formal definition of autobiography as "un récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité" (14). Sidonie Smith is much more expansive in her definition: "[a] written or verbal communication that takes the speaking "I" as the subject of the narrative, rendering the "I" both subject and object....[it] includes letters, journals, diaries, and oral histories as well as formal autobiography" (19). This shift from a narrow to a much broader, more inclusive definition is indicative of the difficulty of characterizing autobiography and the desire to valorize forms of self-representation other than the traditional one.

as a frame of reference against which individual works are written and understood” (Martens x). These norms, conventions or codes are developed from a highly homogeneous grouping of literary works and form a model against which future works are measured. With respect to the development of the autobiographical genre,

one establishes a series of formal conditions through the apprehension of a multiplicity of autobiographies. Then these formal conditions are solidified into one specific text...which hypostatizes them all. Each particular autobiography is, in turn, perceived in terms of the model which it has helped establish in the first place (Elbaz 2).

In its strictest sense, then, genre, once developed and established, has definite boundaries. As Leigh Gilmore writes: “[t]he law of genre...stipulates that genres are not to be mixed. At its base, the law of genre stakes its claims through a rhetoric of purity and contamination” (33). Autobiography as a genre is consistently placed in direct opposition to fiction, largely because autobiography is supposedly grounded in notions of veracity and authenticity and “purports to represent a ‘truth’ about a given reality (through its duplication), while fiction does not” (Elbaz 1). Many autobiographical theorists (Lejeune, Bruss, Martens, and others) rely on the idea of reality and truth as verifiable fact to cement the fictional/factual opposition. However, there is an increasing perception (in postmodern discourse, for example) that boundaries separating non-fiction from fiction are formal constructions which are presently being problematized and destabilized. In one of her investigations of recent fictional autobiographies, Julie LeBlanc points out that these texts strive to raise “la question importante du statut véridictoire normalement conféré aux genres autobiographiques et à questionner le bien-fondé de la frontière traditionnelle entre les champs du réel et de l’imaginaire” (“Autoreprésentation et contestation” 100). This postmodern crossing-over of genres and the deconstruction of the binary opposition of fact and

fiction can also be interpreted in women's autobiographies as a feminist strategy of resistance to the dominant forms of representation in "traditional" autobiography. For many of these writers, a blending of genres is a means by which they attain their truths and represent their realities and their selves. To quote Louise Cotnoir: "Somebody says I'm lying, I say I am inventing. So that reality will no longer be a fiction" ("The Marked Gender" 102). Similarly, Patricia Smart's comment on the reasons women writers' include autobiography and its sub-genres in their fictional works can be inverted and also read as a comment on the inclusion of fiction in autobiography. She writes: "...leur écriture présente une façon *autre* de re-présenter, d'écouter, et de toucher la texture du réel" (*Écrire* 29). Through their transgression of the limits of genre, women writers are also subverting the cultural codes inscribed within these limits, particularly the question of whose stories are told and the conventions that govern their telling.

While the construction of genre and selfhood is increasingly problematized in autobiographical writing, the construction of gender is not often viewed as an issue; when it is, the writing of a self is further complicated. It is not surprising that women writers are exploring and deconstructing the generic limits of "traditional autobiography", given that the model for autobiography has been based only on a compilation of men's texts, a fact which has very direct implications for the writing, reading, interpretation, criticism and classification of women's autobiographical texts. As Gilmore explains:

Although a stable autobiographical form against which women have written about their lives does not exist, an evolving notion of what autobiography is has not been deduced from texts women did write, or from texts that problematize autobiography...or challenge genre's formation, limits, and illusion of stability....Yet, while autobiography began increasingly to mark a point of generic instability, autobiographical criticism preserved the gender hierarchy within which that instability could be recontained. Hence even across recognizable changes in generic definition, women's autobiographical writing remains

anomalous (39-40). (cf. Green 124)

Not only has our concept of what constitutes “traditional” autobiography emerged from men’s texts, but the autobiographer’s construction of self also developed according to the individualistic paradigms of the autonomous male ego at the centre of his own drama. Clarifying the dimensions of self in “traditional autobiography”, Leigh Gilmore explains that the word traditional “does not denote ‘past’; rather, it characterizes criticism that shares the humanist bent...Specifically, ‘traditional’ interpretations of autobiography take the self as a coherent and unified producer of truth and meaning and claim that this ‘self’...is formed outside a community” (21). While the latter part of her assertion is perhaps somewhat extreme, as community often acts as a backdrop to enhance the ego presented in traditional autobiography, Gilmore is basing her conclusions on Georges Gusdorf’s notion of “isolate being” in which “‘man’ as a unitary, consistent and rational self” (Nussbaum 131) is privileged over his relationship to his community. As Sidonie Smith explains: “autobiography promotes a conception of the human being that valorizes individual integrity and separateness and devalues personal and communal interdependency” (39). Susan Stanford Friedman emphasizes this point when she writes: “[t]he consciousness of self upon which autobiography is premised is the sense of “isolated being”, a belief in the self as a discrete, finite “unit” of society...the entity created in the text is distinct, separate from all others, based on individualistic paradigms” (36-7). These theorists further agree that this “conception of selfhood is decidedly male-identified” (Smith 39) and that the genre of autobiography, which “functions as the closest textual version of the political ideology of individualism” (Gilmore 41) is gendered as “male”.

This emphasis in traditional autobiography on the development of self as separate from

others appears to stand in direct opposition to women's self-development through continuous interaction and integral relationships with others. As many of the feminists theorizing women's inscription of self in autobiography have noted, women do not experience the self/other dichotomy as absolute; rather, women "experience themselves relationally" (Green 125) in life and consequently feel the need to inscribe their selves in autobiography by foregrounding their relationships with others. Similarly, Friedman calls into question Gusdorf's notion of "isolate being" as the only means by which self production can occur when she writes: "the very sense of identification, interdependence, and community that Gusdorf dismisses from autobiographical selves are key elements in the development of a woman's identity" (38). And Smith's suggestion that "autobiographical practice proceed[s] by means of a self/other intersubjectivity and intertextuality" (18) seems particularly relevant to the reading, writing and interpretation of women's autobiographies, given the essential role the "other" plays in the development of the autobiographical subject.

The focus on others in women's lives and autobiographies is not however without its problems. As discussed in the first chapter, women often exist and are perceived solely in their relationships with others, particularly in their roles as wives and mothers, which, if played out through the patriarchal script, can eclipse self-expression. Emphasis on the other in this manner (as part of what Smith sees as a "culturally conditioned manifestation of the ideology of gender that associates female difference with attentiveness to others" (18)) has a negative impact on the development of the autobiographical subject if she remains trapped in identities constructed through pre-scripted roles. Thus there is a tension exhibited between the desire to speak as an individual and the cultural and ideological pull to conform to identity construction as "woman".

As Friedman writes: “the feminine capacity for empathy and identification can lead into a kind of selfless abnegation, a self-less-ness...[which] appeals to identity as a WOMAN” (45) within patriarchal ideology but which also leads to self-effacement. This internalization of the dominant culture which places the needs of others *before* the needs of the woman is frequently played out in women’s autobiographies, in which the authors paradoxically place others at the centre and themselves at the margins of their texts.³ The centrality of the other and his/her integral relationship to the female autobiographical subject, is, however, countered by the inscription of self inherent in the autobiographical process. A delicate balance between the self and the other must be established in order to insure that the latter does not have a detrimental effect on the writing of the former but rather becomes a tool through which to discover and inscribe her subjectivity. As Helen M. Buss argues, women have “a need for the ‘other’ as a way to search for the self” that does not exclude but “incorporates the other while moving beyond her/him” (“Canadian women’s autobiography” 160).

A woman’s autobiography, then, must negotiate both genre and gender in the construction of subjectivity and identity.⁴ This inevitably requires the transgression of at least two master narratives: the traditionally male-centred genre of autobiography, and the patriarchal notions

³For example, in Writing a Woman’s Life, Carolyn Heilbrun emphasizes that many accomplished women have internalized patriarchally-defined notions of acceptable behaviour. Uncomfortable with the script of autobiography, they feel they must constantly justify their adoption of the genre and consistently draw attention away from themselves.

⁴This is not to imply that men do not have to be concerned with genre and gender; however, the traditional genre of autobiography is already male-centred, and thus gender has already been incorporated into genre. And while questions surrounding the construction of gender abound, men still occupy a position of privilege and power that women, in the traditional reading of autobiography, do not.

concerning gender norms that have relegated women to a silent space, thus denying the expression of self. However, there is a further double bind for women autobiographers. On the one hand, they cannot write of their experiences within the confines of traditional autobiography, because while adopting a subject position within the master narrative may help a woman's voice be heard by "promis[ing] a culturally empowered subjectivity" (Smith and Watson xix), it may also serve to re-establish dominant ideologies. On the other hand, women who write outside of the prescribed text leave themselves in "a devalued position at the margins of the canon" (Smith 16). In other words, writing within the patriarchal framework of traditional autobiography, women risk being constrained to "acceptable" representations of the female self; while writing from outside generic boundaries they risk being dismissed for their non-conformity. In response to this, Shields and Monette insert an autobiographical discourse in their texts which explores this paradox. Their texts performatively deconstruct the master narrative of "traditional" autobiography, blur its generic boundaries and constrictive concepts of selfhood even as they construct subjectivities through a new autobiographical genre based on a different self/other paradigm which actively includes a discussion of gender.

The deconstruction of "traditional" autobiography occurs within the texts as a simultaneous analysis and performance of the autobiographical act. As James Olney explains: "Autobiography is a self-reflexive, a self-critical act, and consequently the criticism of autobiography exists within the literature instead of alongside it. The autobiographer can discuss and analyze the autobiographical act as he performs it" ("Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 25). This is particularly important for women's autobiographies because a narrative which critically examines its own construction in relation to the principles of the master narrative, can, in effect, serve to

deconstruct it, and call its principles into question. Indeed, the narrators of both texts discuss very early on problems they perceive in telling a woman's life which are directly related to the first level of investigation, specifically that autobiography rests on principles of truth, objectivity and authenticity, and that a reliable "autobiographer could narrate his life in a manner at least approaching an objective historical account" (Olney "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 20), containing in "a comprehensive sketch...a complete and coherent expression of his entire destiny" (Gusdorf "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" 35). Thus, as shall be seen, Shields and Monette seek to subvert "traditional" autobiography in relation to the aforementioned tenets of gender, "acceptable" content, the fictional/factual opposition and genre boundaries.

In her novel The Stone Diaries, Carol Shields creates a narrator/protagonist, Daisy Goodwill, who seeks to tell her life story from her birth in 1905 to her death in 199-, all the while commenting on both the limitations of autobiography and the limitations of living a woman's life outside of the few roles (such as mother and wife) which are open to her. The personal/private subject matter of Daisy's everyday existence is far different from the emphasis on power or greatness in the public/political realm commonly found in the "traditional" autobiographies of men. This private/public dichotomy which is frequently used to differentiate the content of women's and men's writing has also been used to evaluate the quality and validity of women's autobiographies, much to their disadvantage, for "women's autobiographies have often been treated as marginal texts, as women's life experiences themselves have been treated as historically marginal" (Green 125). Shields's focus is on the quotidian - an "ordinary" woman leading an "ordinary" life - suggests however that writing about women's experiences is a valid and valuable subject matter for autobiography. Shields addresses this shift from writing about the public sphere

to writing about the private sphere when she says:

What has also been altered is the kind of experience that can legitimately be brought to art - birth, motherhood, the rhythms of the female body, a yearning for love, and the domestic component of our lives - which serious literature has previously suppressed. But the news is out: we all, male and female alike, possess a domestic life. The texture of the quotidian is rich with meaning... ("The Same Ticking Clock" 258).⁵

As Daisy wanders through the chapters of her life, she includes records of her daily existence, such as lists, photographs, even recipes which are at once deeply familiar and utterly alien because they are recognizable as elements essential to women's lives even while they are unexpected because they are not usually associated with autobiography. Shields's inclusion of such elements not only widens the scope of content in autobiography but also calls into question the way in which lives are organized and presented in the genre. While the text of The Stone Diaries is divided by chapters to reflect what are generally accepted as the universally important periods in most women's lives (birth, childhood, marriage, motherhood, etc), the lists, such as clubs Daisy has belonged to (346), illnesses she has suffered from (357) and books she has read (355), suggest alternative ways her life could have been ordered. Although she has not written her life in this manner, the lists, as different autobiographical angles of vision, provide insight into apparently insignificant aspects of her life, that nevertheless define who she is and have had an impact on what she has become. The lists also draw attention to what has not been included, so as to emphasize that autobiography is not all-inclusive; choices are made to write about some things and not others because of self-censure, memory loss or value judgments as to the relative

⁵Shields has unquestionably succeeded in breaking the silence and bringing the joys and trials of every-day life into literature; her prestigious literary awards include the Governor General's Award and the Pulitzer Prize for this novel.

importance of these events.

The organization of Daisy's life in this rather traditional manner (for women) is significant for two reasons. First, it explores the constraints placed on the living (and writing) of a woman's life, illustrating how very few choices have traditionally been open to women and how they have been expected to fulfill prescribed roles without questioning them. Daisy examines her plight in the patriarchal texts of life and autobiography when she reflects:

But no such choices are available to her at this time in her life, a woman on the verge of middle age - or so she thinks. A person arbitrarily named. A person accidentally misplaced. How did this happen? She's caught in a version of her life, pinned there.

A thought comes into her head: that lately she doesn't ask herself what is possible, but rather what possibilities remain (144).

While her statement can be read on one level as a metafictional comment on Shields's writing (pinning/penning) of Daisy's story, it can also be read as a comment on the autobiographical subject caught in the narrative, and, more specifically, the female subject trapped in the patriarchal master narrative in which she is limited to possibilities of gender-appropriate content, structure, style and narrative perspective. Secondly, the organization of her life is significant because it imposes specific gender identities and pre-conditions which subjectivities will emerge, and which will stay hidden; both are based on patriarchal notions of "acceptable" roles for women. As her story unfolds and the roles she is expected to play within it are presented, Daisy problematizes the relationship between female subjectivity and a woman's life in general, as well as the way her own story affects the presentation of her self.

Why should men be allowed to strut under the privilege of their life adventures, wearing them like a breastful of medals, while women went all gray and silent beneath the weight of theirs?...[W]herever she goes, her story marches ahead of her. Announces her. Declares and cancels her true self. Oh, she did so want to be happy, but what choice did she have, stepping to the beat of that ragbag history of hers? (121-2).

As well as being a metafictional comment on the fact that women's stories are seldom the valid subject of autobiography the way men's are, Daisy's statement illustrates the false subjectivity she is required to adopt in order to conform to societal expectations.

In Le Double suspect, Anne's re-writing of Manon's diary plays a similar role of interrogating identities Manon must assume, specifically the role of silent and loving wife she is expected to play in patriarchal society. Manon acknowledges her own internalization of this role, saying: "Pendant cinq ans je me suis fabriqué une image que me moulait comme une deuxième peau: être <<la femme de Paul>> me convenait parfaitement, me plaisait même" (110). However, she earlier admits that this single identity which ignores the plurality of her being is detrimental and self-effacing: "j'étais donc devenue une femme compréhensive et silencieuse, qui encaissait tout, qui excusait tout, qui était là quand il en avait besoin" (68).⁶ Even with this awareness, Manon is incapable of functioning outside of this ordered, socially acceptable way of life; when her husband, unable to confront his own homosexuality, kills himself, her life and her beliefs are thrown into chaos. The balance in her life is further upset when she senses her own desire for other women; like her husband, she commits suicide.⁷ Thus her diary not only questions the heterosexual economy of marriage, but transgresses societal taboos on homosexuality by examining lesbian desire. The discussion of these two things emerges through the rather complex structure of Monette's novel which is based on three diaries: *les cahiers noirs*, Manon's diary (containing the events surrounding her husband's death and her emotional response to it) to

⁶Like Théoret, Manon's ambivalence illustrates the difficulty of resisting this role because it offers her an acceptable identity in society where she would otherwise be faceless.

