

THE DEATH OF THE SELF:
NOVELS BY ONDAATJE & MARLATT

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ABSTRACT

Using similar disjunctive writing styles, Michael Ondaatje and Daphne Marlatt create characters who defy stability, consistency, and predictability. Both authors undermine the notion that the self is a unified entity determined to resist all ambiguity in the search for univocal meaning. Rather, the worlds inhabited by Buddy Bolden, Lilla Dickman, Mervyn Ondaatje, and Ina as found in *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, and *Ana Historic* subscribe to uniformity by valorizing social and textual conventions. Within these contexts of closure, all characters succumb to some degree of hysteria, madness, or death. In Ondaatje's novels scandal becomes a release from the monotony of a unified self, while in *Ana Historic* Annie Anderson's continual displacement of pronouns effectively suspends female identity. Ondaatje and Marlatt fictionalize the post-structuralist work of Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author" in that both authors create characters whose boundaries are never fixed, but always shifting according to the contexts in which they find themselves. On this basis the self as embodied in the pronoun "I" contains not a set persona, but a network of competing voices.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I examine the implications for authorship which Ondaatje and Marlatt raise in their contention that the self exists without a central core. During moments of autobiography, Ondaatje and Marlatt implicitly contest the defacement of their signatures on novels which call for an obfuscation of identity, but arrest that movement when it folds back on the author's domain--the outer cover of the text. Because Ondaatje and Marlatt elide themselves with their characters, they, too, are pulled into a vertigo of language that knows not identity, but the endless positing and erasure of tropes.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis attempts to do two things. In chapters one and two, I will endeavour to prove that Ondaatje and Marlatt are concerned in their novels *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), *Running in the Family* (1982), and *Ana Historic* (1988) to create a vision of the self that is unstable, unpredictable, and inconsistent. These adjectives comprise my definition of a multiple self that stands counter to the definition of "character" offered by A.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (5th ed.) In each of these novels the author develops a multi-vocal, disjunctive, and atemporal writing style which emphasizes the *multiplicity* of the characters being portrayed. Ondaatje and Marlatt also place in their characters' possession a facility with some kind of art as a way of reiterating the absence of closure posited at a structural level. In *Coming Through Slaughter* Buddy Bolden's jazz music is a metaphor for his desire to escape the confines of fame and reputation; in *Running in the Family* Lilla and Mervyn use theatrics as a way of resisting the diminishing impact of a life that denies them the heroic gestures of the stage; in *Ana Historic*, Mrs. Richards and Annie Anderson use the art of writing to challenge the power of patriarchy to subjectivize them by tying them to prescriptions of womanhood. Each character in his/her own way struggles against a world that in some way diminishes the individual by projecting a standard of coherence, unity, and univocality. Whether that world is obliquely described as it is in Ondaatje's novels, or graphically portrayed as it is in Marlatt's work, in all instances the characters form a collective voice against the power of

institutions and social conventions to determine their experiences for them. As Annie Anderson is particularly adept at pointing out, there is a strong alliance between modes of social convention and modes of writing. Marlatt's character chooses a disjunctive writing style as a way of flouting literary conventions of closure--a convention Annie sees as promulgating the interests of patriarchy.

Generally, it can be said that the multiplicity embodied by Bolden, Lalla, Mervyn and Annie is an anarchical tactic on the part of Ondaatje and Marlatt to resist conventional methods of writing fiction. While Marlatt's resistance is strongly political in its challenge to the solidarity of social and textual conventions, both authors offer an alternate vision of language that I interpret as post-structuralist. Both authors portray the post-structuralist theory of Roland Barthes as delineated in "The Death of the Author." In that seminal essay Barthes suggests that a "text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146). The second major aim of this thesis, then, is to show the implications that devolve into the hands of Ondaatje and Marlatt as a result of their depiction of characters who resist closure. In chapter three I highlight moments in the text when Ondaatje and Marlatt use multiplicity as a means of eliding their authorial voice with the voice of a character/surrogate self. While this strategy might imply a *de-centralizing* of authority, these moments of autobiography are the authors' last great attempt to forestall the vertigo that threatens to engulf them in the same multi-dimensional space their characters inhabit. More specifically, I argue here for the fact that authors who successfully elide the identities of their characters through one means or another implicitly call for the de-facement of their own signatures. Essentially, chapters one and two are the premise of chapter three in that to the extent the reader is convinced of the multiplicity of Bolden, Lalla, Mervyn, and Annie Anderson that reader will also be convinced of the inadvertent way Ondaatje and Marlatt also call for an

obfuscation of authorial identity

Whereas as moments of autobiography are present in *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Ana Historic*, autobiography is everywhere present in *Running in the Family* the subject of the final section of chapter three. Paul de Man contends in his essay "Autobiography as De-Facement" that "autobiography deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores" (81). The autobiographical moments of *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Ana Historic* display on a lesser scale the mortalizing impact of language sustained profoundly throughout *Running in the Family*. That is to say that any author who says "I" is at once engaged in an event of self-expression and self-annihilation. On the one hand, the self is given a hallographic presence as embedded in the power of the "I" to disguise the fact that it is a trope.¹ Autobiography depends on the ability of language to deny its tropological nature. On the other hand, there is something paralyzing in the action of the self turning to look back on him/herself. The individual thus engaged in autobiography becomes like Narcissus whose reflection in the pond bound him to a vision of himself that was static, unchanging, and predictable. Autobiography is life because it convincingly disguises the absence of material presence in the voice which says "I". Conversely, self-life-writing is also death because it throws back onto the self the narrowness of a singular interpretation. The imposition of meaning on events after they have already been lived is a method of tying the individual to a post-mortem identity. The weight of that identity can only work to reduce the variousness of contemporary life as experienced by the the self. As a subject the self is rooted in death because he/she must always match him/herself to internalized standards which deny multiplicity, or social standards which also thwart the individual's uniqueness. Any attempt to describe the self in history involves the submission of the self to the mastering control of interpretation.

Novels which are so obviously self-referential as are *Coming Through Slaughter*,

Running in the Family, and *Ana Historic* call for some degree of self-referentiality on the part of the critic. On this note I must allow that my approach to these novels is post-structuralist in that I attempt to demonstrate Ondaatje's and Marlatt's concern to destroy the authority of a God/Author who invests the text with meaning and signification. Even though Marlatt and Ondaatje are unwilling to extend this destruction to their own names--a point the autobiographical elements in the novels implicitly call for--the style and structure of the novels illustrate the post-structuralist view of language as a network of signifiers which only possess meaning as a relational difference from other signifiers. As Barthes suggests, a text is a multi-dimensional space in which words make their mark only through the contexts they inhabit.

At some points I see the feminist aims of Marlatt as easily compatible with the presuppositions of post-structuralism. That is to say, both feminism and post-structuralism argue for a perspective of the world that defies closure; both are concerned to defy the presence of a God/Author who stands behind the text/world. At other points, however, the feminist concerns of *Ana Historic* seem to be at odds with post-structuralism. The latter's claim that language is the destruction of every voice, the unseating of all authority, ignores the feminist argument that men have traditionally claimed the position of transcendental signifier by imposing their paradigm of values on all. Post-structuralism makes no claim to identify the nature of the God/Author who has traditionally compelled critics and authors alike to seek some hidden meaning latent in the text. Conversely, Marlatt is concerned in *Ana Historic* to show that the absence of women in history has arisen out of some very specific social and political conditions. How can the absence of a women's literary and social history be accounted for by a theory that overlooks the ways in which writing has traditionally been an overwhelmingly male-centred activity? The history of writing is the history of men's ability to place themselves in a position of power over women, to act as the God/Author of the world which is their subject. Without considering the male bias of writing in

history, post-structuralism without the aid of feminism can never hope to acknowledge, let alone address, that unwritten body of literary and social history as expressed through the lives of women. My analysis of *Ana Historic* is, therefore, unreservedly feminist. Marlatt's work is not a thorough going or even a self-conscious apology for feminist concerns, but a discursive look at three women's lives. Summarily, then, my method is both post-structuralist and feminist. Where these methodologies meet I am concerned to show that language is an aporia² where meaning is eternally posited and eternally evaporated. Within that aporia, however, are some very specific ideological concerns at work.