⁷Le Double suspect is filled to overflowing with such doublings of plot and character.

which the reader never has access; *les cahiers rouges*, a re-written version of Manon's diary by Anne; and *les cahiers blancs*, Anne's diary begun in Rome after Manon's death (containing her own reflections and metafictional comments as she re-writes Manon's diary). This multi-layered narrative structure is Monette's own way of confronting limits facing women writers who want to speak about prohibited subjects. As she states: "celles-ci [women writers] avaient recours à des simulations, à d'ingénieuses stratégies narratives leur permettant de se soustraire à la répression qu'exerçaient sur elles les codes tant littéraires que sociaux" ("La tentation" 269).

The foregrounding of gaps, blanks and absences is crucial to the deconstruction of "traditional" autobiography, which presents itself as "the whole story." Daphne Marlatt explores the difficulty of attaining this goal of autobiography:

To write a whole autobiography, i mean autobiography in its largest sense of self writing life, not the life of the self but the life self writes its way to, the whole cloth, is to reach for what is *almost* unwriteable, a hole in that other sense....Given the whole cloth, the truth of ourselves is so large it is *almost* impossible to write. It is full of holes, pulled threads, multiple lines... ("Self-Representation" 205; emphasis added).

Women's autobiography, then, is not only the "whole story" but a "story full of holes," holes which must be acknowledged as the self is constructed. While both Shields and Monette reveal this in their texts, they do so very differently. In *The Stone Diaries*, Daisy is defined by her absence: her self exists in gaps and voids which are identified, left unfilled and yet point to the potential of alternate versions of her life story. In contrast, Anne's rewriting of Manon's life in *Le Double suspect* is an exercise in breaking the silence, making the connections and filling in the blanks left by Manon's diary. While Shields illustrates the failure of the female self to assert her

subjectivity through her story,⁸ Monette demonstrates the resurrection of the female subject by creating a presence from absence as Anne gives voice to Manon's story.

While Daisy is not solely defined by her absence, Shields uses instances of absence to explore women's lack of self-constructed subjectivity and identity. As she explains: "The idea was to interrogate autobiography by writing it so that Daisy is erased from her own story, which is I think what happened to most women in the previous century. Daisy went through the world without leaving much trace. She was prevented from being all kinds of things" (Hamelin 23). Daisy writes that she lived "blinded, throttled, erased from the record of her own existence" (76), swallowed up by "the great story she let rise up and swamp her" (125). The fact that her autobiography is even being written seems incredible, for "her autobiography, if such a thing were imaginable, would be, if such a thing were ever to be written, an assemblage of dark voids and unbridgeable gaps" (75-6).

However, while these gaps represent an absence of self (as subject) from story, they also offer a means of escape for the female subject by suggesting that there are holes in the patriarchal script. Daisy "lives outside her story as well as inside....she's able to disappear, you might say, from her own life. She has a talent for self-obliteration" (123). In this case, self-obliteration is not a negative but a positive quality, because it stands as a refusal to construct identity solely along the lines of conventional female roles or within the boundaries of a prescribed narrative structure. Instead, "the narrative maze opens up and permits her to pass through. She may be

⁸This is not to imply that Daisy fails to assert her subjectivity throughout the entire novel, only to demonstrate that there are specific areas in which and reasons for which she does not always succeed in doing so.

crowded out of her own life - she knows this for a fact and has always known it - but she possesses, as a compensatory gift, the startling ability to draft alternate versions” (190). This ability to “dig a hole in her own life story” (263) so that she can escape the constraints of “traditional” autobiography and the patriarchal script allows for the possibility of a subject speaking from outside the master narrative. Daisy’s emphasis on untold renditions of her story and on a self that exists buried within the official version of her life is an implicit call for a new script in which she could write what has not previously been written, and value what has not been heretofore valued. Rather than a narrative that would confine the female subject to a limited means of self-expression, this new version would allow her to explore the alternate versions of her life and her subjectivity, for it is “in the void [that] she finds connection” (281).

While Daisy deconstructs traditional autobiography by exposing the gaps in its façade as an all-encompassing narrative and examines how the female autobiographical subject needs to explore her subjectivity outside of the patriarchal scripts, Anne constructs a feminized autobiography from the blanks and silences in Manon’s text, enabling her to express her self and her previously unarticulated subjectivity, sexuality and desire. Like Daisy, Anne focuses on the blanks in Manon’s story, drawing attention as much to what is not said as to what is:

L’histoire de sa vie, on ne pouvait la reconstituer qu’à partir d’aveux isolés, souvent involontaires, en consentant à de multiples détours et conjectures. Parce qu’il fallait vouloir la recomposer, cette histoire, malgré les blancs dont elle était semée, les zones d’ombre où elle semblait prendre tout son intérêt (41).

Manon is trapped by her inability to transgress the patriarchal script and to confront her own fears and desires regarding homosexuality, both her husband’s and the possibility of her own. Her resistance to this self-scrutinizing act affects her ability to express herself as a subject, and after

her first experience in what she labels “un milieu féminin” (171), a sphere which is later revealed as lesbian, she states very clearly: “Je sais à présent que c’était de moi que j’avais peur, de moi uniquement....Victime de la règle, je me privais du plaisir de la déviance, de l’invention” (192). In this lucid statement, Manon reveals the roots of her incapacity to inscribe her subjectivity. Experiencing a deeply ingrained fear of anything that goes against the established order, she cannot consciously pursue anything that would lead to disorder, whether societal, as symbolized by “la déviance de l’homosexualité”, or textual, as implied by “l’invention d’un moi subjectif”. It is this desire, sexuality and subjectivity of Manon’s repressed self, denied and concealed in *les cahiers noirs*, which Anne seeks to affirm in *les cahiers rouges*.

Anne excavates what Manon tries to keep hidden by constructing a second *journal intime* from the fragments of the first, a journal which aims to fill in the blanks of Manon’s story: “mon désir de transformer ces fragments en un texte achevé....J’ai envie de reprendre le journal de Manon, d’en enchaîner les parties dans un ordre différent et d’en réparer les négligences, d’en combler les vides...” (51-2). By rewriting Manon’s diary, she resurrects Manon herself, establishing her as speaking subject who is able to confront and articulate her fears and desires. Manon’s physical absence in death is essential to her rebirth as a textual presence, for, as Valerie Raoul notes, “Anne’s rewriting, which is an attempt to dialogue with Manon, to force her to speak..., is dependent on her not being there” (*Distinctly Narcissistic* 164). It is through this interplay of absence and presence that Anne reconstructs Manon’s autobiography.

The self in Manon’s text is written out of the gaps and voids of the first diary and is actualized in the second through a writing process of filling in the blanks; the self in Daisy’s text is left in the gaps of possibility, yet the truth of her self is not always lost but is often recaptured

by alluding to those possibilities of other versions. In both cases, the solid ground of Truth and Reality begins to shift as the language of autobiography is exchanged for the language of fiction, calling into question one of the major tenets of “traditional” autobiography and blurring the boundaries of the fictional/factual opposition. By refusing to organize their lives and writing along the rigid constraints of these categories, Daisy and Manon begin to destabilize the boundaries, turning the language of autobiography against itself. Their examination of the relative claims of truth, fiction and authenticity in the telling of a life allows for a different way of conceptualizing reality, outside of the old binaries which previously contained it. And the texts’ self-reflexive discussions of their own construction reveals an alternate, more valid way for these narrators, of accessing their true stories through “fictional” strategies.⁹

In The Stone Diaries, Daisy subverts notions of autobiography as representing an objective, historical and truthful account of a life and illustrates how autobiography and fiction are both narrativizations of this life. She undermines her own text by calling attention to the illusion of telling a life: “The recounting of a life is a cheat, of course; I admit the truth of this; even our own stories are obscenely distorted; it is a wonder really that we keep faith with the simple container of our existence” (28). Daisy draws the reader’s attention to her own awareness that she is imposing a pattern on her life and constructing a coherent story of her activities, while at the same time mocking her own endeavour to contain her life story within the parameters she

⁹Other Canadian women in their autobiographies have made the same observation. Both Nicole Brossard (Journal intime: où voilà donc un manuscrit) and Sharon Butala (The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature) assert that it is fiction, rather than autobiography, that enables them to portray themselves. Perhaps this is a result of the restrictions women face in writing from within generic conventions.

has established for herself. Each section is dated and tied to a particular time period; however, the content inevitably transgresses the dates imposed, overlaps with other sections and leaves large gaps in time. These concrete divisions are presented as a failed attempt to keep things separate, contained and orderly - an inevitable fate for autobiography because a life which is presented along these principles must be revealed as a construction. Yet Daisy also stresses the fact that despite this necessary "fictional" ordering, her story does contain her truth. At the end of the novel, "the question arises: what is the story of a life? A chronicle of fact or a skilfully wrought impression?" (340). While there is a temptation to oppose fact with fiction and consequently truth with lie, Daisy reveals that the fictional construction of her life which appeals to the imagination is perhaps truer for her than any unswerving adherence to facts:

She understood that if she was going to hold on to her life at all, she would have to rescue it by a primary act of imagination, supplementing, modifying, summoning up the necessary connections, conjuring the pastoral or heroic or whatever, even dreaming a limestone tower into existence, getting the details wrong occasionally, exaggerating or lying outright, inventing letters or conversations of impossible gentility, or casting conjecture in a pretty light (76-7).¹⁰

In the centre of the narrative, Daisy calls into question the principles upon which autobiography is based, laying bare the artifact of self-representation. She begins by casting doubt on the reliability of her own narration, undermining the authority of the narrator and the truth claims of autobiography. Much of what she writes is based on memory, which is inevitably fickle and biased; it omits and distorts events and emotions as they are filtered through time and other experiences. She writes:

¹⁰As a magical act of the imagination, this self-reflexive passage points not only to the construction of Daisy's autobiography, but to the construction of the novel by Shields.

Maybe now is the time to tell you that Daisy Goodwill has a little trouble with getting things straight; with the truth, that is....Well, a childhood is what anyone wants to remember of it. It leaves behind no fossils, except perhaps in fiction. Which is why you want to take Daisy's representation of events with a grain of salt, a bushel of salt (148).

However, even with these cautionary remarks, Daisy is able to persuade the reader that the version of her life that she presents, while it is perhaps not spoken with the God-like Authority and adherence to Truth so often associated with autobiography, it does indeed contain her truth. She succeeds in doing so by destabilizing the fictional/factual opposition and suggesting that perhaps only the power of imagination will allow a truth to emerge. She criticizes a blind belief in equating truth with fact and falsehood with imagination, saying: "When we say a thing or an event is real, never mind how suspect it sounds, we honor it. But when a thing is made up - regardless of how true and just it seems - we turn up our noses" (330). By continuously emphasizing that her life-writing is far more a product of imagination than a strict adherence to facts, Daisy overturns society's assumptions that truth can only be equated with reality, and falsehood with fiction, and instead posits that despite her unreliability in terms of factual evidence, Daisy is still presenting the truth of her life. Daisy's autobiography, as "the only account there is, written on air, written with imagination's invisible ink" (149) is a testimony to Shields's faith in the ability of the writer to capture the truth by using the gift of imagination.

Monette's narrator in Le Double suspect also employs "fictional" strategies to rewrite Manon's diary and refuses to submit her text to a test of its authenticity based on its adherence to verifiable fact. Unlike Daisy, who appeals to her own imagination in order to fill in the gaps in her text, Anne relies on a close reading of Manon's diary to help her reconstruct Manon's life. She writes: "mon récit n'est pas d'abord une construction imaginaire, mais le résultat d'une

lecture attentive, tentant de cerner ce que Manon a voulu taire” (142). She views Manon’s journal the same way a writer views her notes or a rough draft; it is simply a text she must reorganize and put some order to so that it acquires a definite form (51, 140, 147). At the end of her stay in Rome when she has finished rewriting Manon’s diary, she concludes: “D’une pile à l’autre, il pourrait n’y avoir que la différence entre un premier brouillon et la version définitive d’un *roman*” (262, emphasis added). By relabelling Manon’s diary a *roman* (novel), she initiates a transposition of Manon’s story from the non-fictional realm of autobiography to the fictional world of the novel, for she writes according to the same processes of fictional construction which follow “[les] lois de la narration, avec tout ce que cela implique de fraudes et de détours, de glissements et de substitutions...” (55). These, of course, are the same laws which govern the writing of autobiography for, as was illustrated in Daisy’s text, much is omitted, distorted and glossed over to preserve a sense of continuity and coherency in narrative form and content. Yet despite Manon’s admission that she employs fictional strategies to recreate Manon’s text, her self-reflexive examination of her own writing process effectively calls into question any belief in a definitive division separating fiction from autobiography. As Julie LeBlanc notes: “en suggérant que l’écriture autobiographique ne sert qu’à perpétuer la tromperie et l’illusion, [la narratrice] évoquer[a] une affinité entre la fiction et la réalité qui va à l’encontre de ce qui est communément admis” (“Vers une rhétorique” 7). And it is evident that Anne believes Manon purposely avoided telling the truth about her life in *les cahiers noirs*, “car...ils semblent frelater la vérité” (46). Anne feels she can reveal Manon’s truth about her self and her life because in the end, only Anne herself will be able to discern the difference between fiction and reality (57).

The key to obtaining the truth about Manon’s life is Anne’s outright rejection of defining

truth, authenticity and sincerity according to verifiable fact. For Manon, those three elements “ne concernent pas la conformité et la non-conformité de l’histoire, considérée d’un point de vue référentiel, mais ont trait au “faire persuasif” des locuteurs” (LeBlanc “Vers une rhétorique” 8). This is essential to the examination of the fictional/factual opposition, for, while the truth claims of the real journal depend on external evidence which can be verified, questions of truth are irrelevant to the fictional journal, which “exists on a different plane for the verifiable” (Raoul The French Fictional Journal 7). In terms of Le Double suspect, reality as verifiable fact is sacrificed in order to reach the core of the reality of Manon’s suppressed story and the truth of her self. As Anne explains:

Peu importe donc que ma narration prenne des allures de fiction, devienne même incontrôlable, puisque la réalité sur laquelle je me penche n’existe pas ailleurs que dans les cahiers numérotés, dont je n’ai aucun moyen de vérifier, ici, à Rome, l’exactitude ni la sincérité. Du reste les enquêtes ne sont pas mon affaire. La vérité non plus, si elle ne doit être que la qualité de ce qui est vérifiable (144-5).

By refusing to evaluate the truth and reality of *les cahiers noirs* and *les cahiers rouges* according to the laws of the genre, Anne brings Manon’s “real” journal into the fictional realm. Yet questions of truth and reality are still extremely relevant here, because it is only by refuting the ontological status accorded the real journal that she is able, through a process of fictionalization, to grasp the truth of Manon’s life. While she often feels she falls short of recapturing the “real” Manon, calling attention to the difficulty of representing anything more than an image of someone through writing (141), she succeeds in revealing the truth that Manon tried for so long to keep hidden.

This crossing over of the boundaries of fact and fiction in both texts is but one example of the way in which these novels subvert and expand the autobiographical genre. Both narrators

refuse to confine their exploration of self exclusively to one form, for they feel that in order to reach the truth of their selves, they must transcend the limits of genre and embrace alternate means of expression. This does not dissolve autobiography entirely; instead, it suggests that because all lives are different, they must be told in such a way that their differences and uniqueness are reflected. Consequently, a representation of self cannot be contained by rigid definitions of genre and strict determination to stay within its boundaries. Thus when Anne rewrites Manon's journal, she resists imposing the label of either diary or novel on her text, suggesting that only a hybrid of both genres can capture and represent Manon's self, life and experiences. Similarly, Daisy also crosses the boundary between fiction and autobiography, and while Shields calls her text The Stone Diaries, the narrative is a skillful weaving of traditional autobiography and its sub-genres (diary, epistolary, confession), as well as other "unusual" (for autobiography) yet highly relevant testimonies to Daisy's life such as lists, recipes and newspaper clippings. This use of multiple genres reflects a basic need these writers have to subvert traditional genre boundaries in order to create a feminized autobiographical narrative that reflects women's lives and experiences. As Nicole Brossard explains, women (writers) need to escape the paralysing linearity of singular self-expression and consequently use many genres to explore their subjectivities: "[W]omen will link narrative fragments, poetical prose, autobiographical passages, and poetry in the same piece of writing. Because women's experience is marginalized in life as well as in literature, women's subjectivity needs all genres at the same time" ("Before I became a feminist..." 64).

Finally, Shields's and Monette's subversion and reworking of "traditional" autobiography not only affects the technical aspects and specific principles of genre such as its organization,

boundaries and grounding in the fictional/factual opposition, they also have an impact on the creation of a new self/other paradigm. There is a need for an autobiographical account that acknowledges the importance of the other to women's selves, for "the individualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women" (Friedman 35). Thus, in contrast to traditional autobiography, in which the self is perceived as distinct from the other and self-construction proceeds on an isolated level, the other in Shields's and Monette's novels plays an important role in the process of self-construction and the development of the narrators' subjectivities. Through an examination of the relationship of self to other on three levels - self as other, characters as other, reader as other - it becomes apparent that the narrators' subjectivities do not exist in isolation but can only emerge through an intense interaction with the other people in their lives. The resulting self/other intersubjectivity leads to a new way to write and read autobiography which takes into account the vital importance of the other in women's lives.

The first self/other paradigm, that of self as other, is characteristic of all autobiography, regardless of the form it takes. The autobiographical "I" is always a split subject, or, perhaps more accurately a subject divided into subject and object due to the retrospective nature of the narrative (the "I" of the present is remembering and writing the "I" of the past) and the fact that the writer is both narrator and protagonist of her own story.¹¹ As Shari Benstock asks:

Where does one place the "I" of the autobiographical account? In definitions of autobiography that stress self-disclosure and narrative account, that posit a self called to

¹¹Valerie Raoul notes that in the case of the diary, the subject is actually divided three times, because "le je est non seulement sujet et objet de sa narration, mais aussi l'objet indirect, le narrataire/destinataire de son texte" ("Cette autre-moi" 39).

witness (and an authority) to “his” own being, that proposes a double referent for the first person narrative (the present “I” and the past “I”)...the Subject is made Object of investigation (the first person actually masks the third) (19).

While the writing subject must continually mediate and renegotiate the written object, this process is often acknowledged only in a theoretical context. Both Shields and Monette put theory into practice by having their autobiographical narrators foreground the construction of a divided subject. They subvert the unitary subject of traditional autobiography by emphasizing that the autobiographical subject is in fact a split subject, giving voice to a plurality of “I’s” and a multiplicity of subjectivities. In Shields’s text, the split subject is concretized through Daisy’s use of the personal pronouns “I” and “she” to mark the distinction. In Monette’s text, the distinction is first established and then collapsed as Anne’s “I” merges into Manon’s “I”, creating a doubled subject. While their approaches are extremely different, both writers are striving to attain the same end by writing through an autobiographical subject who is conscious of her multiple constructions of selfhood.

The key to situating Daisy’s self is the mediation of the first and third person voices of the narrative. In an interview, Shields comments on Daisy’s sporadic shifting from the third to the first person: “[the novel is] also her looking at her life, so I think she has to be in first person sometimes to comment from outside. But the really tricky part was to write about a woman thinking her autobiography in which she is virtually absent” (Schnitzer 28). The use of the pronouns “she” and “I” highlights Daisy’s positions as object and subject in the narrative and draws attention to the interplay of absence and presence of selfhood; “she” is spoken for and defined by others while the “I” speaks and defines herself. In other words, “she” as a woman in all her incarnations (Mother, Mrs. Barker Flett, Victoria’s Great Aunt Daisy) is trapped within

the narrative and within conventional female roles, denied subjectivity and the possibility of living her life any differently because of patriarchal expectations, while “I” as Daisy Goodwill interrogates this absence of self from story and allows for the possibility of other versions of the story which do posit a certain subjectivity. “She” is trapped in the roles and representations of a woman’s life; “I” represents the possibilities of escape. The first person often runs parallel, or sometimes converges with the third person (“I feel a part of her” 263), and draws the reader’s attention to Daisy’s construction as a character in the text as well as her construction through the eyes of others, suggesting that her self might have been constructed differently had she been given the opportunity to explore other possibilities in life.

By saying “I” and thus speaking from the position of subject, Daisy reclaims agency, power and a voice through which to express a self that she does not possess when she is spoken for by her family, friends and acquaintances. There are many instances in the novel where others’ voices speak louder than Daisy’s, and even some sections where she is completely silenced, her subjectivity erased and the only access to her story is through the eyes and words of others. The section entitled “Work 1955-1964” is composed of letters written by Daisy’s friends, family, co-workers and readers. Daisy is silent in this section, and her work and personal life are summarized by others. In the chapter entitled “Sorrow, 1965”, Daisy’s character is framed by others’ theories of her depression; the self (“auto”) of autobiography is lost, autobiography is transformed into biography and Daisy’s life and experiences are filtered through the consciousness and perceptions of others. Her identity emerges solely in relation to those around her, and is characterized by the roles she plays (such as friend, mother, aunt) in other people’s lives. In this instance, the use of “she” helps illustrate the multiple identities Daisy possesses, identities which

evolve always in connection with another, demonstrating the way in which she is always defined relationally. These fragmented selves which emerge show the impossibility of containing Daisy's self within a single representation, and they reflect her position "in a culture that defines WOMAN in terms of her fragmented roles as mother, daughter, wife and sister" (Friedman 45). Daisy is written as a series of roles, giving rise to her multiple subjectivities. Yet while the presence of others in Daisy's life is fundamental to her identity construction and her self-definition, the fact that she is often constructed by others is detrimental to her own inscription of subjectivity. Therefore the third person comes to stand for Daisy's objectification, and while it helps to clarify what she has become, it ends up eclipsing the self that tries to emerge. It is even sometimes surprising that she would attempt to speak for herself, for while other characters are offering their comments on Daisy's life, the "I" remarks: "Surely no one would expect Mrs. Flett to come up with a theory about her own suffering" (261). Daisy, in the first person, then goes on to explain her own thoughts and feelings about her situation, transforming herself from object to subject, inscribing her own subjectivity with a shift from "she" to "I", asserting her right to express her self.

In Le Double suspect, Anne initially resists using the first person as she rewrites Manon's diary, preferring to maintain a distance between her self and Manon's self by referring to Manon in the third person. Anne quickly realizes that this is impeding her writing project: "Je sais exactement ce qui ne va pas. Je résiste à faire usage du "je"" (54) and soon adopts the first person. As her writing progresses, a doubled subjectivity emerges, for Anne not only collapses the textual distinction between herself and Manon through the use of the first person, she also undergoes a sort of physical metamorphosis (she occupies Manon's hotel room, wears her clothing

and physically resembles her) and is virtually transformed into Manon through her rewriting. Anne explains: "D'ailleurs ce récit, où celle qui dit "je" est à la fois narratrice et personnage, opère en soi cette condensation qui fait une même personne de Manon et de moi" (141). What follows is a successful attempt "de cerner le moi à travers l'autre dans une subjectivité féminine dédoublée" (Aas-Rouxparis 754). The boundary between self and other is dissolved as Manon's voice slowly merges with Anne's; however, by the end of the novel, two female subjects are allowed to emerge. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Manon's subjectivity is re-inscribed through Anne's rewriting of Manon's diary. Yet Anne's subjectivity is also inscribed in the text as her project to rewrite Manon's self places her on her own path to self-discovery. As Anne-Marie Gronhovd explains: "À travers la vie et le corps fragmentés de Manon, Anne reforme une image plus distincte d'elle-même" (4).

The doubled subjectivity created by Anne's use of "je" allows Anne to inscribe her own subjectivity in relation to her own desires, which otherwise would have remained repressed and unexplored. A literary critic by profession, Anne resists her own voice and prefers to write through the voices of others, adopting their styles and imitating their prose. She admits that "je n'écris que par autrui" (234), largely because to use her own voice, she opens herself to the intimacy of writing and the possibility of confronting things she would rather keep hidden (234). Thus by adopting Manon's voice, she is able to explore her own feelings with respect to homosexuality and her burgeoning desire for other women from the safety of another's persona. She explains that through her doubling, "c'est comme si quelque chose de moi s'y perdait et s'y trouvait" (148). Yet rather than imprisoning her within Manon's textual self, this doubling of Manon's voice is a liberating action for Anne, as she has been able to express female desire and

the erotic by forging new relationships between women on both a social and a textual level. It is in this manner that Anne survives where Manon fails. As Nicole Brossard observes: “a Lesbian who fails to reinvent the world is a Lesbian in the process of extinction” (“Tender Skin My Mind” 181). Manon commits suicide because she is unable to even attempt to change the world by facing her desires for other women; instead, she represses them and tries to fit the mold patriarchy has carved out for women. Unable to do so, she seals her own fate. On the other hand, Anne, by rewriting Manon’s diary, not only resurrects Manon’s story, but successfully changes the world both socially and textually. In the first instance, she introduces a discourse on feminine desire not previously addressed and examines homosexual relationships (both male and female) in a very open manner. On a textual level, she reinvents the traditional self/other paradigm by establishing new links between self and other where an intimate exchange between the two leads to a new female subjectivity unafraid of exploring its desires and expressing itself.

The other important self/other paradigm that must be examined is that of writer and reader. In order for the story to become a story and the self to be actualized, they need to be heard and acknowledged; it is only through the necessary presence of the reader and the bond of reading that this can occur (Felman 14). There is a strong need in both texts for witnesses so that these women’s stories do not slip away in silence, unread and forgotten. In The Stone Diaries, Daisy needs others, not so that they will tell her story (as in fact they do in the novel) but so that she can tell hers. She writes: “The odd thing about the pictures that fly into Daisy Goodwill’s head is that she is always alone....And we require, it seems, in our moments of courage or shame, at least one witness, but Mrs. Flett has not had this privilege. This is what breaks her heart. What she can’t bear. Even now, eighty years old” (339). As readers of her story, we have followed Daisy’s

evolution of selfhood and have acted as witnesses to her life; she has been read and recognized. The same occurs in Le Double suspect where Anne, as reader of Manon's text, is the only witness to Manon's story. Yet by rewriting Manon's diary and labelling it a novel, she takes it out of the realm of the private, where it would have remained forever silent, and places it in the realm of public consumption, making her story accessible to others and ensuring that it is not lost.

In both The Stone Diaries and Le Double suspect there is, then, a subversion of traditional autobiography and its writing practice and a call for a new form which inscribes a female subjectivity outside of traditional patriarchal codes and roles. By deconstructing the basic principles of the genre and positing a different self/other paradigm, both Shields and Monette have created narrators who successfully write themselves and their stories in a female (en)gendered autobiographical form. Encrypted in both texts is a fundamental alienation from the master narrative and an instinctive pull towards the matrilineal roots of language and story, similar to that observed in the study of Théoret's and Warland's texts in the first chapter. In The Stone Diaries, Daisy appears to be searching for a sense of community or roots through both fathers and mothers. However, when she succeeds in her search for fathers (both her father and father-in-law), she finds no connection and remains empty and unfulfilled. At one point she explains: "She's more focused...wanting...to pull herself inside a bag of buried language, to be that language, to be able to utter that unutterable word: father...when she concentrates on them she feels her own terrifying inauthenticity gnawing at her heart's membrane" (266-7). There is a juxtaposition of her desire to fit into this symbolic world of the father and her feelings of inauthenticity (not belonging) because she does not conform to the father's laws of language and the master narrative. Instead, it is her search for mother that pulls her forward, for with the loss

of her mother comes a feeling of loss “of any connection in the world” (189). In the end, she finds connection to her soul, the kernel of her self, in her name, Daisy Goodwill, inscribed on her hospital bracelet just before her death. It reminds her of “the small primal piece of herself that came unshaped into the world” (322) blessed by the last breath of her mother. She writes: “It’s this wing-beat of breath I reach out for. Even now I claim it absolutely. I insist upon its literal volume and vapors, for however hard I try I can be sure of nothing else in the world but this” (40). Anne, too, finds a link to her mother and to the Imaginary through her name. Originally named by her father for a dead aunt (a name the reader is never told), the narrator symbolically renames herself Anne, the name her mother had originally intended for her. As Nicole Aas-Rouxparis suggests:

...“une jeune née”, nouvellement-nommée-Anne, émerge du texte, prête à “sortir” de l’ordre traditionnel pour libérer l’imaginaire dans une “ambiance purifiée” (231). La narratrice rejette le registre masculin lacanien du Nom du Père - abandonnant symboliquement le nom que lui avait donné son père - pour rejoindre le registre féminin en adoptant le nom qu’avait choisi sa mère (760; c.f. Raoul “Cette autre-moi” 49).

These fundamental links to the Imaginary through the mother and the implied rejection of the Symbolic through the father can be read as a metaphor for the textual practice of both narrators. As writers trying to change the way in which women are inscribed in order to ensure their subjectivities emerge, Shields and Monette have taken important steps towards liberating women’s stories and selves from traditional representations through a feminization of the autobiographical form.

Chapter Three

HIStory - The Language of Power and Exclusion (or Where is HERstory?)

[N]ous nous racontons des histoires de femme. Nous barbouillons d'encre blanche des archives invisibles...

-Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska

hystery. the excision of women (who do not act but are acted upon).

-Daphne Marlatt

Changing the way women are represented in texts so that a subjective self-inscription emerges is fundamental to the writing project of these six writers. Yet before they can accomplish this, they must demonstrate the way in which women are excluded from the narrative forms and discourses they are investigating and reinventing. Just as Warland and Théoret exposed women's erasure in/under language, and Shields and Monette explored the gaps and holes of traditional autobiography, Daphne Marlatt in Ana Historic and Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska in La Maison Trestler examine women's virtual disappearance under the weight of History's master narrative. Women's presence in the official records of History is the exception rather than the norm, as women are seldom in a position to author their own historical discourse. Instead, and in contrast to the very public histories of male figures who dominate the history books, women's personal histories are frequently removed or are altogether absent from the public records. Thus in their novels, Marlatt and Ouellette-Michalska set out to write Herstory and mark its pages with the presence of women. They challenge the writing of History and employ historiographic metafiction as a means of inscribing women's previously unrecounted historical experiences or at least of imagining their

possible experiences. Using intertexts from the dominant (patriarchal) historical discourse, the narrators of the texts deconstruct notions of history, truth and reality, appealing to the imagination and an intrinsic sense of memory, both maternal and corporeal, to escape the patriarchal script and reconstruct an alternate version of history. However, their writing extends beyond the recovery of their respective female historical subjects. For the narrators, writing is a vehicle for discovering their own identity, inscribing their own experience and insisting on their own subjectivity before a master narrative that seeks to dominate and efface them. Just as Warland and Théoret unearthed the feminine in language and Shields and Monette injected the feminine into traditional autobiography, Marlatt and Ouellette-Michalska are writing women into History's archives, feminizing its records and writing Herstory.