CHAPTER ONE

Michael Ondaatje's

Coming Through Slaughter & Running in the Family

When one places fragments in succession, is no organization possible? Yes, the fragment is like the musical idea of a song cycle: each piece is self-sufficient, but is never more than the interstice of its neighbours.

Roland Barthes

In both *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Running in the Family* Michael Ondaatje creates a vision of the self that is multiple, indeterminate, and in conflict with the outside world. For instance, in *Coming Through Slaughter* the character of Buddy Bolden is created through the multiple voices that describe him. Although one of those voices is finally his own, our sense of Buddy is fragmented by the continual alterations in the narrative's point of view, and by Ondaatje's choice to break up the chronology of the plot line--if a plot line can be said to exist. In the absence of chronology we are presented with events that evolve synchronously until the last pages of the novel when Bolden is incarcerated in a madhouse. Of course, the character of Webb does force some sense of plot onto the narrative inasmuch as he becomes the driving force behind the search to recover Bolden, the truant musician. However, Webb's presence is merely antithetical to the chaos Bolden embraces. Order and purpose are left behind as Bolden reaches forward into madness where he finds relief from the oppressive impact of fame and reputation. Bolden recognizes fame

as a force which works to transform his art, and therefore the artist, into a commodity awaiting consumption by an adoring but overpowering public. Jazz music, then, becomes the method of Bolden's freedom and the cause of his ultimate demise. Not only does music become a way of escape into the unpredictable world of jazz, but music also becomes a form of incarceration through the mesmerizing power of an audience to tie the artist to his/her public persona. Fallen somewhere between the criss-crossed notes of a blues and a gospel song is the fine line of ordered chaos that Bolden treads. Preyed upon by Webb and tempted by Bellocq, Bolden crosses the line and lets his music propel him into the irreversible dissonance of madness.

Although the art is theatrics rather than music in *Running in the Family*, Lalla Dickman and Mervyn Ondaatje embrace an end not unlike Bolden's. As in *Coming Through Slaughter*, Lalla and Mervyn are portrayed through a myriad of voices which work to undermine the stability they reject. Theatrical and temperamental, both fight against the confinements that force life into the mundane roads of the predictable. Never compatriots in life, Lalla and Mervyn share a desire for the grandest theatrical gesture--that final great leap into death. Although this autobiographical novel is much more light hearted than *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje's work again depicts a vision of the artist fragmented by his/her encounter with a wholly predatory universe.¹ Lalla's and Mervyn's flight into death fulfills their desire for the epic, a desire that could never have been realized under the diminishing conditions of life.

When I say that Ondaatje creates a vision of the self that is *multiple*, I mean that the author is intent on exploding the following definition of character:

A character may remain essentially "stable", or unchanged in his outlook and disposition, from beginning to end of a work, or he may undergo a radical change, either through a gradual development or as the result of an extreme crisis. Whether a character remains stable or changes, the reader of a traditional, realistic work requires "consistency"--the character should not suddenly break off and act in a way not plausibly grounded in his temperament as we have already come to know it. (A.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 20)

This definition embodies the essence of what Buddy Bolden is not. Bolden is essentially *unstable* in his outlook of life; the only radical change he undergoes is a final rejection of the prescribed role of artist as projected upon him by Webb and his fans. The musician is defined by *inconsistency*, and by his constant desire to do the *unpredictable*. In contrast to Abrams' assessment of character, Bolden is a character devoted to suddenly breaking off all ties with the familiar. Essentially, Bolden rejects identity as we see in his desire to leave Nora and the band, thereby cutting himself off from everyone he has ever known before (39). His rejection of his wife and friends is not personal; rather it is Bolden's way of ensuring his precariousness in a world where the self is defined by the predictable demands of set relationships.

Although it is clear that Bolden is greatly attracted to some aspects of Nora's personality, his aversion to stability is often drawn out in situations of conflict between the two. For instance, in the following scene, Bolden is distinguished by his irrationality:

Once they were sitting at the kitchen table opposite each other. To his right and to her left was a window. Furious at something he drew his right hand across his body and lashed out . . . The window starred and crumpled slowly two floors down. His hand miraculously uncut. It had acted exactly like a whip violating the target and still free, retreating from the outlines of a star. She was delighted by his performance. Surprised he examined his fingers (16).

For Bolden, the consummate performer, even spasms of rage are described as "performance." Indeed, Ondaatje has cast the scene perfectly in that Bolden's eruptions of anger occur in a context of perfect symmetry. Imagine for a moment the evenly balanced lines of a table below a window, a chair on either side of the window, and a figure in either chair. Bolden disrupts the visual balance of this scene by lashing out at the window which shatters, but leaves his hand intact. Inasmuch as the setting of this scene symbolizes the congruity Bolden deplors, the fractured window captures Bolden's affinity for chaos, disorder, and inconsistency. Framed as he is in a context of domesticity, Bolden's gesture of violence marks his aversion to the predictability embodied by Nora. Immediately before this scene we are told that Bolden is: "[b]reaking chairs and windows

glass doors in fury at her [Nora's] certain answers" (16). Nora's "certain answers" are juxtaposed here with the surprise Bolden feels at his own actions. So instinctive is his aversion to the predictable that the violence surfaces on impulse, leaving Bolden in amazement at his own actions. Two years later when Buddy returns to Nora their relationship remains the same: "She [Nora] brought short cuts to his arguments and at times cleared away the chaos he embraced" (110).

However much Bolden and Nora are at odds with each other over his propensity for disorder and her affinity for the probable, they are not nearly as fundamentally opposed as Webb and Bolden. In soliciting Nora's help in finding Bolden, Webb says: "[h]e won't last by himself Nora, he'll fall apart. He's not safe by himself" (20). A long-time acquaintance of Bolden's, Webb also notes here that Bolden never speaks of his past. Even in the midst of life with Nora, Bolden's lack of interest in the past underscores his sustained desire for anonymity. Of course, Webb finds this reprehensible, calling such silence "landscape suicide" (22). And so, Webb takes upon himself the task of tracking Bolden down. "I'm looking for Buddy" (80) becomes a refrain in the novel, until Webb, discovering Buddy at the Brewitts', enters to find his friend relaxing in a bathtub. Webb, then, is that purposive character described by Abrams. In contrast to Bolden, Webb displays that singularity of purpose that makes him *stable*, *consistent*, and *predictable*. In true detective form, Webb searches and he finds. Not surprisingly, however, Buddy resists the discovery. He not only tells Webb that he does not want to go back to his former identity, but he reinforces his point by trying to drown himself in the bathtub. Wrongly convinced of the value of Buddy's fame, Webb saves Bolden from what he interprets as a waste of the musician's talent. Webb cannot envision a world without cause and effect, a world where things exist for themselves and not for their use value. From the perspective of a narrator who empathizes with Bolden we learn: "Webb was releasing the rabbit he [Bolden] had to run after, because the cage was open now

and there would always be the worthless taste of worthless rabbit when he finished" (83). Webb's re-entrance into Bolden's life opens a door that connects the past with the future. Undesirable though it is, Bolden seems to have no choice but to pursue once again the destiny of his musical talent as defined by Webb. Bolden is therefore cast in the rather curious role of a predator tracking his prey. In pursuing his music as if it had an end, Bolden becomes a self-exploiter. He participates in the game to make an object out of his music, and a commodity out of the artist. Interestingly enough, Buddy describes his awakening the next morning: "I wake up crucified on my back in this bed" (86). Gone are the fluidity, vitality, and formlessness that gave Buddy's life meaning. In its place is an icon--the shell of a man divested of personality and placed on a cross to be worshipped as a symbol. No other image captures more arrestingly the literal and figural objectification which occurs with fame, than Bolden physically nailed to a bed/cross. This is the epitome of stasis.