Both Marlatt and Ouellette-Michalska recognize historiographic metafiction as a useful tool to help women question the mastery of history and its presentation of "what really happened" as a by-no-means complete narrative construct which privileges the dominant ideology's version of history and excludes the marginalized. Once History as recorded fact and therefore legitimate and all-encompassing documented truth is called into question, women's limited representation within history and their frequent absence from it also become suspect.¹ To carefully examine what is included in the historical text and what is excluded from it points of course to the underlying theme of this entire project, that of power and control. Indeed, as Linda Hutcheon suggests, "[t]o write

¹Linda Hutcheon states: "[W]hat I have been calling postmodern fiction does not "aspire to tell the truth"...as much as to question *whose* truth gets told" (*Poetics* 123). Both Marlatt and Ouellette-Michalska are intent on demonstrating the way in which History privileges men's stories to the exclusion of women's. But they are also very concerned with telling the truth - not the totalizing Truth that would encapsulate every woman but their own personal truths as they struggle on their journey towards self discovery.

either history or historical fiction is equally to raise the question of power and control: it is the story of the victors that usually gets told" (The Canadian Postmodern 72). By employing techniques of historiographic metafiction, Marlatt and Ouellette-Michalska are able to wrestle the power and control out of the victor's (read patriarchy's) hands by exposing the holes in the historical narrative and destabilizing the principles of truth and authenticity upon which it is based. By calling History's totalizing and legitimizing discourse into question, they make room for the possibility of other versions grounded in different, yet no less (or more) valid principles which reflect a feminization of the past and its written record.

The narrative of both novels takes place on three² levels which are not separate or distinct but which are collapsed in on one another. The first level of the narrative concerns the narrator and her personal life, while the second level explores the history and characters she is writing about. In Marlatt's Ana Historic, Annie, the narrator, is caught in the patriarchal script of marriage and motherhood which she inherited from her own mother, a very real presence she must come to terms with in the novel. She feels trapped in a role she is expected to play and tentatively, at first, sets out to explore other possibilities life might hold by re-writing the story of Mrs. Richards, a school teacher who settled in British Columbia in the late 1800s. Annie's resurrection of Ana from the buried archives of women's unwritten history brings forth the previously unheard voice of the foremothers, thus adding another dimension to the historical record. Yet Annie also uses Ana to explore the risk of a lesbian relationship and to write herself out of the binding patriarchal script.

²A fourth level in La Maison Trestler contains a rather scathing commentary on the colonial relationship between Great Britain, France and Canada with a visit from a French dignitary "Monsieur B." and a trip to the Queen's bedroom. This explores power relationships on yet another front.

Consequently, the real (his)story that is being written is not only Ana's, for her story is also the vehicle for discovering a way to write Annie out of the history that dominates her and into a liberating space. Similarly in La Maison Trestler, Ouellette-Michalska's narrator rewrites the story of Catherine Trestler who rebels against her father, the ultimate patriarch, and asserts her right to step outside of the life he plans for her and instead marry the man she loves. The insertion of this traditional-style love story illustrates on a thematic level the ideological struggle for power and control within patriarchy. As Janet M. Paterson summarizes: "[L]'histoire d'amour n'est rien d'autre que la représentation dramatique d'une lutte idéologique....qui se joue aux niveaux du pouvoir, du savoir et de l'avoir" (64). The narrator in Ouellette-Michalska's novel also uses her historical counterpart to investigate the possibility of a loving relationship based on mutual trust and understanding, a relationship very unlike the one she is currently experiencing with Stefan.

The third narrative level is that of writing. There is a self-reflexive discourse that runs throughout both novels examining the writing process of fiction and history. On this level, Marlatt and Ouellette-Michalska use their narrators to examine women's exclusion from the dominant historical discourse, to expose this exclusion as one based on power relations and dominance rather than solely truth or fact and to repair this exclusion by deconstructing the historical master narrative and replacing it with a feminized historical discourse based on maternal memory, the female body, love, friendship and imagination. They accomplish this in two ways. First, they demonstrate the way History is merely one section of the whole and then they posit the history of the foremothers and women's personal, everyday lives as another section which needs to be told. They also, in typical poststructuralist fashion, show that the history which is recorded is one version of many possibilities; they then present alternate versions of what might have occurred.

History's power as a master narrative is rooted in its politics of exclusion. As such, it is essential to investigate whose stories are told and whose are not, which events and people can be inscribed within the historical discourse as legitimate and valid and which remain outside of it because they do not satisfy its criteria and therefore cannot be encoded. In order to uncover women's absence from History, both novels "investigate[] the processes by which supposedly neutral monologic historical language constructs 'woman's place' in history as 'unreadable' or 'unrecognizable'" (Jones 20). History is gendered as masculine; as such, it is extremely difficult to inscribe the feminine as it is coded negatively (read absence, lack) by the dominant patriarchal discourse. The narrators of both novels draw attention to this lack as they lament the absence of women in the founding myths of Canadian history, something Patricia Smart notes is common to the development of all countries. Smart writes: "Nations have without exception been the creation of fathers, wild spaces tamed and mapped and bordered by them, in order that they may be passed on to sons....Nations without exception have used women as reproducers and educators and nurturers, all the while excluding them from power and from public space" ("The (In?)Compatibility of Gender and Nation" 15). Annie explores her own understanding of this part of history with barely constrained anger and not a little sarcasm when she says: "I learned that history is the *real* story the city fathers tell of the *only* important events in the world. a tale of their exploits hacked out against a silent backdrop of trees....so many ordinary men turned into heroes. (Where are the city mothers?)" (28, emphasis added). Yet her criticism formed as a question is inserted between brackets, performatively marking women's exclusion through her use of punctuation as if the very

suggestion of women's presence in history is scandalous and against the rules of the narrative.³

The narrator in La Maison Trestler makes a similar scathing commentary when she illustrates how women's most basic contribution to the building of Canada is overlooked. She writes:

Au commencement étaient le Père et le Fils, et l'Esprit-Saint et l'Amérique....D'un océan à l'autre, les femmes avançaient, chargées de foetus qui devaient assurer la continuité du temps. Au septième jour du monde, elles ne furent pas nommées....Sans Jeanne Mance, Marguerite Bourgeois...et toutes ces autres dont on ne sut jamais le nom, Montréal serait restée une île déserte (208).

Recognizing how women have been erased from the record, the narrator intends to set it straight. She makes several references to the bible and the creation myth, seeing women's absence from "la Grande Histoire" (18) entrenched in the Christian myths upon which the belief system of Western civilization is built. Ouellette-Michalska's novel is thus symbolically subtitled "le 8^e jour d'Amérique"; her allusion to the biblical narrative is subversive as she implies that, regardless of its divine authority, it is nevertheless incomplete. As Jane Moss states: "Ouellette-Michalska's narrator, like her protagonist, contests the patriarchal past and its religious and historical discourses because they have no place for women" (62).

Annie and Ouellette-Michalska's narrator explore the ways in which women were written out of History because their experiences were not coded as valid and their own self-written records were not considered legitimate by patriarchal standards. In her search for documentation of the Trestler family, the narrator discovers that the letters written by Catherine's niece were destroyed. The narrator is not surprised. "Je sais. On a aussi brûlé le journal intime de ma mère, de ma grand-mère, et ceux de Sophie Tolstoï et Virginia Wolf [sic] attendirent longtemps avant d'être publiés. La

³Near the end of the novel, Annie writes: "break the parentheses and let it all surface" (150). By removing the parentheses, she opens the text to women's subjective experiences.

femme de rêve n'écrit que pour ses tiroirs" (233). Annie attests to similar experiences regarding women's writing - her own, as it does not follow the stark linearity of Richard's documentaries; her mother's, as she "scribbles" in secret; and Ana's, whose journal is "a document, yes, but not history" (31). Annie suggests that one of the possible reasons "they think [Ana's] journal suspect at the archives. 'inauthentic,' fictional possibly..." (30) is because a woman's journal does not meet the criteria of content or objectivity of the historical narrative - not only does it contain a subjective account of events, but these events are narrated from a woman's perspective. In attempting to record their own histories, women are doubly stripped of authority - they cannot author (write) their own texts as the texts they produce are not regarded as legitimate sources of historical truth; as a consequence, they are denied a position of authority (power, control, agency) within the historical narrative.

The only means by which women can enter the historical record appears to be through their relationships with the men in their lives. Annie notes that the women's names she has access to are almost all identified through their link to their husbands (47).⁴ And while she feels this is history's way of naming women and then writing them out of the record, Zoe ironically points out that this is the only way they were not completely sentenced to anonymity (134). Annie still finds this problematic, as the prerequisite to becoming part of history is adherence to the patriarchal script. This also requires silence and self-effacement: "entered as Mrs., she enters his house as his wife. she has no first name, she has no place, no place on the street, not if she's a 'good woman.' her

⁴Ana is identified purely by her dead husband's and her new husband's last names - much like Annie is identified by her own husband's name, "Richard's Annie" (a grammatically possessive form no less).

writing stops” (134). The female figures of History enter Ouellette-Michalska’s text in a similar self-effacing manner. As Paul G. Socken points out: “le roman comporte un certain nombre d’allusions aux femmes qui, dans l’histoire, se sont sacrifiées pour le bien de la société” (335). These women deny their own individuality and subjectivity in order to occupy the place society has set for them. Interestingly, it is Catherine’s refusal to follow the script that places her in History. Yet it is her link to her father and the court battle they have for her mother’s inheritance that marks her entrance into Canada’s legal records beyond the documentation of her birth, marriage and death.

Throughout both novels, History, both as ideological discourse and as official written record, is presented as being written and acted out by men. Control of historical knowledge and the power to participate in its creation and dissemination remains exclusively part of men’s world; women are actively discouraged from entering it and are anything from mildly chastised to severely reprimanded when they make even the slightest attempt to venture into it. Knowledge is a valuable weapon, and by maintaining a monopoly on historical knowledge, the men are able to maintain their position of power and control and thus ensure women’s strict adherence to the patriarchal script.⁵ In Ana Historic, Annie’s husband Richard controls the historical record. As a professor of History and researcher and writer of documentaries, Richard is the authority figure who holds the key to historical knowledge and who unconsciously sits in judgment of anything that does not follow the linear plotline of carefully documented fact. Having left university in order to marry Richard and thus suspending her formal education to fulfill the prescribed role of wife and mother, Annie is

⁵Stan Dragland makes an important observation: “*Ana Historic* is anti-patriarchy, not anti-male - [the men] themselves uncritical, because unconscious, of the patriarchal script” (176). Thus in Richard’s case, his hold over his wife is unconscious. However, Catherine’s father in La Maison Trestler is extremely aware of the power and control he has over her.

perpetually trapped in the student/teacher relationship with her husband.⁶ He is the authority who directs and produces the historical document; she is the assistant who follows his lead and does as she is told. Their “working” relationship becomes a metaphor for their marriage, and when Richard suggests “I can always train one of my grad students to replace you” (147), Annie is overcome by panic, “dying to offer my time again, so as not to be left out of the book, the marriage, history” (147). Despite her increasing resistance to the patriarchal script, Annie finds it difficult to completely reject her position within it as by doing so, she denies herself an identity and makes herself a-historic.

Yet Annie also recognizes that her constant reiteration of Richard’s texts and others’ citations is contributing to her obliteration and she feels a need to assert her self and fill in the blanks she notices in Richard’s official record. Despite his meticulous sifting through of all the facts, Richard leaves glaring discrepancies (at least in Annie’s eyes) in his documentation of history. Annie ironically turns Richard’s own words against him when she quotes him as saying: “one missing piece can change the shape of the whole picture - you see how important your part in it is?” (134). For Annie, it becomes increasingly obvious that the missing pieces are no less than all the women in history. Annie writes: “i’m no longer doing my part looking for missing pieces at least not missing facts. not when there are missing persons in all this rubble” (154). Including them in the official record would dramatically alter the face of history and disrupt the power imbalance sustained by

⁶Théoret draws similar parallels of the relationship between men and women under patriarchy in “Plaidoyer pour le droit à l’existence des femmes” in *Une voix pour Odile*. She writes about *le mariage des intellectuels*: “Je suis évadée d’un mariage où l’on me disait toujours que j’interprétais mal tel ou tel concept et que je n’approfondissais rien.... Mon mariage, le rapport prof-élève” (62)

their exclusion. Thus, as Stan Dragland points out: “Annie’s writing has one sort of origin in the research for her husband’s book. In fact, it begins, hesitantly, as an answer to that book, to Richard’s linear method, to the virtual absence of women from his sources; it begins as a reaction against history in which women are a-historic” (179). It becomes a way of making history part of the women’s world and insisting that the official record be marked by women’s presence.

Men also have control over the documentation and dissemination of history in La Maison Trestler.⁷ Catherine’s father, J.J. Trestler, is the source of historical knowledge which he imparts to his sons with enthusiasm but vehemently denies his daughters “[car] cela exige le retrait des filles” (39). Women are barred from History in several ways by J.J. Trestler’s authoritative version; they are absent from the story, denied its knowledge and silenced during its telling. J.J. Trestler’s history tells tales of battles and politics from which women are excluded. His daughters are not allowed access to his historical narratives and must never question his stories, for to do so is to question his authority and undermine his control. Catherine recognizes that she is not supposed to overstep these clearly defined boundaries.⁸ When she dares to speak during a family dinner, her father silences her with a look that puts her back in the place she is expected to occupy by clearly indicating: “Au repas, les filles n’ouvrent la bouche que pour se nourrir....Discuter de guerre et de politique appartient aux hommes. Aux femmes, il suffit de régner à la cuisine” (142).

⁷The old historian the narrator consults for documentation on the Trestlers is another example. Interestingly, the narrator’s mother is a history teacher. Yet the narrator stresses it is the legacy of men’s exploits that her mother recites (204), and she notes ironically: “L’histoire l’habitait, mais elle-même restait hors de l’histoire” (205).

⁸Janet M. Paterson goes so far as to equate J.J. Trestler with History itself. She writes: “le conflit entre Catherine et son père acquiert un sens symbolique selon lequel l’Histoire, incarnée dans le personnage du père, est remise en question par les actions et les paroles de sa fille” (65).

By listening to her father, Catherine begins to realize that access to and control of the script signifies access to and control of her own destiny. She explains that: “Ils⁹ barrent ses mots, lui imposent la suite du récit....déjà dans cette histoire tout été prévu, fixé, arrêté” (39). Catherine therefore completely and irrevocably refuses the role her father had intended her to play, refusing “d’être celle qu’ils veulent que je devienne” (144). As a first illustration of the repeated doubling of Catherine and the narrator, Catherine’s earlier comment and recent assertion figuratively imply the possibility of concrete emancipation through words, language and writing that the narrator so strongly believes in. It is both Catherine’s freedom and her own that the narrator seeks to achieve by rescuing Catherine from the realm of a-historicity. Like Annie, the narrator intends to change the face of the official record by including women’s stories and writing them back into history. She intends to find a new way to write history, for, as she explains: “Je crois que mon salut viendra par l’alphabet” (26).

The narrators of both texts portray the official record of history as one based on power and domination. They use intertexts from the dominant historical discourse to illustrate this point as excerpts taken from colonial life depict bloody battles and men’s struggles to exert control over the new land. Annie and the narrator use these intertexts to reveal the significance of “master” narrative on three levels. First, they use them to explore history’s theme of power and domination. Secondly, they use them to expose the record as a subjective and selective account and to demonstrate that many components - such as the every-day events of domestic and community life - are lacking. Thirdly, they employ Canada’s history of colonization as a metaphor for their own struggles for

⁹While “ils” refers to both Catherine’s step-mother and father, it is evident that her father dominates the relationship. As phallic mother, his wife clearly upholds the patriarchal script.

identity within the patriarchal script. Through a gendered re-reading of these intertexts, the narrators expose and subvert the patriarchal discourse embedded within them.