Insofar as Nora and Webb represent degrees of stability that stand counter to Buddy, Bellocq takes up the other end of the spectrum. After Buddy is admitted to the East Louisiana State Hospital Willy Cornish makes this observation: "I think Bellocq corrupted him with that mean silence" (145). Webb arrives at the same conclusion: ". . . it was him [Bellocq] who had tempted Buddy on" (64). Nora makes the opinion unanimous; when confronting Buddy she says: "Look at you. Look at what he did to you. Look at you. Look at you. Goddam it. Look at you" (127). The "he," of course, is Bellocq. Nora recognizes as does Buddy himself that Bellocq tempted Bolden with his offering of "black, empty space" (91). Buddy confesses: "what I loved were the possibilities of his silence" (91). Buddy's decline into madness is a choice to follow Bellocq. Although Bellocq commits suicide by setting fire to his living room, Bolden commits psychological suicide by playing the long hard medley of notes that hemorrhage his brain. He subsequently refuses to escape from the asylum, preferring instead to exist only in performing a small set of

private rituals (150). In symbolic terms, Bolden fades from life in the same way that his image disintegrates in Bellocq's tray of photo developing acid. Bellocq stands over the negative and watches it bleach out to grey: "Goodbye. Hope he don't find you" (53). Undoubtedly, Bellocq's suicide seduces Bolden into madness. Not only does Bellocq turn Bolden from a public to a private individual, but the former's suicide creates a gap in Bolden's sphere of friends, a gap that in itself becomes a lure. As someone who admired the possibilities of silence, Bolden envies the way Bellocq consummated his desire with reality. Death is the most complete silence of all. In writing Buddy Bolden's story, then, Ondaatje gives us a character who rejects the certainty of Nora and the purposiveness of Webb, but embraces the possibilities of silence he sees in Bellocq.

By way of contrast with the surviving characters of the novel, Bolden is a *multiple* self in that he always chooses the least known path, the path that promises the most variance from what he has previously known. Unlike the men he shaves daily at the barber shop, Buddy does *not* hate to see himself change (48); instead, "he [does] nothing but leap into the mass of changes and explore them and all the tiny facets so that eventually he was almost completely governed by fears of certainty" (15). Ondaatje attempts to interweave the novel's form and content by conveying Bolden's mindset in a writing style that could be described as multivocal, disjunctive, and atemporal. The story of a character who refuses to stay on track deserves to be told from a context that likewise subverts convention. The pages that comprise the bulk of Bolden's story are, accordingly, told in fragmentary form and from multiple points of view. All the people who ever knew Bolden, as well as some who did not, offer a comment. Included in this cacophony of voices are Webb, Nora, Bellocq, Tom Pickett, Brock Mumford, an anonymous interviewer, John Joseph the interviewee, Crawley, Willy Cornish, Dude Botley, Frank Lewis, Robin, Stanley, a school teacher, Bernadine, Charlie--and the list goes on. Bolden's own voice is there too, weaving in and out of the others' offering his version of events. And there is another voice, the voice of the author

whom we first encounter on a fact-finding mission in the opening page of the novel. That narrator's voice summarizes Bolden's life well when he says that these people's stories "were like spokes in a rimless wheel ending in air. Buddy had lived a different life with every one of them" (63). The medley of voices that comprise *Coming Through Slaughter* is as various as we imagine Bolden's music to sound. Although each voice attempts to tell something of Bolden, the voices are inadequate. They are like spokes ending in air. In the absence of the rim, the spokes or stories end in a state of indeterminacy. Such is the life of Bolden, who led a different existence with every one of his friends because he deplored stability of character, especially the homostæsis of fame. If left to his own designs one imagines that he would have survived to thwart the turning of his memory into a legacy.

It could be said, in fact, that Bolden is not a character but an aggregation of the multiple voices which comprise *Coming Through Slaughter*. From this perspective, Bolden's identity is further thrown into question by the patternless manner in which these voices are presented. Most notably, the voices do not appear in conventional format, marked by indentation, quotation marks, and a clause identifying the speaker. Instead, the voices appear synchronously--as if all speakers were present at once and competing for their own opportunity to tell a particular version of Bolden. Even the narrator who introduces the novel with "[f]loated by in a car today" loses his status among so many voices. Indeed, there is no distinction between his voice and all the other voices, despite his position as fact finder. Furthermore, the blank portions that appear between lines, comments, or even between pages mark the lapses when no one speaks. Sometimes there is more silence than narrative as is the case on page 60. "Passing wet chicory that lies like the field in the sky" is the only line to dispel the silence of the page on which it appears. Not surprisingly, this is a line we associate with Buddy on his transfer from Charity Hospital to East Louisiana State Hospital. The absence of any more description than this suggests that Bolden is already well on his

way to embracing the complete silence of death. Taken to its logical conclusion, a decline in self-expression marks a decline in being. As words erode, so does the self.

In *On Edge* J. Hillis Miller says: "Once you see the self as being generated by language, then selfhood becomes much more various, precarious and complicated" (124). Ondaatje's depiction of Bolden proves to be a case in point. Bolden is as various as Nora and Webb are predictable. Defined by his own feelings combined with the comments of acquaintances, friends, strangers, media personalities, and professionals, Buddy's existence seems to be out of control. He is as polysemous as the interpretations surrounding him. Ondaatje's use of multiple voices and his decision to disrupt the narrative by having the characters continually interrupt each other work well to support the complexity of Bolden's experience. In portraying a character who is so obviously generated by the words of others, Ondaatje creates a vision of the self that is every bit as *various, precarious, and complicated* as the possibilities raised by Miller. Ondaatje further problematizes Bolden through the absence of a plot traditionally used to unify fictional characters in some semblance of form and purpose. It must be admitted that under close scrutiny *Coming Through Slaughter* does yield a rough chronology of events which can be divided up as phases of Bolden's life; however, that chronology lacks the cohesiveness of a traditional plot. One suspects that to a certain extent the presence of Webb forces a sense of order on the narrative in that his search for Bolden propels the other characters into dialogue. Of course, Webb is a convenient tool for Ondaatje, whose novel might otherwise be totally inaccessible to readers influenced by extensive experience with more traditional texts. As an artist Ondaatje must walk the same fine line as Bolden--he must find a balance between giving his audience too much disruption and not giving them enough through which to experience his character's instability.

In the absence of time which is a factor of plot, the reader is forced to simulate Bolden's madness. For example, Bolden's days in the hospital consist of small rituals of inspection which

include touching the taps on the bath, the door frame, and benches (150), are comparable to the reader's own desire to bring order to the characters in *Coming Through Slaughter*. The reader is like Bolden is as much as he/she becomes obsessed with finding an ordering principle which will force the events of *Coming Through Slaughter* into some register of meaning. That is not to say that Bolden searches for meaning through his rituals, but that his gestures *resemble* those of a reader caught in a text devoid of the measuring principles of time and plot. Bolden's preoccupation with the anathema of form is indicative of the reader's more complex fixation with turning the form into something else. Like Webb, the reader wants form for its use value, for its ability to endow the text with meaning--as if form alone were inadequate.

Ondaatje further erodes Abrams' definition of character by endowing Buddy with a cornet. With that musical instrument, Bolden becomes the master of his own text since he is allowed to display the instability talked about by others and symbolized in Ondaatje's fragmentary writing style. Early on we discover that while Bolden is talented he lacks some other component of a professional. In the words of one narrator "[Bolden] was the best and the loudest and most loved jazzman of his time, but never professional in the brain" (14). The musician's inability to organize is continued on the following page: "Bolden could not put things in their place" (15). Taken together, these comments imply that, although gifted, Bolden is a poor administrator of his talents. In all we learn of him this does seem to be the case. Anyone who decides to quit his band and his marriage in a moment of *angst* atop a train station platform is hardly the epitome of rational thought. If we look closely at that scene, the one remarkable thing about it is that Bolden never decides to *do* anything. His fear decides for him by blacking out his mind just long enough for the train to pull out of the station leaving him behind (39).

More to the heart of the matter is the fact that Bolden operates by instinct rather than by logic. "You never saw Bolden thinking" (109) is the consensus among those who knew him. Instinct

is the singular element that makes Bolden's music so provocative. His jazz consistently evokes an aura of danger because he pushes the rhythm and melody to the extremities of convention. In Bolden's own words:

. . . Galloway taught me not craft but to play a mood of sound I would recognize and remember. Every note new and raw and chance. Never repeated . . . his brain had lost control of his fingers . . . [w]e had no order among ourselves. I wouldn't let myself control the world of my music because I had no power over anything else (95,99).

In this passage Bolden describes his essence. Music for him is a means of perpetually re-inventing himself. Within the word "new" is the suggestion that the sequence of notes has never been tried before; "raw" suggests that the music is unpolished and therefore dangerously close to primal passion; "chance" embodies the presence of risk or danger in that every turn of the music propels the audience and the artist into an unexpected turn of emotion. Galloway, of course, is one of the musicians Bolden refers to as his "fathers" (95). Together with Mutt Carey and Bud Scott, Happy Galloway taught Bolden how to play from his soul instead of his brain. From these mentors Bolden learned how to disconnect himself, how to let his music disassociate his fingers from his brain. As the seat of reason, the cerebrum must be excluded from the creative processes. In order for the measured chaos of jazz to exist, for the runs of syncopation and acceleration to produce their asymmetry, the logic of order must be suppressed. Bolden's description of the artistic process is mystical to say the least. Transported by passion, he sees music as controlling him rather than the other way around.

Ironically, the fundamental uncertainty of jazz--its ability to recreate a song every time it is played--becomes the physical undoing of all who participate in this game of musical roulette. There is a price to pay for relentlessly challenging the boundaries of art. Bolden addresses the thrill and the danger of subverting convention: "[d]rawn to opposites, even in music we play. in terror we lean in the direction most unlike us. Running past your own character into pain" (96).

Pushing past his own character Bolden finds "terror" and "pain." Clearly, the combination of these must be addictive, for terror and pain are feelings which produce a powerful rush of adrenalin. Unlike what may be called the softer feelings, love or happiness, terror and pain physically affect the body in a way that is highly memorable, and often traumatizing. Quite possibly this is so because terror and pain are accompanied by a perceived threat to one's physical being. To be sure, Bolden feels the threat. He even names it "barbed wire" and "hell": "My fathers were those who put their bodies over barbed wire. For me. To slide over into the region of hell. Through their sacrifice they seduced me into the game" (95). Told from Bolden's perspective, jazz sounds more than a little masochistic. "Dead before they hit the wire" (95) effectively summarizes the price Galloway, Carey and Scott paid to engage in the desultory moods of jazz. Just as Bellocq's suicide lured Bolden into madness, so the jazz fathers' deaths seduce Bolden and lead him to the same fate.

Madness and death are the epitome of uncertainty. Perhaps it would be fair to say that when uncertainty is balanced against some degree of the familiar we have art; however, when uncertainty outweighs the familiar madness and death ensue. This notion of balance is not an unfamiliar one. Before Buddy leaves the band, one commentator notes: "his life at this time had a fine and precise balance to it, with a careful allotment of hours" (13). Somehow the implication arises that Buddy went mad because he, like the jazz fathers who preceded him, descended too far into the regions of extremity. Interestingly enough, this opinion is offered at the outset of the novel: "many interpreted his later crack-up as a morality tale of a talent that debauched itself" (13). Although we are tempted to perceive Bolden's "crack-up" as a consequence of his over-indulgence in both personal and professional recklessness, there is another side to the picture which Buddy attempts to relate. In contrast to the observer who forecasts doom because of Buddy's "sacreligious" mixing of the blues and a gospel tune (81), Buddy hints at the conditions which

eventually push him into madness. Bolden correctly points to Webb: "I'm scared Webb, don't think I will find one person who will be the right audience. All you've done is cut me in half, pointing me here. Where I don't want these answers" (89). As we have seen, Bolden's demise is precipitated by the occasion of his discovery, by the fact that he was quite content within the relative anonymity of the Brewitts' house. Moments after the bathroom exchange between Webb and Bolden, the latter says: "I was unaware that reputation made the room narrower and narrower" (86). Here Buddy refers to the psychological distance that separates him from Robin in the moment Webb enters with the cumbersome baggage of Bolden's fame. Fear is appropriate here because Bolden must sense the outcome of Webb's decision to force him back onto the stage and into the limelight. Buddy condemns Webb's desire to make him into something better by calling ambition a "leash" (89). In the subsequent days with Nora, Bolden again refers to his forced captivity: "[l]ocked inside the frame . . ." (110). Clearly, Webb is largely to blame for Bolden's madness insofar as he pushes the musician back into a life he deplors.

But the issue is more complex than this. As Sam Solecki suggests, Buddy Bolden's instability, inconsistency, and unpredictability become in themselves governing principles that the artist cannot possibly sustain:

To keep on succeeding as a musician Bolden must remain always sensitive to the pressure of the moment, he must be the loudest cornet player in New Orleans, and he must be predictably unpredictable. He is a one man avant-garde who must stay ahead not only of what others have done and are doing but even ahead of what he himself has recently done. To surrender to this kind of creativity, a complete immersion in the immediate, the momentary, means extinguishing any possibility of achieving and possessing a stable, private self (*Spider Blues*, 256).

Oxymoron though it is, "predictably unpredictable" is the keynote of this passage which captures the catch-22 situation Bolden must sustain in order to "keep on succeeding as a musician." Solecki is quite right in emphasizing that public expectation of Bolden becomes in itself a force for continuity and consistency. The better Bolden is at maintaining his role of "one man avant-garde,"

the more his audience will demand that he sustain that level of performance. I must disagree with Solecki, however, about the implications that arise from this scenario. Solecki contradicts himself by saying, on the one hand, that public expectations force a degree of unwelcome predictability on Bolden's life, and, on the other hand, implying that Bolden subconsciously requires a "stable, private self" in order to survive. In Buddy's world is not *stability* rejected for the same reasons *predictability* is eschewed? To say that Bolden's music took him down is to admit to an interpretation of the musician comparable to the "morality tale" interpretation. Bolden's is not primarily "a talent that debauched itself," but a public that debauched its artist.

Bolden did not need, neither did he seek, a "stable, private self." As we have seen, Bellocq is blamed for tempting Bolden with his silence, a silence achieved by turning the musician from a public to a private individual: "he [Bellocq] tempted me out of the world of audiences" (91). Bellocq himself is aware of the way he lured his friend on by tempting him with "mystic privacy [which] has no alphabet of noise or meaning to the people outside . . . Buddy who had once been enviably public" (64). Bellocq who does not consider his photography a profession, considers it instead at the level of fetish, "a joyless and private game" (64). Survival for Bolden means returning to the public sphere of life. "Public" here does not exclusively mean the life of a musician; rather, it means the kind of life Bolden enjoys as a barber, as a vagrant, and *sometimes* as a musician. Bolden flourishes as a barber because his position allows him to dispense all kinds of (usually bad) advice to his clients. His fascination with murder and scandal as they make their way into *The Cricket* is another way Bolden manages to embroil himself in the lives of others (13). On the road after leaving the band, Bolden once again finds himself in a barber shop "always listening, listening to the wet fluid speech with no order, unfinished stories, badly told jokes . . . (40). Scandal, murder, and unfinished stories, like music, allow Bolden the disorder he requires. Too much of any one of these would compel him to move on.

As Nora notes, Buddy's descent into madness is marked by his refusal to "enlarge stories as he used to" (120). This retreat into privacy costs Buddy his former balance between the counterpoints of chaos and order. But we must remember that this opposition chaos/order is our word pair--not Bolden's. In fact, this dichotomy is conflated in that Bolden flourishes under conditions of scandal, intrigue, and tales of murder and mystery. These things, like his music, provide the musician with the endless possibilities he desires. Among the notes of a hybrid blues and gospel song, and at the climax of some "raw steaming scandal that brought up erections in the midst of fear" (12) Bolden invents himself. Bolden deplures stability of character because it robs him of his chameleon powers. Madness, then, is the inevitable end to the imposition of fame which lands heavily on Bolden's shoulders. Fame deprives Bolden of the freedom to run past his own character into pain (96). Figuratively speaking, wherever he runs with his music his audience, expecting the unexpected, is always already waiting for him. Fame turns Bolden into another loathed John Robicheaux known for the way he dominates his audiences: "[h]e put his emotions into patterns which a listening crowd had to follow" (93). Although Bolden's music is patternless, as patternlessness comes to be in vogue, success ordains that every song he plays receives the same response--praise. "Locked inside the frame [of fame], boiled down in love and anger into dynamo that cannot move except on itself" (112) summarizes the way Bolden is forced into self-destruction by a world that foists upon him the rigidity of identity.

Bolden's madness is that point at which his mind opens onto the world and announces the world's guilt for having thus laden him with the strictures of identity. Bolden's madness is profane insofar as it violates the sanctity of the western world's view of the self as an integrated, coherent, and unified entity. In commenting on Nietzsche's madness, Michel Foucault makes the following observation:

. . . through the mediation of madness, it is the world that becomes culpable . . . in relation to the work of art; it is now arraigned by the work of art, obliged to order itself by language, compelled by it to a task of recognition, reparation, to the task of restoring reason *from* that unreason and *to* that unreason (*Madness and Civilization* 288).