The record of history, as Annie and the narrator perceive it, is a continuous struggle for power. Consequently, they select examples which illustrate this assertion of control. In Ana Historic, italicized intertexts are inserted from various sources and diverse discourses - literary, biblical, historical, social, and written by both men and women - to depict men's drive for control and women's confinement to positions of powerlessness. As Annie points out: "history the story. Carter's and all the others', of dominance. mastery. the bold line of it" (25). Carter's is but one of the voices that Marlatt chooses to insert from the history of Canada's colonization whose progress is couched in language conjuring images of possession, invasion and mastery. Annie quotes:

'In those days good timber was plentiful - good timber, on sea-coast slopes, that could be felled and shot right down to water - hand-loggers' timber. The country bristled with opportunities...'

'Many a man I have heard lament those days. "Boys, oh boys!" one would say, "why was we all so slow in coming to this country?...Why! The country hadn't been touched!"' (63).

By themselves, the implications of these intertexts might be unclear, but Annie marks the text with her own commentary to subvert the ideology hidden beneath the label "progress." Skilfully woven throughout the novel, these intertexts, when read against Annie's own text, unveil a legacy of dominance and subjugation as horrific as the sanctioned rape of a virgin (land).

Indeed, the settler's brutal mastery of the landscape as it is stripped for profit and invaded by man-made structures built from the fruits of its exploitation becomes a metaphor for the domination of women within the patriarchal script. The explorers perceive the woods as something to conquer for economic gain, something to be used and abused without thought or consequence,

much as women exist in a similar colonial relationship with men under patriarchy, silenced by the expectations of the patriarchal script. Annie clearly draws this parallel when she imagines “Ana’s fascination”:

the silence of trees
the silence of women

if they could speak
an unconditioned language
what would they say? (75).

For Annie, it is clear that the language of history “is a foreign tongue to her as a woman” (Dragland 183). Consequently, she must develop her own language to find a voice to liberate her self from the silence.

She recognizes that this is not an easy task for someone brought up to respect the conventions of the code. She is constantly struggling against all the things she has learned and internalized, from her mother’s attempt to mold her into the perfect little lady, to her own efforts to adhere to the norm of a heterosexual relationship, to society’s views of gender-appropriate behaviour as represented in part by the excerpts from Hannah More’s writings. Indeed, Annie explains her own difficulty of escaping the script and expressing herself when she asks: “and what if our heads are full of other people’s words? nothing *without* quotation marks” (81). Intertextuality in her text plays a very concrete role in illustrating this point, for, as she explains, her understanding of history and a woman’s place (or lack thereof) within it is based on knowledge produced by other sources. It becomes extremely difficult to read and speak outside the code once she is integrated into it and it is the only language she knows.

Consequently, the subversion of the historical narrative must come from within through the

re-reading of the intertexts from a feminist perspective. As Manina Jones points out, "*Ana Historic* acknowledges that since it is impossible to forget or completely neutralize the language of history, 'one might as well...subvert its ideological poles'...turning propriety - and linguistic property - upside down" (160). Annie flushes out the dominant theme of mastery that runs throughout patriarchal historical discourse; she then turns it on its head by juxtaposing it with her own interpretations and giving it a new significance. Back to the trees. As part of the patriarchal historical discourse and depicted by the intertexts, the woods are silent, ready to be exploited, cut down, transformed. Annie reclaims them in her text and they are untouched, magical and a little frightening. They call to her in her childhood as they call to Ana, hinting at promises of self-knowledge if Annie can only muster the courage to explore them against her mother's cautions and her own fears. Annie describes her discovery of the two lesbians making love when walking through the woods with her friend Donna:

we'd escaped from the hotbed of home to be out in the woods where we could exchange a shifting currency of complaint, of hopes and fears, sensing our freedom before us...I thought about that leafy tunnel they'd [the women] chosen, the silence of dripping woods and, under glass as under water, two mouths meeting each other....for they had chosen the woods, despite loggers, bears and God (106-7).

The woods become a symbol of freedom in Annie's text, of power and the possibility of self-assertion outside of the patriarchal script and the dominant discourses that seek to confine her. Written out of their intertextual significance, the woods are no longer powerless, threatened and exploited, but are a source of strength, empowerment and possibility leading to self-discovery.

Ouellette-Michalska's narrator also points to intertexts from History which depict struggles for power. Jane Moss elaborates: "This complex postmodern text reconstructs the history of the eighteenth century Trestler house while deconstructing the nineteenth century historical novel and

making a nationalist and feminist critique of the power of economic colonialism, cultural imperialism, and patriarchy” (59). Like Annie, the narrator centres her discussion of History on the colonization of Canada, but rather than focus on the struggle to dominate the land, she focuses on the battles (English, French and American) for control of the land. As one outsider summarizes, to the narrator’s shame and embarrassment: “votre histoire, c’est une histoire de colons qui se battent contre d’autres colons” (35). Indeed, all the events in Canada’s history which are alluded to in La Maison Trestler support this assertion, from the conquest of the French by the English in 1760, to the two American invasions of 1775 and 1812. The narrator uses these intertexts, re-written and told from the perspective of J.J. Trestler, to illustrate not only the theme of dominance and mastery in History, but to demonstrate that all historical narratives are subjective and selective.

As has already been discussed, the historical record largely excludes women. The narrator places women’s contribution to everyday life in opposition to History, calling it “cet envers de l’histoire officielle où s’affichent des dates, des guerres, des trafics de territoire...” (110). She reproaches the historians who consider only stories of conflict as relevant historical material, who ignore the “mundane” events of day-to-day living and who only write history from the victor’s point of view. She finds this all-consuming fascination with conflict, war and death, which she sees as fundamental to archival documents, unacceptable as it is only a partial representation of the history and life of all the inhabitants of a country; “history, being the record of men’s battles...does not always speak to women. It is a limited accounting of the collective memory” (Moss 63). She seeks to fill in the blanks not even addressed in J.J. Trestler’s version of eighteenth century events and to offer an alternative to its dialogue of conquest and its foundation of war and conflict: “Je cherche à reconstituer une histoire qui échapperait à leur appétit d’anéantissement. Une chronique de la vie

quotidienne, peut-être, d'une extrême simplicité, qui pourrait exercer une emprise analogue sur l'instinct de survivance et la volonté de création" (133). As a self-reflexive statement of the goals of her own writing project, the narrator suggests a way to re-write history while simultaneously putting it into practice by juxtaposing J.J. Trestler's stories of battles with Catherine's story of every day life and love.

In La Maison Trestler, Canada's past conflicts and recent struggles among the British, French and Americans serve another purpose: they play out the narrator's personal identity struggle on a national level. Quebec's crisis because of the threat of assimilation by England and the United States is a metaphor for the narrator's fear of cultural, linguistic and sexual subjugation. Jane Moss explains that "as a Quebec feminist, Ouellette-Michalska is doubly ex-centric, belonging to a people abandoned by the father country (France) and mistreated by the conquering nation (England), and to a sex oppressed by every level of the ruling patriarchal order" (60). The narrator of the novel occupies the same position. Through her examination of the intertexts, it comes to light that Quebec's struggle for its own identity is not unlike her own; both are involved in a continuous process of evolution. As Socken points out: "Elle se rend compte que le Québec, tout comme elle-même qui ne se connaît pas bien, est en voie de se définir, et n'est pas du tout une simple extension de la France" (332). The struggle for control of Quebec can be perceived in much the same way the dominant discourses of history, patriarchy and language seek to dominate the narrator. The narrator voices a scathing commentary on France's abandonment (34-5), leaving Quebec at the mercy of two English-speaking countries. She writes:

La même ambiguïté prévaut à Montréal où l'on ne sait pas non plus qui, de l'Anglais ou de l'Américain, constitue la menace réelle. L'un est dans nos murs, l'autre est à nos portes. Mais les deux renâclent <<I don't speak French>> en mâchant leur <<chewing gum>> au nez

des jeunes secrétaires qui rêvent d'épouser un millionnaire de la rue Saint-Jacques, à deux pas du parquet de la bourse (139).

This fear of linguistic and cultural assimilation on a national level (32-3) is indicative of the narrator's personal struggle as her own father, born in the United States, would insist on speaking English to American tourists at every opportunity (11). The narrator's political commentary on Quebec's plight can be read as a symbol of her own struggle against dominant discourses. "Dans ce roman, la quête d'identité représente la vie personnelle et intime engagée dans une lutte pour affirmer sa validité dans un monde de valeurs et d'institutions dominantes. L'histoire officielle joue le rôle d'«institution» dominante par excellence" (Soken 332).

In addition to exposing women's absence from the historical record and illustrating the power relations at play within the dominant discourses responsible for their exclusion, the authors shift their attack from narrative content to narrative structure in order to further subvert the authority of the Historical discourse. They draw attention to the shared conventions of historical and fictional narratives, deconstructing the notion that history and fiction are fundamentally opposed and that the former is the only possible representation of truth and reality. As examples of historiographic metafiction, these novels "se caractérisent par deux tendances simultanées parce que, tout en mettant en valeur l'Histoire et l'importance d'une contextualisation historique, ils remettent en cause la légitimation de ce savoir" (Paterson 53-4). The narrators in the novels are not blindly dismissing history or the importance of a historical context in their writing; they are, however, questioning it as a totalizing discourse which privileges a certain ideological position. The danger of course is to collapse the categories of history and fiction into one another because by completely delegitimizing history, the gaps it leaves could never be filled. Therefore, history has to be exposed as a human

construct which is subjective and selective from a technical standpoint as much as from an ideological one.

Linda Hutcheon argues that because history shares similar writing conventions with fiction, historiography is as “structured, coherent and teleological as any narrative fiction” (Poetics 111). The narrator in La Maison Trestler points out that writers of fiction proceed in the same manner as writers of history when piecing together their narrative accounts. She writes: “Il faut avant tout rendre la fiction cohérente, faire en sorte que l’histoire inventée se superpose à l’histoire vécue. Chroniqueurs et historiens ne procèdent pas autrement, et on les croit sur parole” (155). She examines the stylistic strategies historians employ to make their accounts of battles plausible and convincing (132), and draws attention to the fact that History is not an objective accounting of the “Truth” but a selection of one version among many by a writer motivated by his own ideological position. History, like fiction, is thus subjective with respect to choice of subject and point of view: “L’Histoire avec un grand H, c’était d’abord un genre littéraire doté d’un style, de règles, de procédés d’écriture. C’était, de toutes les histoires possibles, celle que l’on choisissait à des fins qui ne se révélaient que plus tard” (239). The narrator illustrates this point when she examines the different versions of the same event recorded by various people, all of which expose the bias of the writer and none of which support one “Truth” (268). This leads to the juxtaposition of History and story, and to the opposition of “la notion d’Histoire (avec une majuscule et au singulier) à celle d’histoires (avec une minuscule et au pluriel)” (Paterson 56).

With respect to the dichotomy of History vs. story, Janet Paterson asks the familiar questions: “une histoire peut-elle raconter l’Histoire? l’Histoire serait-elle tout simplement une histoire?” (57). In other words, could La Maison Trestler as a novel represent History itself? Could History be

reduced to the status of a narrative? Calling history's status as an authoritative discourse into question by drawing attention to its narrative structure is one of the strategies the narrator employs to demystify History. She also subverts History by relabelling it with names that further destabilize the division between History and story: *épopée militaire* (125), *légende* (138), *caricature* (161), *genre littéraire* (239). A second strategy is her allusion to the possibility of multiple versions which each tell a different tale. Both pave the way to her deconstruction of the fictional/factual opposition upon which History as truth and fact is based. The narrator examines this dichotomy by introducing "l'historien du dimanche," a superficial old fogey who regards novelists with disdain: "Il ne peut musarder avec une romancière sans mettre sur le même pied la fiction qui fabule et l'histoire qui dit vrai. Je m'abstiens d'énoncer que la vérité est la fraction du réel que le mensonge n'a pas encore dilapidée. Je passe également sur le fait que je préfère la passion du rêve aux déterminismes des archives" (192). When the narrator juxtaposes fact and truth with lie and fiction, she undermines the net distinction by insinuating that such a fine line cannot be drawn, and that truth and lies exist in both. For the narrator, the facts do not necessarily tell the story; it is often the power of imagination rather than the documents of history that provides the more truthful account. By blurring the boundaries between fiction and history, the narrator demonstrates that history is not the ultimate authority because of its appeal to fact. As Janet Paterson states: "en détruisant les frontières entre les discours réels et fictifs, en mélangeant le présent et le passé, le texte neutralise la distinction entre le récit *fictif* et le récit *historique*: les deux sont soumis aux contraintes de la narration et les deux peuvent dire leur part de la vérité" (65).

In Ana Historic, Annie also questions the division of History and story as it is defined by the oppositions of fact/fiction, real/imaginary, and truth/lie. She inserts imagined dialogues with her

mother throughout her text which debate the issue and criticize Annie's "fictionalization" of Ana's life: "now you're exaggerating" (22), "and i know what that means, you who used to accuse me of 'telling stories' when you thought i'd lied" (27), "now you're indulging in outright speculation. this isn't history, it's pure invention....you're simply making things up, out of a perverse desire to obscure the truth" (55). But for Annie, the truth cannot be contained in the brief plot summaries which constitute the historical record of the facts of Ana's life. She writes: "these are not facts but skeletal bones of a suppressed body the story is" (29). She views facts as moments frozen in time, and the only way to make them speak is to "step inside the picture and open it up" (56). This is what she does with Ana's story, as well as her mother's, essentially imagining them into being and helping them actualize their potential. Marlatt explains: "It is through analysis, analysis of the social context each of them inhabit, that Annie can write her way through the bare bones of who they apparently are to the full sense and the full sensory body of who each of them might be, *if* they could imagine themselves to their fullest" ("Self-Representation" 204).

As Annie progresses to the end of her telling, she comes to the realization that the categories of history and fiction, truth and lie are inapplicable for her. She writes: "fooling myself on the other side of history as if it were a line dividing the real from the unreal" (152). She sees her mother trapped in the "fiction" (lie) of being the perfect wife and mother which is the reality she lives (101). She envisions Ana breaking free of the small cluster of facts which supposedly define her and writes her free of the history that seeks to contain her. And she imagines herself - "i wasn't dreaming of history, the already-made, but of making fresh tracks my own way" (98) - telling a story that contains her truth, even if it rests on the visions she has created through her own imagination.

Now that Marlatt and Ouellette-Michalska have revealed women's absence from history and

exposed the patriarchal ideology behind the master narrative, they can turn their writing project to filling in the gaps and giving women an opportunity to voice their own experiences. Jane Flax elaborates on this feminist practice in relation to history when she writes: “We need to recover and explore the societal relations that have been suppressed, unarticulated, or denied within dominant (male) viewpoints. We need to recover and write the histories of women and activities into the accounts and stories that cultures tell about themselves” (87). Having challenged the authority of the master narrative, the narrators are now concerned with writing themselves and their historical subjects out of the patriarchal script and into history. They do this by infusing historical discourse with the feminine. The physical absence of women is compensated for by a strong feminization of language and writing. Women’s bodies are inscribed in the text and their sexualities are spoken. The traditional comparison between giving birth and literary creation becomes more than a metaphor as it “is given explicit physicality” (Dragland 188). The narrators also engage in a real and symbolic search for their (fore)mothers - they resurrect their own mothers lost to the invisible archives of women’s history and locate the mother of the Imaginary, before History, before patriarchal language. The narrators also write about their respective historical subjects and their experiences and involvement in Canada’s development. Yet their writing extends beyond the recovery of female characters of the past: the narrators also engage in a doubled subjectivity to explore their present possibilities through their past heroines. Drawing upon imagination, maternal memory and the female body, they inscribe women as subjects and write Herstory.