As Foucault argues of Nietzsche, Bolden goes mad *not* through some internal flaw or inadequacy, but through the tyranny of a world that wrongly announces the illegitimacy of his outlaw(ed) mentality. Foucault's language is both legal and religious. In using the word "culpable," Foucault subverts the original usage of that term which announced the guilt of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Unlike Adam and Eve, Bolden is innocent of any crime. Instead of bearing the wrath of the world (God), the world must bear the madness of Bolden. Legally, the world is "arraigned" before Bolden to account for its inability to accommodate the musician's desire for indeterminacy without death. In legal terms, the world of *Coming Through Slaughter* owes Buddy Bolden "reparation" which is restoration of his former legitimacy and compensation for pain. Without madness to define it, "reason" then becomes a shifting ground of "unreasons." Madness divests the world of its righteousness by showing it be the the closet author of unreason.

* * *

Many of the concerns raised in *Coming Through Slaughter* are again addressed in Ondaatje's autobiographical novel *Running in the Family*. Although Lalla and Mervyn Ondaatje are not ostensibly the topic of the latter, both are caught, like the author, in a world that preys upon their attraction to the profane. Lalla and Mervyn are both drawn to the epic possibilities of life; both attempt to transform the mundane events of reality into the drama of a daily theatre. For

them, the reality of others is banal and reductive of human magnanimity. Their actions become profane in that to succeed at their art they must transgress life. Whereas Bolden embraces madness as the only alternative to the anonymity which eludes him, Lalla and Mervyn choose death as mortality's grandest gesture. United in death, Lalla and Mervyn have little to do with each other during life. Ondaatje notes that "the stories about my father are closer in style to those about Lalla than anyone else" (169), but oddly the two are never friends. In part, Mervyn's private nature may contribute to his contempt for Lalla's public displays of herself. Flamboyant and self-centred, Lalla, with her indomitable style, sustains her vision of grandeur right to the end. Tragically, Mervyn loses his vision and becomes, like Bolden, a victim of "miniaturism" and brain hemorrhage. Although they share the epic gesture of death, there lingers around Mervyn the sadness of a defeated man, while around Lalla there rises the ambiguous upheaval of tragi-comedy.

Like Bolden, Lalla and Mervyn come to us through the fragmentary stories of those who knew them. The narrator, ostensibly Michael Ondaatje, describes the process of recovering the past as travelling through a "labyrinth," glimpsing a series of cue cards proffered by Aunt Phyllis the minotaur (25), and constructing a ship's intricate architecture (26):

... we will trade anecdotes and faint memories, trying to swell them with the order of dates and asides, interlocking them all as if assembling the hull of a ship. No story is ever told just once. Whether a memory or funny hideous scandal, we will return to it an hour later and retell the story with additions and this time a few judgements thrown in. In this way history is organized (26).

Given the autobiographical premise of *Running in the Family* this statement might come as a surprise to those who interpret the genre as the "truthful" telling of one's personal history. As the above passage suggests, Ondaatje is concerned throughout *Running in the Family* to obscure the line between fact and fiction, thereby underlining the artifice which supports the distinction. Anecdotes, faint memories, asides, scandal, additions, and judgments are the ingredients which Ondaatje offers in the making of his history. The status of these ingredients as

history is further eroded by the words Ondaatje uses to describe the process of compilation: "trade," "swell," and "retell." Each of these words projects an aura of dubiousness. When considered together, the terms mock the idea of credibility in the way they invoke the possibilities of uncertainty, indeterminacy, and untruth.

In *Coming Through Slaughter* Ondaatje creates a vision of the self that is unstable, inconsistent, and unpredictable. Insofar as Bolden represents a self that is neither unified nor coherent, Ondaatje develops a writing style I have described as multivocal, disjunctive, and atemporal. This same writing style appears again in *Running in the Family* with the express purpose of creating characters who, like Bolden, defy coherence. Mervyn Ondaatje, like Bolden, becomes a composite of multiple perspectives. At the end of the novel, Jennifer, V.C. de Silva, and Archer Jayawardene, offer their eulogies for a father, a doctor, and a friend. Jennifer describes a private joke Mervyn had with himself at the expense of his daughters' innocence. During frequent outings to Elephant House Mervyn cultivates his daughters' gluttony by telling them: "the more you eat the less I'll have to pay" (193). Jennifer and Suzie believe him until their mother, Maureen, discovers and ends the joke. Other facets of the man are conveyed by de Silva, who describes Mervyn's aptitude for selling chickens and his occasional bouts with the D.T.s (196). Similarly, Jayawardene speaks of Mervyn, relating the tragi-comic circumstances of his funeral as well as the man's contributions to such illustrious foundations as the Cactus and Succulent Society and the Kandy Garden Club (196-197). Ondaatje ends the eulogy with some lines from Goethe: "Oh, who will heal the sufferings/ Of the man whose balm turned poison?" (198). As described by these individuals, Mervyn Ondaatje in his last days is intensely private, depressed, and silent. Ondaatje is careful to note, however, that no amount of portraiture could ever tell the complete story of Mervyn. The visions offered in *Running in the Family* are little more than tokens of the man. To the end, Ondaatje is adamant that biography, insofar as it

purports to be history, can never claim the power of complete representation: "There is so much to know [of Mervyn] and we can only guess" (200). In *Coming Through Slaughter*, Webb considers Buddy's family and friends and concludes: "Buddy had lived a different life with everyone of them (63)." The same can be said of Mervyn. Each portrait of the man is distinct. At times father, at times patient, at times friend, Mervyn is a different man with everyone one who knew him.

Even though *Running in the Family* contains the dominant voice of its author, Michael Ondaatje, overall the work produces a cacophony of voices highly reminiscent of *Coming Through Slaughter*. The eulogies which conclude *Running in the Family* come at the end of a long line of anonymous "Dialogues," monologues ("April 11, 1932"), anecdotes, rumors, and other highly questionable source material. *Multiplicity* is thus created through the number of voices which offer information, and through Ondaatje's ability to call into question the credibility of those voices. "Dialogues" (173), for example, is a section comprised of eleven anonymous comments about a man finally identified as Mervyn by the seventh speaker. In some cases, the context discloses the speaker's identity. More often than not, however, we are left to wonder at the identity behind the "I" who speaks in quotation marks. We are left to wonder at the credibility of an "I" who speaks without a name. Essentially, Ondaatje enters into a game celebrated by his mother in the comment: "Nonsense, I love aspersions" (106). Every time Ondaatje provides us with an anonymous comment he perpetuates the game by "casting aspersions" on the credibility of the speaker. Implicitly, Ondaatje allows for the possibility that the comment, or part thereof, could be a fabrication authored by himself and/or the speaker. On the other hand, the possibility also arises that in withholding his/her identity, the speaker is allowed to censor material in which he/she is implicated, or reveal without fear of retribution other information which is supposed to remain a family secret. Whatever the case, the reader is compelled to query the possibilities of

scandal latent in the anonymity of a speaker's remark.

Buddy Bolden loves scandal because it opens up for him infinite possibilities, infinite variations of the truth, and thus infinite ways of re-creating the self. As Webb watches Bolden play he describes the musician's talent: "his whole plot of song [was] covered with scandal and incident and change" (43). This phrase describes, exactly, Ondaatje's method of autobiography. Underlying the author's propensity to call into question the credibility of those who speak in *Running in the Family* is an attraction to scandal's ability to re-generate itself endlessly and effortlessly. Ondaatje's desire to create a vision of the self which transcends the stasis of stability, coherence, and predictability begins with an erosion of the nullifying impact of fact, truth, and history. To get at the heart of a matter is to pin down the subject in a rhetoric of closure, finality, and, ultimately, death. Through scandal, the self loses these strictures and thereby ascends to a place of multiplicity, or as Miller describes it, a place of variance, complexity, and precariousness. The self regenerates itself to the same degree that scandal is able to defer truth, fact, and history. Smaro Kamboureli specifically applies this thought to Ondaatje's characters in her essay "The Alphabet of the Self: Generic and Other Slippages in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*": "The unrestrained economy of the Ondaatje family activities, the episodic lives--especially those of Mervyn Ondaatje and Lalla Dickman . . .--scandalize the order of things, upset the alphabet of ordinary living" (87). As we shall see, scandal is a useful tool for Lalla and Mervyn in that both are able to deflect the authenticity of the essential self by involving themselves in activities that upset the social order of the world. As gossip and rumors of excessive living follow Mervyn and Lalla, so they succeed in deferring the reduction of themselves to coherent subjects.

In a text which admits self-consciously its desire to "trade," "swell," and "retell" stories, all events and speakers are cast into suspicion. *Running in the Family* informs us that Ceylon

is the centre of rumor (64), a point reiterated in the section title "Tropical Gossip" (53). Not surprisingly, we discover that Ondaatje's entire family sustains itself by inflating the truth: "If anything kept their generation alive it was this recording by exaggeration" (169). The author has just finished recounting how the Ceylonese women from his mother's side of the family would "take the minutest reaction from another and blow it up into a tremendously exciting tale, then later use it as an example of someone's strain of character" (169). In a world so obviously founded on the basis of gossip, all lose their claim to the truth.

Ondaatje's desire to cast aspersions on those who speak in *Running in the Family* is not an act aimed at garnering ultimate authority for himself, however, since the text is replete with a myriad of ways Ondaatje undermines his own voice. For instance, in a text which is supposed to be autobiography, one ceaselessly wonders how Ondaatje has managed to recover such exquisitely detailed information from the past. The point is a curious one in that most of the autobiographical events occur *before* its author is even born. While we can accept that some parts of *Running in the Family* are the contributions of individuals from previous generations, at times Ondaatje puts himself in a rather peculiar position by quoting intimate conversations he could not possibly have known. For instance, Ondaatje's mother Doris tries to talk his father Mervyn out of suicide while standing in the Kadugannawa train tunnel. The following exchange between the naked suicidal man and his wife occurs:

"It's me!"

Then a pause. And, "How *dare* you follow me!"

"I followed you because no one else would follow you" (150).

Upon reading this one has to question the authenticity of Ondaatje's quotation. No one was present to record the events or to transcribe the conversation *verbatim*. In presenting such detail, Ondaatje endows himself with the position of omniscient narrator. Of course, the role is merely one more

jest at biography's claim to "tell the truth" about an individual's life. Here, as in countless other places, Ondaatje displays his own *scandalous* writing style by insinuating highly questionable material into the text. Ondaatje's method is thoroughgoing, since the suspiciously accurate exchange between Doris and Mervyn is but one of many ways Ondaatje intentionally discredits himself as a historian. The section "Honeymoon" is remarkable in that while the title promises information about Ondaatje's newly married parents, the text itself only provides trivial detail from contemporary *public* history. We learn nothing of the newlyweds.

At all points the text undermines the reader's expectations. Wherever we expect to find historical detail he gives us extraneous trivia. Similarly, where we encounter an episode etched by Ondaatje for its obvious comic effect the author subverts the riotous impact of the scene by providing documentary "facts." Such is the case in the scene of Ondaatje's grandfather's death. After describing the event so that the mourning women's behaviour spectacularly upstages the grandfather lying dead in his coffin, Ondaatje concludes with "[a]ll this occurred in the afternoon of September 12, 1938". To reinforce the historicity of this statement Ondaatje adds as an aside, "Aelian died of his liver problems in April of 1942" (57). High comedy turns into obituary citations at the conclusion of the passage. Whereas the "Honeymoon" section gives us newspaper headlines where we wanted private details, the funeral indulges that voyeurism only to deflate it with unwarranted historical proofs. Throughout *Running in the Family* Ondaatje thus confuses the kind of autobiography he is trying to tell. The novel oscillates between the emotional truth of private tragi-comedy and the "factual" truth of public history. Ondaatje purposefully draws attention to the arbitrary distinctions which assign credibility to the latter, while discounting the former's ability to sustain anything but the audience's good humour.

Running in the Family contains a whole cast of characters of relatively equal importance in contrast to *Coming Through Slaughter* which is overwhelmingly about Buddy

Bolden. Although both novels contain multiple voices, *Running in the Family* differs from *Coming Through Slaughter* in that it contains, in addition, the dominant voice of Michael Ondaatje. Ondaatje's controlling voice is required in the former due to that text's claim to autobiography. But, as we have seen, Ondaatje's univocal dominance is fractured in *Running in the Family* with the erosion of his credibility as a historian. Scandal becomes Ondaatje's method of operation. Not only does the author cite from sources made questionable by their anonymity, but he deliberately allows the entertainment and historical aspects of the novel to undermine each other. *Running in the Family* cannot establish itself either on fictional or biographical grounds. Ondaatje's fractured narrative voice is thus another means of producing the multivocal writing style displayed formerly in *Coming Through Slaughter*.

Insofar as multivocality provides a character with a suitable context in which to defy notions of stability, *Running in the Family* also shares with its predecessor the effects of a disjunctive and atemporal writing style. As in *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje has decided to compile short sections and sub-sections which are remarkable for the way they simulate the discursive patterns of oral story telling. One tale leads off into another without concern for such conventions as plot or chronology. The novel is not progressing anywhere except through the labyrinth that is Ondaatje's ancestors' lives. For instance, the middle of the text contains a series of anonymous poems followed by Ondaatje's description of the family home in Kegalle (98). This descriptive passage is followed by a photo of the family during what appears to be a masquerade party. Immediately succeeding this ambiguous image, we are presented with a "Lunch Conversation" in which the opening speaker declares his/her inability to keep track of the tale's direction: "Wait a minute, wait a minute! When did all this happen, I'm trying to get it straight . . ." (105). This is precisely the reader's thought as he/she progresses through the novel. As in Bolden's world there is no order here. Ondaatje has failed to impose an overriding meaning on his

family's life--a meaning which would link the events of *Running in the Family* to a unified form. Traditionally, one might expect chronology to perform this task of organization for the autobiographer, but in his desire to gainsay the closure of his text (and thus the closure of his characters) Ondaatje has chosen an atemporal format. To be sure, a rough chronology of events seems to appear in the sequential positioning of "The Courtship," "The Honeymoon" to the death of Mervyn in "Final Days/Father Tongue." However, the chronology of these sections is a misnomer in this case, for other sections of *Running in the Family* repeatedly transgress this apparent order by giving us characters who predate Ondaatje's parents. Lalla and Francis de Saram predate Doris and Mervyn but appear some chapters later than the couple. Moreover, if "The Courtship" were a true chronological point of departure in the novel, one must also ask why the author, who is the offspring of said courtship and honeymoon, appears on page 21 while his parents do not make their debut until page 31. Ondaatje's presence in *Running in the Family* is particularly disruptive from a chronological standpoint since he often interrupts his own story to bring us some anecdote from his present life, or even from his experience as an autobiographer.

Form and content are inextricably related in that a character who defies stability, consistency, and predictability will not succeed unless the process which works to define him/her likewise subverts conventions of closure. Lalla Dickman and Mervyn Ondaatje achieve multiplicity through Ondaatje's ability to present them in contexts which deny the strictures of plot, chronology, and credibility. As with Bolden, Ondaatje endows Lalla and Mervyn with the power to generate their own indeterminacy. While Buddy is a cornetist, Lalla and Mervyn are actors embroiled in the daily drama of their lives. In the section entitled "The Passions of Lalla" the narrator, referring to the silence surrounding Lalla's childhood, observes: "those who are magical break from silent structures after years of chrysalis" (113). This is a fitting image for the flamboyant Lalla who, after her husband dies, takes up the rather ambitious task of turning

herself into a larger-than-life image. As a young mother Lalla hates the confinement of breastfeeding, referring to the experience as being "pinned down." Even in this traditional role Lalla early expresses a dislike for experiences which confine her in any way. As her children grow older, Lalla sees in them a chance to transform the banality of everyday life into something grand. Noel and Doris, we are told, could hardly move during their early years "without being used as part of Lalla's daily theatre" (118). Trying her hand at other roles in the theatre, Lalla gains notoriety for the costumes she continually dreams up for her daughter, especially the costumes worn to the Galle Face Dance. But, as the narrator informs us, Lalla "could never be just a mother--that seemed to be only one muscle in her chameleon nature" (124). With every appearance in *Running in the Family* Lalla increases the magnitude of her character: she is a siren in the way her outrageous laughter ominously precipitates Rene de Saram's death; she is a suspect witch in that Rene apparently died "the victim of someone's charm" (115); she is a liar and an accomplice in crime as seen in her actions involving the murderer Brumphy; she is also a modern day Robin Hood stealing flowers from all manner of gardens to bestow upon her friends. At every level, Lalla's life is enhanced and amplified by the scandal that follows her everywhere. Within the few pages that comprise "The Passions of Lalla," the woman is seen violating every one of the seven deadly sins. Still, she is a highly attractive character. In the narrator's words: "[s]he was the centre of the world she moved through." With her daughter for company she carries her own theatre on her back (125).