Part of the subjective inscription is a physical one. Taught by their mothers to deny their selves, the narrators are also taught to deny their bodies, ignore their sexuality and hide their physical presence. As discussed in Chapter One, a woman’s body under patriarchy is an object to be

possessed, its cycles and rhythms taboo subjects. In Ana Historic, Annie examines the alienation from the body women are taught to feel and the shame of sexuality: “you taught me the uneasy hole in myself and how to cover it up...you taught me how i was *supposed* to look, the feminine act....pride on the outside, and on the inside - shame (60-1). By linking hatred of the body to the language the body is entrenched in (62), Annie explores what might be said or written if women “could speak an unconditioned language” (75) that lifts silence from their stories and from their bodies. Through her use of *écriture féminine*, Annie calls for a language and a writing that celebrates rather than shames the female body, “not the language of definition, of epoch and document, language explaining and justifying, but the words that flow out from within, running too quick to catch sometimes, at other times just an agonizingly slow trickle” (90). Annie rebels against the thematic content of the patriarchal script by making her own body part of her textual practice. The text becomes an embodiment of her physical presence, written in “the language of a different period” (133). The narrative gives way to her lived experience through fusion of body and writing: “there is still even now the innate pleasure of seeing on a fresh white pad the first marks of red...*i made that!* The mark of myself, my inscription in blood. i’m here. scribbling again” (90).

Annie also transgresses the heterosexual script as her desire drives her to examine her sexuality. Unhappy and unfulfilled in her marriage to Richard but fearful of stepping outside the heterosexual norm, she first examines the possibility of lesbian love by writing it into Ana’s relationship with Birdie Stewart. By developing this aspect of Ana’s life, Annie offers an alternative to History’s version. She also engages in a search for her own identity, a sometimes painful but essentially liberating process which leads to a self-effacing decision. She chooses to explore her desire for another woman without shame or guilt, and her choice of doing so is marked by a re-

naming. She perceives Richard's name as the final link to her husband and the patriarchal script she wishes to leave behind. She drops the possessive form of "Richard's Annie" and renames herself "Annie Torrent." Throughout the text, Annie implies that her experience and desires are damned up inside her and she is waiting for a torrent of speech to release them. Her renaming is symbolic of the voice she finds while writing the novel and her newly-discovered ability to perceive herself as a subject with the power to choose her own destiny.

The narrator in La Maison Trestler also uses her historical counterpart Catherine to inscribe the female body in the text. Jane Moss suggests that the narrator uses this as a strategy to oppose the dominant historical discourse: "[She] feels compelled to write her version of history relying on the memory of the body and the sense rather than archival documents" (63). The narrator explores the female body and heterosexuality from the perspective of female desire. Rather than write the body as Annie does, the narrator writes about a woman's body. She does not suggest the same link to writing, but explores with honesty the changes of puberty and the cycle of menstruation: "Chaque mois, un sang abondant et épais coule entre mes cuisses. Celui de ma soeur est rare, transparent. Nous comparons" (92). Catherine is fully aware of her body, her development as a woman and her feelings of desire and passion. Unlike Annie whose sexuality is hidden from her and then slowly discovered, Catherine is instinctively in touch with her sexuality and sees it as an integral part of her identity: "Mademoiselle Catherine, c'est moi. Un corps ardent qui a la forme de l'été. Chaque matin je plonge dans le jour, impatiente, remplie d'audaces et de désirs" (147). Catherine risks everything to fulfill her desire for Éléazar, both in body and in spirit. Their lovemaking is not one of possession but of mutual passion:

J'étais fière de la déchirure qui ourlait mon sexe....Lorsque je me soulevai, des gouttes de

sang tachaient le drap. J'étais devenue femme....J'articulais son nom, rejetant le nom Trestler hors de ma bouche. Désormais, je m'appellerais Catherine Hayst....Les syllabes collaient à ma langue...Nous obéissions à l'impulsion du corps. Nous glissions dans un vertige éclatant, bras et cheveux mêlés, longue chute entrecoupée de mouvements blanchis par l'émiettement de la lune sur le lit....Une dernière vague mouillait mon sexe (178).

As a result of her actions, Catherine is disinherited by her father. Yet Catherine's conscious decision to actualize her desire gives her agency. By renouncing her father's surname, she symbolically rejects the patriarchal system he represents. By renaming herself, she voluntarily enters a relationship based on love and respect rather than the marriage of economy and convenience her father had foreseen for her. By choosing to be with Éléazar on her own terms, Catherine asserts her right to live life "comme il me plaît" (146): "Elle n'y est pour personne. Elle s'accorde le droit d'exister pour elle seule" (150). Based on actual legal historical records that indicate Catherine was disinherited after her marriage to Éléazar, the narrator posits the above scene as a possible precursor to that outcome. She uses Catherine to explore how she herself could have lived her life differently had she possessed the courage to pursue her own desires: "J'avais tracé pour elle les chemins d'indépendance, de passion et de ténacité qui m'avaient parfois manqué" (274).

Both Annie and the narrator perceive the power of imagination as a means of changing the world and giving birth to a new era. Indeed, they link the process of literary creation with pregnancy and birth. As a traditional metaphor, it is given actual physical substance as the narrator and Catherine give birth to their children, and Annie witnesses pregnancy and labour through Ana's eyes.

Writing and giving birth become inextricably tied together for the narrator in La Maison Trestler. She writes: "...Catherine murît dans mes flancs et ma tête. Portant jour et nuit l'enfant de ma chair et de mes mots, je vis une grossesse de rêve..." (65). By firmly rooting the creative experience in the physical one, the narrator succeeds in inscribing the female body and feminizing

the narrative. She also extends the creative process, both literary and physical, and makes it more inclusive by relating it to a maternal memory encompassing generations of women who helped populate Canada but whose experiences were never recorded. She goes into great detail describing the pregnancy and labour she and Catherine share, from the fear and pain of delivery (words and child - "Rien ne s'ouvre. Rien ne se libère" (226)), to the intimate moments shared between mother and the child still housed in her body, moments that are not open to their male partners (207, 225). The narrator's recollections of her own pregnancy conjure images of the pre-symbolic paradise before language. She writes:

J'étais grosse fécondée de part en part, jubilante de l'extrémité des doigts à la plante des pieds. Le monde passait par ce noyau qui me permettait d'éprouver ma puissance de femme, la jouissance d'un corps grévide en état de resplendissante beauté. Cette transfiguration rendait les gestes imprévisibles. La parole dérapait. Elle fondait dans la bouche, inutile. Tout existait avant d'être nommé (207).

She alludes as much to the Imaginary as she does to her child. All is calm in this world before birth into patriarchal language, after which women struggle to express and assert themselves. This is yet another link between the struggle to give birth and the struggle to find the right words and the right way of saying things that will capture, for a moment, a woman's reality.

Annie in Ana Historic also seeks the words to capture the miracle of birth. Her descriptions relate birth to language in a much more graphic way as she connects mouth with vagina and allows the female experience to speak itself:

How dark it looked, an angry powerful o, stretched, stretched, hair springing back above....this was a mouth working its own inarticulate urge, opening deep - (126)

...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 would speak!* - As indeed it did. it spoke the babe, and then the afterbirth, a bleeding mass of meat....

mouth speaking flesh. She touches it to make it tell her present in this other language so difficult to translate. the difference.

Marlatt's practice of feminizing language takes form as Annie speaks the female body in its reproductive/creative process. Language and speech are grounded in the physicality of women's sexual/reproductive organs making them different than the language into which women and their children are born. It is hard to speak this subjectivity when women are subsumed by the language of an other that does not account for this difference.. Marlatt explains in "Difference (em)bracing": "[the] struggl[e] to speak the difference we sense through rigid assumptions of sameness and identity in the language we have inherited" (192). As explained in Chapter One, making the mouth/vagina speak is a means of writing against patriarchy's phallic penis/pen and exploring a different representation and existence. It marks women's presence upon the page in a very real way. It also places value on an experience seldom represented, and even more rarely in such graphic, bloody and vivid detail.

The narrators also use the birth/creation metaphor in relation to their mothers. Annie writes: "in my imagination, Ina i would give birth to, enter her into the world " (132). The narrator of La Maison Trestler echoes this statement when Catherine speaks of her dead mother: "Ma mère est une phrase....Je devrai inventer moi-même les bras, le regard et le souffle absents" (87). In both cases the narrators set out to write their respective mothers into the historical record which has shut them out and ignored them. French feminist Luce Irigaray theorizes that patriarchal culture has been built

on the silence, the effacement, the “death” of the mother.¹⁰ In La Maison Trestler, this theory finds its literal example as J.J. Trestler asserts his power and control over his daughters after his first wife’s death. In Ana Historic, the assertion is both literal and figurative. Annie’s mother is indeed effaced and silenced by the patriarchal script she lives out and tries to teach to her daughter. Her struggle to conform to the script results in her madness and eventual suicide. Thus the search for the mother is a liberation from, or perhaps explanation of, the social context which leads to this repression of women’s stories.

In Ana Historic, the narrator Annie struggles to come to terms with the “obstacle” of her own mother, Ina. Yet it is not a dismissal of her mother, for she writes: “and so you went on, a character flattened by destiny, caught between the covers of a book. I don’t want to do that to you.” Rather, it is an examination of “the cultural labyrinth of our inheritance, mother to daughter to mother...” (24) in which the daughter in “the female line of inheritance” (57) learns to accept “woman’s lot” (79) as exemplary (and silent) wife and mother. Through her writing, Annie struggles to understand her mother’s impact on her life and her perception of her body as well as her mother’s descent into madness. She repositions her mother in the narrative, resurrects her from her madness. Annie’s exploration of the silence of her mother’s madness, rooted in conformity to women’s self-effacing role in patriarchy, is the only way she can free her mother and consequently herself from the social system they inherited. She must “step inside the picture and open it up” (56) and try “very hard to speak, to tell it” (49). It is by recognizing that she is not responsible for her mother’s illness (49) that she can begin to understand their relationship. Only through the “telling, untelling, unravelling”

¹⁰See Luce Irigaray, Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère (Montréal: Les éditions de la pleine lune, 1981).

(137) of stories can she say to her mother: “yours hasn’t ended with you” (138).

Catherine also pledges to tell her mother’s story: “...cette femme m’habite toujours. Maintenant que me voilà amoureuse, je lui rendrai son dû” (154). Throughout Catherine’s life, her mother is defined by her absence: “Ma vraie mère est l’ombre dont je n’entendrai jamais la voix, le corps dont je ne verrai jamais le visage. Elle est l’absente figée dans les initiales M.N. ...” (75). Her mother’s absence is juxtaposed with her father’s presence. The struggle between Catherine and her father, and subsequently the battle for control of the script, is acted out partially through Catherine’s claim to the maternal heritage which her father seeks to deny her. “Catherine Trestler...inscrib[es] her real mother, Marguerite Noël, into history, by restoring the maternal inheritance illegally withheld by their father” (Moss 64). The narrator of the novel also has a desire to connect with her own mother through her writing. She sees Catherine as being “un peu ma mère,...un peu ma fille” (274), imagining as she inscribes Catherine’s life experiences that she also places her mother in history.

Placing others in history is also a means by which the narrators write themselves into history. They engage in a doubled subjectivity with their respective historical figures in order to pursue their own self-inscription. The “she” of the characters blends with the “I” of the narrators, creating a synthesis of personal pronouns which gives rise to the doubled subjectivity. This enables them to explore the plurality of the female poststructuralist subject in a very concrete way. By participating in the identity struggles of the others in their texts, the narrators reveal that their own identities are not stable and fixed but are in constant negotiation with factors surrounding them. Consequently, they portray themselves as subjects always in the process of becoming, and it is through their interaction with the other women in their texts that they in turn develop their own subjectivity.

In La Maison Trestler, the narrator's subjectivity develops in close association with her rewriting of Catherine Trestler's life. Early on, the narrator feels intimately connected to Catherine. She senses that they are both products of an environment that demands their silence and submission, and that they are both rebels, biding their time and planning their escape (42). As the writing project progresses, the division between "I" (the narrator) and "she" (Catherine) which is at first distinct is slowly eroded: "Je suis Catherine. Elle est le double inventant les mots insaisissables" (53). Finally, the distinction is collapsed, blurring the boundaries which maintain Catherine's separation from the narrator. The narrator writes: "À la fin, je ne sais plus qui parle, qui a parlé. Je ne sais plus qui raconte ses rêves et ses peurs. Qui succombe à l'attrait du plaisir et à l'horreur du sang. Qui, de Catherine ou moi, tire la fiction du réel, ou extrait le réel de l'imaginaire" (93). Past and present, fiction and reality merge as "she" is erased and the narrator and Catherine both say "I." In the novel, two female subjects are speaking against the patriarchal discourse that seeks to silence them. Janet Paterson elaborates: "C'est évidemment du dédoublement entre la narratrice et Catherine que provient la fusion, au niveau de l'énonciation, des "je" narratifs. Dans l'espace d'un pronom, deux voix - mais un seul discours - cherchent à se faire entendre" (60). The narrator and Catherine both inscribe their subjectivities in such a way that they write against the dominant discourse and give voice to Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska's alternative way of viewing history. The author's own comments in an essay are equally applicable to her novel: "...une autre mémoire est en train de se constituer qui englobe d'avantage de féminin, de corporel, de valeurs quotidiennes, marginales" (quoted in Moss 60).

Essentially, the narrator uses Catherine's experiences to examine the choices in her own life, and to live out the possibilities that she did not. By telling Catherine's story of rebellion from the

patriarchal script, she frees herself from it as well. The narrator uses Catherine to provoke her own evolution as a subject. Yet she also realizes that Catherine lived a life of containment in her father's home and she is therefore unwilling to perpetuate such an entrapment by cementing her in a closed, definitive version of her life in the narrative. The narrator explains: "Ainsi Catherine avait pu mener la vie que je lui avais donnée, mais elle avait pu tout autant s'en choisir une autre plus conforme à ses vœux, à son tempérament, à son appétit de vivre. Je l'avais interpellée au moment où j'en avais eu besoin pour traverser le cycle de reconnaissance qui m'appelait" (274). Indeed, this function of her writing project is successful as at the end of the novel, she is able to close the book on Catherine's story and pursue her own. Yet the text remains as a testimony to "la double dimension de la vie, la duplicité fondamentale du sujet, confronté aux incertitudes que lui offrent son histoire ainsi que celle d'autrui, mais aussi le <<refus d'une seule et unique version de l'Histoire>>, que celle-ci soit d'ordre socio-historique et culturel, ou biographique et personnel" (LeBlanc "Autothéorisation au féminin" 64).

In Ana Historic, the doubled subjectivity actually plays out Annie's split subjectivity, as she exists as a first doubled subject with her mother and as a second doubled subject with Ana. These two subjectivities often leave Annie in contradiction with herself as she struggles to fight the identification she feels with her mother's life and the desire to escape it which she associates with Ana's life. Annie's sense of split subjectivity is explored in a game of pronouns: "you who is you or me. she. a part struck off from me. apart. separated" (11). Despite the obvious doubling in characters - Annie is both her mother and Ana - the separation is always kept distinct by the pronouns which identify them: Annie is "I", her mother Ina is "you" and Ana is "she" or "I" in

quotation marks.¹¹ Annie struggles with the “you” that is her mother Ina and the legacy of repression and self effacement her life represents. She explains: “I feel myself in you, irritated at the edges where we overlap” (17). Yet she is also tempted to claim her mother’s identity and the place in the patriarchal script it offers her: “yes I tried to efface you, trace myself over you, wanting to be the one looked at, approved by male eyes” (50). Indeed, it is the life she chooses to live with Richard, an identity which plays her self false and which she struggles to escape by writing her way out of it through the novel.