During his youthful days, Mervyn Ondaatje reveals many of the same ostentatious displays of a self divided from rational behaviour. On one occasion, Mervyn, intoxicated and driving with a vengeance, accidentally propels the automobile part way off a cliff. His three children, who had been enjoying the riotous ride thus far, are stricken with the gravity of the situation and their father's inappropriate nonchalance. "[M]uch too casual" is their assessment of Mervyn who

appears to be sleeping but has in fact passed out behind the wheel (173). Not surprisingly this is the same Mervyn we observe living extravagantly in England off an income his parents intended for tuition. This is also the same Mervyn who threatens to shoot himself twice in the span of a few days--once because his father refused payment on the huge emerald engagement ring Mervyn had purchased for Doris, and later because Doris temporarily breaks off their engagement (35). Impetuous, self-centred, and often illogical, the young Mervyn resembles Lalla in that both are surrounded by scandal. However, Mervyn's dramatic nature is, unlike Lalla's, a solo act. With the exception of his family, he prefers not to involve others in his escapades: "My father's dramatic nature pleased only himself and sometimes the four of us" (170). Although Mervyn and Lalla share a flair for the theatrics of everyday life, the tragedy of Mervyn's later life seems to have its roots in the privacy he increasingly embraces with age. Perhaps a propensity for privacy is fundamentally at odds with the spectacle of the theatre. Thus torn by the antithetical demands of privacy and spectacle, Mervyn grows into a seemingly unavoidable tragedy.

As the author describes it, Lalla and Mervyn are remarkable for the energy they infuse into their daily lives. Undaunted by the mundaneness of others, Mervyn and Lalla dominate their worlds in a way that is larger than life. Both aspire to extend themselves beyond the highly forgettable routines of those who conform to the norm. Breaking every rule of propriety, Lalla and Mervyn lie, cheat, steal, and drink their way into an egomania that knows no boundaries. Perhaps Lalla laughs too loud and Mervyn drinks too much, but their lives possess a vitality that allows them endless self-expression. As described in *Running in the Family*, however, there is a price to pay for those who push convention to its limit. Flamboyance ceases to be self-expression and becomes instead the *excess* of egomania. According to Ondaatje, "[i]n her last years [Lalla] was searching for the great death." Despite an extensive search Lalla never finds "the giant snake, the fang which would brush against her ankle like a whisper" (123). As fate

would have it, death finally comes during a blissful bout of carousing with her brother. Innocent to the danger of the flood that lies outside her door, Lalla falls victim to a tide which sweeps her into the deadly "blue arms of a jacaranda tree" (113). Death becomes Lalla's last and fatal reach into the grandeur of the theatre. Determined to maintain her chameleon power, she takes on the role of tragic hero, a role that by definition costs her her life. Mervyn's last dramatic gesture is also an embracement of death. Reduced in his final years to a quiet and sometimes paranoid individual, he finally succumbs to death as a result of cerebral hemorrhage induced, in part, by alcoholism (196). Ondaatje describes his father's death in the poem "Letters & Other Worlds": "He came to death with his mind drowning . . . the blood searching in his head without metaphor" (*Rat Jelly* 24-26.10,77). Not an actor but a poet in "Letters & Other Worlds," Mervyn transgresses the fine balance between creation and destruction. He is no longer able to summon the tropes or words required to transcend the violent silence of death. To invoke an image of a mind drowning is to recall Lalla's death in the flood waters of a tropical monsoon. On the other hand, the image is also highly reminiscent of Buddy Bolden's cerebral hemorrhage: "feel the blood that is real move up bringing fresh energy . . . flooding past my heart in a mad parade" (131). Musician or actor and sometime poet, Mervyn, Lalla, and Bolden are joined in life and in death. While their art forces them to challenge the boundaries of convention, the success of that challenge becomes profane because it exposes the world's resistance to the magnitude of their desires for self-expression. In their primes, all three characters are exhibitionists to the extent that their desire to reach beyond the stasis of a unified self propels them helter-skelter into the lives of others. Mervyn, Bolden, and Lalla open themselves to all because at core there is no single identity to which they can be reduced. Identity, for them, is as fleeting as the many shades of a musical note, a theatrical role, or a single wanton act.

In contrast to Lalla, Mervyn and Bolden display the preliminary signs of a mind gone awry

because of its inability to cope with the banality of a unified self. Both of these men exhibit an obsession with ritual. Bolden is fixated with the taps on the bath, the door frame, and benches in the same way Mervyn finally "reduced himself to a few things around him"--such as the behaviour of certain creatures and varieties of cactus (200). Denied the multiplicity of the self, both men recoil into the sanctuary of empty rites. Madness is a further symptom of a mind at odds with a world that militates another reality. Bolden sinks into madness in the same way Mervyn embraces alcohol--as an escape from the tyranny of stability, consistency, and predictability. Madness, then, becomes a scornful contemplation of the power of the world to invoke death and thus reduce the individual to nothingness which is neither identity nor multiplicity.² For a while Bolden and Mervyn are able to disarm death by turning it inward upon themselves. Finally, however, both succumb to a world which will not allow them the irony of suspension between the polarities of life and death. In the flood of brain hemorrhage both die, as dramatically as Lalla in the monsoon torrent. While Lalla's egomania saves her from the suffering sustained by Bolden and Mervyn, she, too, is finally a victim of a world determined to escape its origins: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. /And the earth was without form, and void" (Genesis 1:1,2). Formless in a world that insists on form, Bolden, Lalla, and Mervyn pursue their powers too far. Formless but *not* void in a world that cannot accommodate the two, Ondaatje's characters are consigned to death.

CHAPTER 2

Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*

. . . without history or use, sitting in the middle of the rain forest, an immigrant school teacher wrote: 'To touch the soft fingerlings of Fir, the scaly fronds of Cedar!--Underfoot, a veritable pelt of needle droppings. If Earth be sentient here, then Man with his machinery, his noisy saw, his clanking chain and bit, is after all dwarf in such green fur, mere Insect only. --It comforts me.'

Daphne Marlatt

In *Ana Historic*, Daphne Marlatt provides a vision of the self that resists stability and closure. Marlatt's vision is somewhat more complex than Ondatje's, however, since the world of *Ana Historic* is much more covertly treacherous than either of those portrayed in *Coming Through Slaughter* or *Running in the Family*. Marlatt names that world; it is patriarchy.¹ Contained within patriarchy is an ideological system which excludes women by assigning her the devalued side of such binary oppositions as public/private; forest/home; writing/silence. Under the ruse of protection, women's activities are censored, the circumference of her experience curtailed to include only the private realm, the home, and the silence of non-writing. That is not to say that these *are* inferior realms, but that they have been interpreted this way by a male-centred value system. Denied access to writing as well as to the danger of the forest and the public sector, woman becomes a commiserator in her own exile. Marlatt's vision of the *multiple* self is two-fold. On one hand, *Ana Historic* is about the fragmentation which occurs when women are cut off from their capacity for self-expression and

self-determination. Ina embodies this image of woman in that she displays the hysteria of an individual powerless to interpret her own experience. On this level, multiplicity is a tragic but understandable consequence of a world preoccupied with denying the ways in which it privileges the interests of men. At the other end of the scale is Ina's daughter, Annie Anderson. Unlike her mother, Annie claims her right to tell her own story and, in the telling of that story, Annie becomes the voice of Everywoman. In a multivocal, disjunctive, and atemporal writing style similar to Ondaatje's, Annie reinterprets the experience of woman as she has suffered under the weight of an identity prescribed by those who profit from her non-public, non-writing, domestic labour. Mrs. Richards, a woman of late nineteenth-century British Columbia, becomes a focal point for Annie, who finds in her predecessor a woman who gives up writing and recedes into the ahistorical silence of married life. Mrs. Richards' error lies in assuming that she is endangered by the forest, when the real danger is the *conspiracy* to keep her out of that domain. If not for this misjudgement Mrs. Richards would have confronted her fear and kept on writing as does Annie in the telling of *Ana Historic*. Marlatt's vision is consequently revolutionary and revisionary. Through the many registers of Annie's voice, the author contests the ability of patriarchy to define female experience. Through Ina, Marlatt is able to reinterpret the impact of a female mind divided against itself. Mrs. Richards, on the other hand, provides a curious mixture of the two. She is that woman who has known the ecstasy of self-expression, but grows tired of the continual battle to mark her place in the world.