Ana, as a woman who is able to escape the patriarchal script and attain control of her own life, is used as a role model for Annie. Yet Annie is unwilling or unable to recognize the similarities in her own yearnings and subsequently maintains a rigid distinction between her own “I” and Ana’s “she”. It takes Zoe’s frank statement “who are they if they aren’t you?” (140) for Annie to realize the truth of her own intersubjectivity. Thus the process of writing Ana’s story is a means by which Annie discovers her own identity and is finally able to position herself as a subject capable of inscribing her lesbian desire. At the end of the novel, a fourth pronoun is introduced: “you. I want you. and *me*. together....we give place, giving words, giving birth, to each other” (152-3). “We” comes to the text in such a way that it gives voice to a subjectivity based on the conscious knowledge and acceptance of the other as an integral part of Annie’s own identity in the lesbian

¹¹I have always been intrigued by Marlatt’s (and Warland’s) use of small “i” rather than capital “I”. In “Difference (em)bracing,” Marlatt offers this explanation: “To begin with, to write I, to assume our own centrality as ground, goes against all our gender-conditioning and is a frightening first step in autobiography and journal writing. We do it because we must. But 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” (192).

relationship she is entering. This is her way of speaking the multiple facets of her desire and the plurality of the subject. It is also the way she chooses to write against the dominant historical script and inscribe women in a form previously unwritten in History.

In both novels, the narrators write towards a new vision of history which incorporates women's experiences and in which they can inscribe themselves as subjects. Rebellious against the closed patriarchal script of history, both in terms of its thematic content and narrative structure, they refuse to follow the rules of the historical narrative and instead call upon the power of imagination to fill in the blanks of the official record. In the face of a History whose overwhelming theme is control and domination, the narrators present the stories of average women engaged in everyday activities. They develop new ways to write history based on "le quotidien, le personnel, le corporel et le subjectif" and succeed in reconstituting "une histoire plurielle...qui fasse place à la différence, à l'Autre que la tradition patriarcale a toujours tenté d'occulter" (Neuville 38). In closing their writing projects, both narrators signal that the end is but a beginning. In Ana Historie, Annie's rejection of the patriarchal script and her movement towards a new script of her own making culminates in a poem embodying (in all senses) the lesbian identity she finally allows herself to assume pursuing at last her own desire and subjectivity. She includes the reader in this final fragment, and ends/begins: "the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead" (153). Literally, when the page is turned, the next page is blank, free of the patriarchal script and open to future possibilities. In La Maison Trestler, the narrator also indicates at the end of the novel that the creative process does not end when she stops writing. Alluding to the creation myth once again, she writes: "Très vite, mon cahier s'est refermé. Je n'écrivais plus. Je ne me préoccupais plus de la suite. Le huitième jour commençait" (299). This statement is an attestation to her belief that

patriarchal dominance over the writing of History has ended. She has succeeded in her project, inscribing women in history and opening up the narrative space for future women's stories. In their novels, Marlatt and Ouellette-Michalska subvert the patriarchal script of History from which women are excluded and offer in its place another version created from the depths of their own imaginary powers: Herstory has been, is and will continue to be written.

Conclusion

She must write her self...

-Hélène Cixous

The six women writers whose work is analyzed in this study have produced texts which they feel give rise to their female subjectivities. Through their writing, they break the silence and find a voice to express themselves in a manner that is of their own making. Although successful, these writing projects are not without pain and difficulties. For many of the women in the texts, trying to conform to the patriarchal script and admitting their inability to do so is very painful. The writers and narrators struggle through internal conflicts between who they are expected to be and who they aspire to be in order to better understand and finally come to terms with who they actually are. As the writers discover, women do not exist as subjects within the patriarchal script and thus their subjectivities are silenced. Therefore, the writers' solution is not to write themselves into the patriarchal script but to transform the script altogether so that through the power of imagination, women's subjectivities can be expressed.

In Chapter One, France Theoret's Une voix pour Odile and Betsy Warland's open is broken examine the way in which women are silenced by patriarchal language. They expose the way women are negatively coded and positioned as objects, paradoxically trapped and excluded by these linguistic power structures which dominate the writing of their selves and experiences. Consequently, the writers set out to subvert the language which supports the patriarchal script. They break the silence and explore their subjectivities by feminizing language and introducing topics traditionally labelled as "taboo" but which are an integral part of their experiences as women, such

as Théoret's writing of the cycles of the female body and Warland's portrayal of lesbian desire. Their poetic texts transform language and women's relationship to it, a means of changing the world through words and altering thinking through language.

The two fictional autobiographies, Carol Shields's The Stone Diaries and Madeleine Monette's Le Double suspect, compared in Chapter Two, also engage in the transformation and feminization of a language and discourse in which women as subjects are absent and in which they are confined to the traditional and accepted roles of wife and mother. They break the silence surrounding women's stories by deconstructing fundamental dichotomies upon which traditional autobiography rests such as the public/private and fictional/factual oppositions as well as the traditional self/other paradigm. The texts challenge the content and principles of traditional autobiography as it relates to the writing of a woman's life and the writers must call on their power of imagination to fill in the gaps left by the traditional forms of self-representation. The feminization of the autobiographical form, which places value on women's everyday lives and experiences, enables the writers to inscribe the female autobiographical subject as she explores the various periods of her life.

Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic and Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska's La Maison Trestler, discussed in Chapter Three of this study, examine women's entrapment within patriarchy and the exclusion of their stories and their selves from the dominant historical discourse. They use intertexts from History to demonstrate the overriding theme of men's power and control in the colonization of a country and seek to oppose the official historical record with a feminized historical discourse which rests on the deconstruction of History/story and Truth/lie and the construction of a new vision of history grounded in maternal memory, the female body, women's everyday experiences and the

power of imagination. They present a thematic and textual challenge to the writing of History and write their respective historical subjects out of the patriarchal script. By using their historical characters, the narrators of the novels also write themselves out of the patriarchal script, making the journey from absence to presence and from self-denial to self-knowledge as they too succeed in writing themselves as subjects.

All six texts are tied together by their primary goal of voicing women's experiences and developing women's subjectivities in the face of discourses that seek to dominate and efface them. Each text deconstructs the patriarchal script and exposes the power relations responsible for women's exclusion from patriarchal language, traditional autobiography and History. Occurring simultaneously is the construction of the female subject and the writing of her experiences as she liberates herself from the patriarchal script by positing a feminization of language, autobiography and history based on women's everyday experiences including her body, her desires and her relationships. The narrators of the texts all appeal to the memory of the Imaginary and the power of imagination to write themselves out of the patriarchal script and inscribe themselves as speaking subjects.

In all six texts, the sense of subjectivity which emerges is a relational one. The women are continuously defining themselves in their relationships to others and their interactions with others is an integral part in the formation of the subject. This is particularly evident in, although not exclusive to, Warland's poetry and Marlatt's novel in which the boundaries between desiring lesbian subjects dissolve in a fluid movement of incorporation and exchange. Céline Chan explores this relational subjectivity in her analysis of the poem at the end of Marlatt's text: "Here lesbian love is celebrated, not from the voyeuristic or omniscient perspective of patriarchy as the penetration of an

“other” but as a merging interface of boundaries between two selves which are distinct and yet alike” (72).

An additional important involvement of the other in the development of the subject and the creation of the text is the positioning of reader as other. The reader plays an essential role in the actualization of the texts. The writers often invite the reader’s participation, and reading and writing are often interactive activities. In a most basic sense, readers act as witnesses. As Shoshana Felman explains, a story can only become a story through the bond of reading (14). Thus in The Stone Diaries, when Daisy thinks “she needs someone - anyone - to listen” (340), the reader attests to Daisy’s presence and ensures that her story is heard by the very act of reading it. Similarly in Monette’s text, Manon’s story would have been left untold had the narrator not decided to first read it and then rewrite it. Texts such as Théoret’s poetry engage the reader in their textual creation as the reader must do the work and make the connections among words in order for the text to have meaning. Other texts such as Marlatt’s novel actively invite the reader to participate in the making of the text by addressing the reader in the narrative and including the reader in the textual production. Marlatt includes the reader in her conclusion: “it isn’t dark but the luxury of being / has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading / us into the page ahead” (153). The actual page ahead is blank, waiting to be written - perhaps by the reader.

In the writing of this study, I have been the “other”, the reader of these literary works. And yet for the purpose of this academic investigation, I have kept my analysis theoretically grounded and have refrained from saying “I” and speaking from a subject position about texts which have had an enormous impact on my understanding of myself as a woman and of my understanding of women’s place in society, language and culture. Because it is so important for these writers to

communicate the experiences of the women they write about in a relational and intersubjective manner, I would like to respond to these texts and the ongoing reading and writing process I have been engaged in. As Marlatt says: “Every woman we have read who has written about women’s lives lives on in us, in what we know of our own capacity for life, and becomes part of the context for our writing, our own imagining” (“Self-Representation” 202).

One of the criticisms my advisor levelled at me during the writing of this thesis was that I appeared to be going around in circles, repeating myself. She added that I seemed to be attacking the texts from all different angles. It was extremely difficult not to do this. However, perhaps my failure attests to the writers’ success. Attempting to force my arguments to fit the strict logic and linearity of an academic paper was akin to trying to fit a square peg into a round hole - or stretch a spiral out into a line as the case might be. My intent to impose a linear and logical order on texts which resist and write against this felt somehow like a betrayal. I had to compensate for texts whose multi-layered discourses were so intricately interwoven they were nearly impossible to separate, and it is important to note that everything I talked about individually was occurring at the same time.

Both Théoret and Marlatt speak of the difficulty of expressing themselves through academic language, and Louise H. Forsyth explains that academic language does not contain the means to read the female subject, as it is “a language which is simply not adequate for our reading of ourselves. It is a discourse that has no room for women’s bodies, women’s desires, women experiencing the world as conscious subjects” (“Feminist Criticism as Creative Process” 88). I think this has changed since the 1980s, when these comments were made, due to a greater acceptance of feminist thought and texts at the university level. Yet I still believe that women’s stories and experiences are marginalized in the academic world if the larger picture is taken into consideration. Marlatt’s and

Ouellette-Michalska's comments about the exclusion of women's stories from History and the teaching of History bear out in Carleton's academic context. My own experience at Carleton showed that women's stories were not included in the Canadian history classes except as an aside or a special topic. To fill in the blanks, I had to take a course on Women's History which, while examining women's contribution to society throughout the ages, emphasized their exclusion from the official record. Not surprisingly, the class was almost exclusively composed of women. Women's history is still at the periphery of the teaching of history - the course is not mandatory and we can choose not to take it. Perhaps I should take comfort in the fact that it is offered at all, but I still find it unbelievable that I had to take a separate course to get the whole picture.

Talking about women's bodies in an open and frank manner in the academic milieu is also difficult. Because I am accustomed to only speaking with other women and usually in confidence with a best friend about the female body, it is very hard for me to broach the subject - it is still taboo. I identify far more with Daisy and Manon and even Ina who shy away from the topic, than I do with Warland, Annie or Catherine who celebrate their bodies, and I hide behind the theorizing of the female body and desire in order to avoid engaging in a direct discussion. I console myself with the fact that I am not alone in my unease. Marlatt writes: "[M]y students were embarrassed about naming the female body and female desire. The power embedded in the classroom made it impossible for them to identify what they have been socialized to ignore, and they simply could not find the words" ("when we change language..." 186). I even have a friend who decided against translating erotic poetry for her Master's thesis because she felt she would be uncomfortable discussing it at her defence. Nevertheless, these texts and others which also celebrate the female body and posit women as desiring subjects rather than as desired objects are becoming increasingly

part of the literary institution. They are giving voice to female desires both heterosexual and lesbian, writing about “taboo” subjects and presenting women’s bodies in a positive light, all of which gives me a different perspective on my own physical reality. In essence, I am slowly reading my way towards speaking.

These texts also extend beyond the academic world into my everyday life. While their complex structures easily lend themselves to a theoretical analysis, their themes and messages find a deep connection to the “real” world and I recognize that these authors are in fact writing to break the silence surrounding women’s experiences. I can’t help but think of Théoret’s description of the physical abuse of women when I hear my twenty-two-year-old neighbour beat his eighteen-year-old girlfriend while their baby screams in the background. I’m reminded of Ina’s and Annie’s frustration as they try to conform to the prescribed role of perfect wife when I see my own mother still struggling with the same issues. And I recall Warland’s fear and difficulty of expressing her lesbian self in a hostile patriarchal society when I listen to a client, unaware of the irony of his own comments, complain about all the dykes and lesbians on The Women’s Television Network and the lack of educational programming on television. It saddens me when I hear other women proclaim the feminists aren’t “real women”. It shocks me even more that academia is pushing on towards post-feminism when the rest of society is still in such desperate need of feminist thought. The inscription of the real is so essential to these women writers because they know that the need for feminism does not end with the inscription of the subject in the narrative. Women need to feel safe and secure in a loving relationship; they need to choose which roles they will play in life; they need to know that they are not alone in their struggle to define themselves. And I firmly believe that these texts, which represent all this and more, will play an important role in liberating the female subject.

Speaking from this position is hard. I keep wondering if what I say will be dismissed as anecdotal gibberish not suitable for an academic paper. But it would be criminal to contain these writers within the framework of an academic analysis when their stories extend far beyond academic borders. And I do not want this analysis to forever fix the meaning of these texts and close them to other interpretations. This is my reading of six texts which are open to the possibilities that other readers bring to them. Yet in many ways, I hope that other readers will see the same basic patterns as I did. All six writers, despite their fear, their internal struggles and the threat of failure, confronted a dominant discourse deeply embedded in patriarchal society. By deconstructing either language, autobiography or History, they were able to subvert dominant ideologies and inscribe women's experiences and subjectivities. By positioning themselves as subjects and representing women's experiences, these writers clear the way for women who come after them so that they too will be able to speak as subjects in narrative as well as in life. Through the power of imagination, these six writers create a new script in which women's bodies, desires and daily activities are valued and in which their voices are heard. And while their writing projects may be over, the challenge to the patriarchal script is not. The feminist task has just begun: she must continue to write her self.

Bibliography

Primary Works

Marlatt, Daphne. Ana Historic. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1988.

Monette, Madeleine. Le Double suspect. Montréal: Les Quinze, 1980.

Ouellette-Michalska, Madeleine. La Maison Trestler ou le 8e jour d'Amérique. Montréal: Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1984.

Shields, Carol. The Stone Diaries. Toronto: Random House, 1993.

Théoret, France. Une voix pour Odile. Montréal: Les Herbes Rouges, 1978.

Warland, Betsy. open is broken. Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1984.

Secondary Works

Aas-Rouxparis, Nicole. "Inscriptions et transgressions dans Le Double Suspect de Madeleine Monette." The French Review 64:5 (April 1991): 754-61.

Bennett, Donna. "Naming the way home." Neuman and Kambourelis 228-45.

Benstock, Shari. "Authorizing the Autobiographical." Benstock 10-33.

—, ed. The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Bersianik, Louky. "Women's Work." Trans. Erika Grundmann. Dybikowski et al. 155-65.

Bordeleau, Francine. "Les cris du corps: France Théoret, Josée Yvon et Monique Proulx." Pascal 89-94.

Brossard, Nicole. "Before I became a feminist, I suppose I was an angel, a poet, a revolutionary..." Williamson 59-72.

---. "Tender Skin My Mind." Trans. Dymphna Borowska. Dybikowski et al. 180-3.

Brossard, Nicole, et al. "What We Talk about on Sundays." Trans. Barbara Godard. Godard 127-35.

- Buss, Helen M. "Canadian women's autobiography: some critical directions." Neuman and Kamboureli 154-64.
- . Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993.
- Chan, Celine. "Lesbian Self-Naming in Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic." Canadian Poetry vol 31 (Fall-Winter 1992): 68-74.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. New French Feminisms. Eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980. 245-64.
- Cixous, Hélène and Catherine Clément. La Jeune née. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975
- Cotnoir, Louise. "The Imaginary Body." Trans. Erika Grundmann. Dybikowski et al. 166-70.
- . "The Marked Gender." Trans. Barbara Godard. Dybikowski et al. 99-104.
- Crean, Susan. "Writing Along Gender Lines." Scheier, Sheard and Wachtel 83-90.
- Downes, Gwladys. "Contrasts in Psychic Space." Dybikowski et al. 117-21.
- Dragland, Stan. "Out of the Blank: Ana Historic." The Bees of the Invisible: Essays in Contemporary English Canadian Writing. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1991. 172-190.
- Dupré, Louise. Stratégies du Vertige: Trois poètes: Nicole Brossard, Madeleine Gagnon, France Théoret. Montréal: Éditions du remue-ménage, 1989.
- . "Une poésie de l'effraction." Voix et Images XIV.1 (automne 1988): 24-30.
- Dybikowski, Ann, et al, eds. In the Feminine: Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots. Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1985.
- Elbaz, Robert. The Changing Nature of the Self: A Critical Study of the Autobiographic Discourse. London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1988.
- Felman, Shoshana. "What Does a Woman Want? The Question of Autobiography and the Bond of Reading." What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993. 1-19.
- Field, Trevor. Form and Function in the Diary Novel. London: Macmillan Press, 1989.

Forsyth, Louise H. "Feminist Criticism as Creative Process." Dybikowski et al. 87-94.

Fragments of a Conversation on Language. Videocassette. National Film Board of Canada, 1990.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice." Benstock, The Private Self 34-62.

Gallop, Jane. The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Gilmore, Leigh. Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Godard, Barbara, ed. Collaboration in the Feminine: Writings on Women and Culture from Tessera. Toronto: Second City Press, 1994.

---, ed. Gynocritics: Feminist Approaches to Canadian and Quebec Women's Writing/Gynocritiques: Démarches féministes à l'écriture des Canadiennes et Québécoises. Toronto: ECW Press, 1987.

---. "New Forms of Subjectivity: Théoret's *Entre raison et déraison*." Room of Ones's Own 14.4 (1991): 119-25.

---. "The Translator as She: The Relationship Between Writer and Translator." Dybikowski et al. 193-8.

---. "Women of Letters (Reprise)." Godard, Collaboration 258-306.

---. "Writing and Difference: Women Writers of Québec and English-Canada." Dybikowski et al. 122-6.

Gould, Karen. "L'écrivaine/la putain ou le territoire de l'inscription féminine chez France Théoret." Voix et Images XIV.1 (automne 1988): 31-8.

---. Writing in the Feminine: Feminism and Experimental Writing in Quebec. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.

Green, Mary Jean. "Structures of Liberation: Female Experience and Autobiographical Form in Quebec." Yale French Studies 65 (1983): 124-36.

Gronhoud, Anne-Marie. "Images spéculaires dans les romans de Madeleine Monette." Quebec Studies vol 15 (Fall-Winter 1992-1993): 1-9.

- Guillemett, Lucie. "L'Amérique déconstruite et les voix/voies féminines dans *La maison Trestler* de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska." Dalhousie French Studies vol 23 (fall-winter 1992) 61-67.
- Gusdorf, Georges. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." Olney 28-48
- Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Maroussia. "Le dénoncé/énoncé de la langue au féminin ou le rapport de la femme au langage." Féminité, Subversion, Écriture. Eds. Suzanne Lamy and Irène Pagès. Montréal: Éditions du remue-ménage, 1983. 53-69.
- Hamelin, Christine. "Pulitzer Prize Winner Carol Shields: A Celebrated Canadian Writer Comes Home." Magazine Tabaret été.summer 1995: 22-4.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G. Writing a Woman's Life. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988.
- Hlus, Carolyn. "Writing womanly: theory and practice." Neuman and Kambourel 287-97.
- Hutcheon, Linda. A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction. New York & London: Routledge, 1988.
- . "Incredulity Toward Metanarrative: Negotiating Postmodernism and Feminisms." Godard, Collaboration 186-92.
- . The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Irigaray, Luce. "Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un." Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977. 21-32.
- . Le corps-à-corps avec la mère. Montréal: Éditions de la pleine lune, 1981.
- Jones, Manina. "I quote myself'or, A Map of Mrs Reading: Re-siting 'Woman's Place' in *Ana Historic*." That Art of Difference: 'Documentary-Collage' and English-Canadian Writing. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. 140-60.
- Kanne, K.O. "When is Art Subversive? When Does Politics Subvert Art?" Dybikowski et al. 46-9.
- Koski, Raija, Kathleen Kells and Louise Forsyth, eds. Les Discours féminins dans la littérature postmoderne au Québec. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993.
- Kristeva, Julia. Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

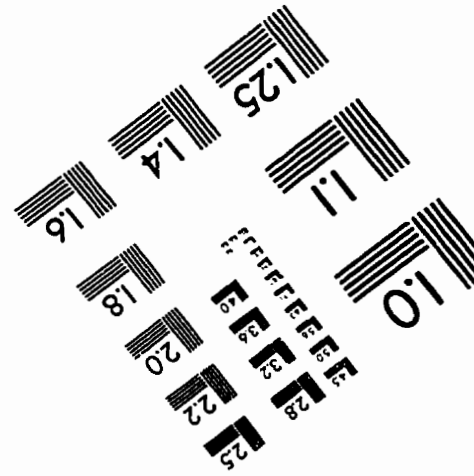
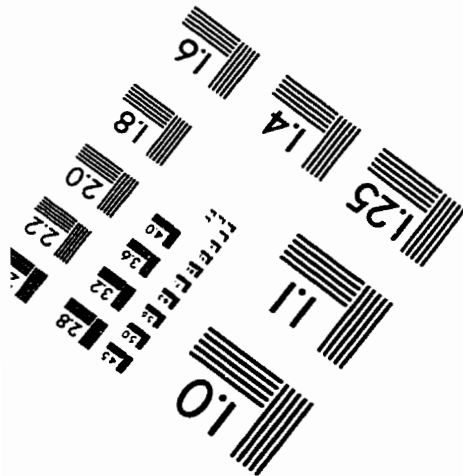
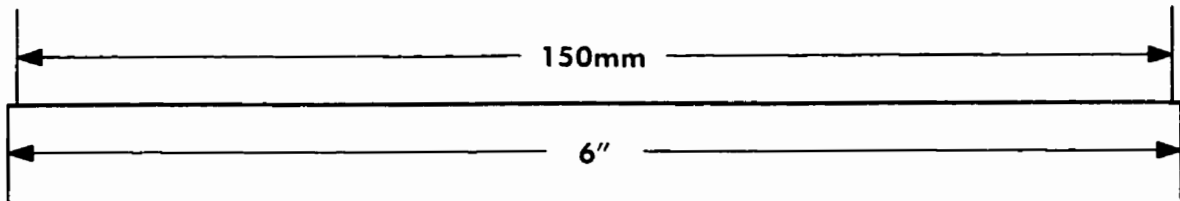
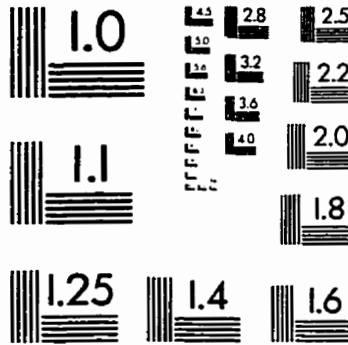
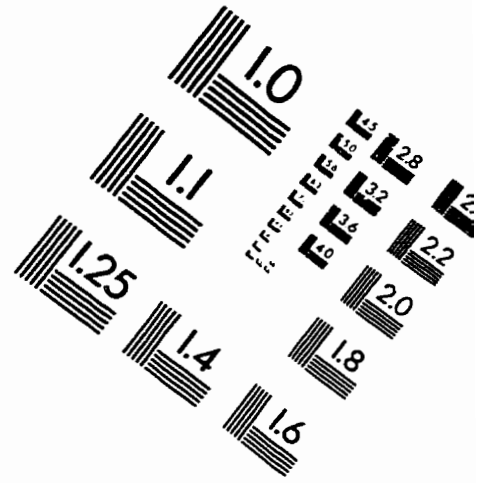
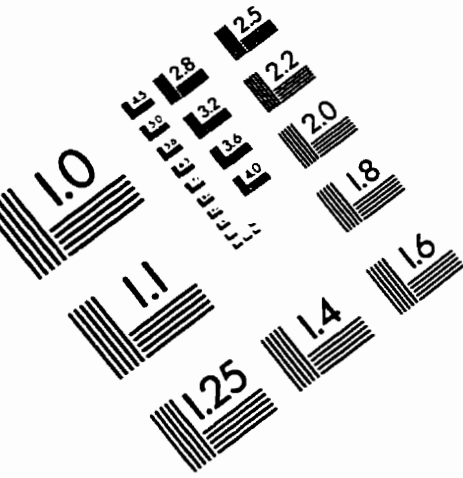
- Lamy, Suzanne and Irène Pagès, eds. Féminité, Subversion, Écriture. Montréal: Éditions du remue-ménage, 1983.
- LeBlanc, Julie. "Autoreprésentation et contestation dans quelques récits autobiographiques fictifs." Quebec Studies vol 15 (Fall-Winter 1992-1993): 99-110.
- . "Autothéorisation au féminin: les journaux de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska." Voix & Images vol xxii, no 1 (automne 1996): 55-66.
- . "Vers une rhétorique de la déconstruction: les récits autobiographiques fictifs de Madeleine Monette et de Gilbert La Rocque." Dalhousie French Studies vol 23 (Fall-Winter 1992): 1-10.
- Lee, Sky, et al., eds. Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1990.
- Lejeune, Philippe. Le pacte autobiographique. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1975.
- Lionnet, Françoise. Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- Marlatt, Daphne, and Betsy Warland. "in companionship with another voice." Williamson 195-9.
- Marlatt, Daphne, et al. "In the Feminine." Dybikowski, et. al. 11-7.
- Marlatt, Daphne. "Difference (em)bracing." Scheier, Sheard Wachtel 188-193.
- . "Musing with Mothertongue." Room of One's Own: A Feminist Journal of Literature and Criticism 8:4 (Jan 1984): 53-6.
- . "Re-belle at the Writing Table." Koski Kells et Forsyth 113-7.
- . "Self-Representation and Fictionalysis." Godard, Collaboration 202-6.
- . "when we change language..." Williamson 182-93.
- . "Writing our Way Through the Labyrinth." Godard, Collaboration 44-6.
- Martens, Lorna. The diary novel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Massé, Carol. "The Subject at Stake." Trans. Barbara Godard. Godard, Collaboration 218-20.

- Mezei, Kathy. "Writing the Risk In, Risking the Writing." Godard, Collaboration 237-45.
- Moi, Toril. Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory. London & New York: Routledge, 1985.
- Morris, Pam. Literature and Feminism: An Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- Moss, Jane. "A House Divided: Power Relations in Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska's La Maison Trestler." Quebec Studies 12 (Spring-Summer 1991): 59-65.
- Nemeth, Tünde. "Present? or Re-Present?" Canadian Fiction Magazine 57 (1986): 82-91.
- Neuman, Shirley and Smaro Kamboureli, eds. A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing. Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1986.
- Neuman, Shirley. "Women, Words, and the Literary Canon." Dybikowski, et al. 136-42.
- Neuville, Laure. "Écrire pour <<vivre le temps à l'envers>>: Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska et Francine Noël." Pascal 33-45.
- Nussbaum, Felicity A. "Toward Conceptualizing Diary." Studies in Autobiography. Ed. James Olney. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. 128-137.
- Olney, James. "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction." Olney 3-27.
- , ed. Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980
- Ouellette-Michalska, Madeleine. "Questions Pending." Trans. S.E. Stewart. Dybikowski, et al. 27-31.
- Pascal, Gabrielle, Ed. Le roman québécois au féminin (1980-1995). Montréal: Les Éditions Triptyque, 1995.
- Paterson, Janet M. "Le procès de l'Histoire: La Maison Trestler." Moments Postmodernes dans le roman québécois Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1991. 52-66.
- Raoul, Valerie. "Cette autre-moi: hantise du double disparu dans le journal fictif féminin, de Conan à Monette et Noël." Voix & Images vol xxii, no 1 (automne 1996): 38-54.
- . Distinctly Narcissistic: Diary Fiction in Quebec. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.

- . "Le journal dans le roman: narcissisme féminin et écriture postmoderne." Koski, Kells and Forsyth 169-83.
- Ricouart, Janine. "Le Silence du double dans Le Double Suspect de Madeleine Monette." Quebec Studies vol 7 (1988): 137-44.
- Saint-Martin, Lori. "Nicole Brossard et Daphne Marlatt: la fascination de l'écriture." Koski, Kells et Forsyth 253-275.
- Scheier, Libby, Sarah Sheard & Eleanor Wachtel, eds. Language in Her Eye: Views on Writing and Gender by Canadian Women Writing in English. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1990.
- Schnitzer, Deborah. "Tricks: Artful Photographs and Letters in Carol Shields's *The Stone Diaries* and Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac*." Prairie Fire Vol 16, No 1 (Spring 1995): 28-39.
- Scott, Gail. "Red Tin + White Tulle." Godard, Collaboration 34-9.
- . "Shaping a Vehicle For Her Use." Dybikowski, et al. 184-91.
- Shields, Carol. "Interview with Carol Shields." By Marjorie Anderson Prairie Fire Vol 16, No 1 (Spring 1995): 139-150.
- Shields, Carol. "The Same Ticking Clock." Scheier, Sheard and Wachtel 256-9.
- Socken, Paul G. "La quête d'identité: *La Maison Trestler* de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska." Mélanges de littérature canadienne-française et québécoise offerts à Réjean Robidoux. Eds. Yolande Grisé et Robert Major. Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1992. 324-36.
- Sojka, Eugenia. "Language and Subjectivity in the Postmodern Texts of Anglo-Canadian and Anglo-Québécois Writers." Canadian Review of Comparative Literature 21.3 (September 1994): 355-67.
- Smart, Patricia. Écrire dans la maison du père: L'émergence du féminin dans la tradition du Québec. Montréal: Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1988.
- . "France Théoret: narratrice de la subjectivité." Voix et Images XIV.1 (automne 1988): 6-7.
- . "The (In?)Compatibility of Gender and Nation in Canadian and Québécois Feminist Writing." Essays on Canadian Writing. 54 (Winter 1994): 12-22.

- Smith, Sidonie. A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson, eds. De/colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992. xiii-xxxi.
- Smythe, Donna E. "Violence Against the Feminine: Using Our Anger." Dybikowski, et al. 40-1.
- Théoret, France. "Entrevue avec France Théoret." By Patricia Smart. Voix et Images XIV.1 (automne 1988): 11-23.
- Théoret, France. "Territories of Criticism." Trans. Patricia Kealy. Dybikowski, et al. 95-8.
- . "Writing in the feminine: voicing consensus, practicing difference." Trans. A.J. Holden Verrburg. Neuman and Kamboureli 361-6.
- Thesen, Sharon. "Poetry and the dilemma of expression." Neuman and Kamboureli 380-4.
- Warland, Betsy. "a language that holds us." Williamson 305-15.
- . "f.) is sure." Lee, et al. 31-6.
- . "difference = invisibility: the ground of our meeting." Lee et al. 74-6.
- . "Far As the I Can See." Canadian Fiction Magazine 57 (1986): 92-6.
- . "Surrendering the english language: the lesbian writer as liberator." Dybikowski, et al. 175-9.
- . "The breasts refuse." Scheier, Sheard & Wachtel 279-92.
- . "Where our loyalties lie." Lee, et al. 191-202.
- Weedon, Chris. Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.
- Williamson, Janice, ed. Sounding Differences: Conversations with Seventeen Canadian Women Writers. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.
- Whitfield, Agnès. "Le roman autobiographique." Le je(u) illocutoire: Forme et contestation dans le nouveau roman québécois. Laval, Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1987. 9-60.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc.. All Rights Reserved