Marlatt's critical vision of woman's multiplicity appears through Ina, who is the classic hysteric. As seen through her daughter's eyes, Ina is a woman driven to the brink of insanity: "you'd rush out of the house screaming at us, jump into the car and back out, wheels spinning" (93). Annie laments that she was never able to save her mother from the anguish that plagued her: "if only i'd . . . provoked you into a torrent of speech the torrent you damned up all those

later years--after they had fixed you. patched you up" (49). Here Annie alludes to the electroshock treatments Ina sustains but never fully recovers from: "they erased whole parts of you, shocked them out, overloaded the circuits so you couldn't bear to remember. re-member" (148-9; cf.88). For the woman who fails to behave *properly*, electroshock will effectively erase those parts which provoke the fits of *impropriety*. A pathological definition of hysteria defines the condition as:

a functional disturbance of the nervous system, characterized by . . . convulsions, etc. and usually attended with emotional disturbances and enfeeblement or perversion of the moral and intellectual faculties. Women being much more liable than men to this disorder, it was originally thought to be due to a disturbance in the uterus and its functions (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

Interestingly enough, *hysteria* can be etymologically traced back to the Latin word *hysteria-us* which means "belonging to the womb." Historically defined, hysteria is a condition rooted in women's biology. Hence, the woman who displays symptoms of "emotional disturbances, [or] an enfeeblement or perversion of the moral and intellectual faculties" is simply doing what comes natural to her. She is being a woman. According to this definition, Ina's periodic screaming spasms are not effected in any way by her environment, but by disturbances rooted in her female anatomy. Clearly, this is the opinion of Herald her husband and the doctors who treat her with electroshock, and who possibly remove her uterus as well. The latter is implied in the long section on page 88 where Annie links hysteria with hysterectomy. With more than a little irony, Annie accuses women of being " 'wrong' from the start, our physiology faulty, preoccupied as we are with the things of the flesh."

Sigmund Freud offers an alternate, and somewhat more convincing, explanation of women's hysteria. His studies conclude that the roots of hysterical symptoms are rooted in some repressed experience during a child's first or second year of life (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 584). Freud points to the *father* in the emergence of the female child's earliest sexual

impulse. Hysteria in female patients, he claims, is a result of some disturbance in the sexual (Electra) attraction that binds father and daughter together. Freud cites the case of one female patient who lost her father while still a child, but "retained unconsciously recollections of the figure which had disappeared so early in her life" (585). This unconscious memory combined with other events caused the adult female to experience occasions of mental and emotional lapse. With the advent of psychoanalysis, women for the first time had something of an escape from theories which attempted to explain all behaviour exclusively through biology. For the first time attention was being paid to the environment of a child's upbringing, especially the impact of family relationships.

Nothing is ever mentioned of Ina's father in *Ana Historic*. However, Annie takes great pains to recall the way in which she challenged her mother for the affection of Harald, Annie's father and Ina's husband. Within this triangle of personalities, Annie sees some cause for her mother's inability to cope with the world. Annie recalls the way her childhood forced her into competition with her mother: "yes i tried to efface you [Ina], trace myself over you, wanting to be the one looked at, approved by male eyes" (50). Later she claims "the truth is (your truth, my truth, if you would admit it) incest is always present, it's there in the way we're trained to solicit the look, and first of all the father's look, Our Father's" (56). Inasmuch as Annie seeks the approval of Harald and thereby positions herself as his sexual peer, she usurps her mother's role. Harald's reference to Annie as "Princess" and Annie's subsequent blush of embarrassment betray her attraction to her father and her desire to have him notice her blossoming sexuality: ". . . sure that he noticed, that he sees how she has become a woman (almost), even another (the other) woman in the house" (50). Ina, too, is aware of the rivalry and confronts the adult Annie: "yes, you were the Perfect Little Mother, weren't you? you could have replaced me. you tried hard enough" (49). Although these lines are, in part, Annie's confession of the way she

unknowingly contributed to Ina's hysteria, they are *not* in the end an affirmation of Freud's Oedipal/Electra theory. Freud's theory is helpful insofar as it considers environment at all in the development of human consciousness. Unfortunately, his theory is ultimately just as much rooted in biology as the traditional view which considers hysteria a product of a malfunctioning reproductive system. In contrast to Annie, Freud would have considered the sexual attraction between father and daughter as natural and inevitable. The daughter relates to the father in the way that she does because it is "natural" for a daughter to direct her first expressions of penis envy toward the male who is most important to her. As a prepubescent substitute for the lover she will take in adulthood, the father functions as the inevitable object of his daughter's envy and desire.²

While Annie concedes that an attraction exists between father and daughter, she sees that attraction as a product of the way a male-centred society teaches female children to assess their value through male eyes. Unlike Freud, Annie sees the process as rooted in gender socialization rather than anatomy. In *The Daughters of Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Jane Gallop has this to say:

Patriarchal law, the law of the father, decrees that the "product" of sexual union, the child, shall belong exclusively to the father, be marked by his name. Also that the womb which bears that child should be a passive receptacle with no claims on the product, the womb 'itself possessed as a means of (re)production' (16).

The root of sexual attraction between father and daughter has nothing to do with a Greek play written by Sophocles and everything to do with the way a female child is taught to view herself as the *property* of her father. As Gallop points out, the child is not the only one to suffer from the father's desire to appropriate, for in the father's eyes the mother's womb is also perceived as property since it is the means of "(re)production." As the father appropriates the objects of production, the mother and child come to view themselves as commodities awaiting consumption. This is what lies behind Annie's blush. Defined by her father's perception, she seeks to fulfill

that definition. Her blush is a subconscious acknowledgement of what both father and daughter know to be true: Annie reifies her father's maleness by offering herself as a sexual object.

The adult Annie hits upon the only thing that could have cured Ina's hysteria and even the listlessness following electroshock. The one cure for Ina would have been to unleash "a torrent of speech, the torrent you damned up all those later years" (49). From one perspective this "torrent of speech" might be perceived as an expression of hysteria. Indeed, this is the case since Ina, defined as hysterical, consigns responsibility for her mental health to medical physicians. As far as Annie is concerned, however, hysteria is the only "natural" reaction for a woman in an "unnatural" situation. To tell one's own story, to let it pour out with all of its accompanying incoherence and incongruity is the "natural" reaction of a woman repressed under a social regime that denies her the sound of her own voice. Hysteria, then, is not a sickness but a symptom of the profound impact of a woman who is taught to endorse "the mute matter of being a wife and mother--ahistoric" (121).

Just as *Running in the Family* is Ondaatje's eulogy for his father, *Ana Historic* is Annie's eulogy for her mother. In the latter, Annie rewrites Ina's history, a history Ina could not write for herself. With the advantage of hindsight, Annie reinterprets Ina's life, including the circumstances, not the biological flaws, which precipitated Ina's final retreat into silence. In the following passage Annie probes the reasons for Ina's demise:

--you had three lovely children and a fine husband, were you happy?

--but that was my fault, that was the flaw in my character.

--and so you closed down, closed in on yourself, thinking it was all your fault--your solitude was retribution, wasn't it? the dreams and heroes gone, except the dream of perfect motherhood--impossible to live up to. but that you couldn't was your fault. and you had no friends to tell you otherwise (100).

In this dialogue Annie reaches out to her mother as the friend Ina so sadly lacked. Annie redefines Ina's life. Unlike Ina's peers, Annie understands that her mother's silence was a desperate

attempt to retreat from a life that presented her with dreams of grandeur but failed to tell her the dream was a lie. Solitude is Ina's "retribution" for a life that promised gratification, but delivered instead the eternal suffering of guilt. Sadly, Ina never comes to see the fallacy of "perfect motherhood"; she never understands that it, too, is a means by which patriarchy obscures the fact that women are valued not for themselves, but because of the unpaid (and unvalued) service they provide. In *Feminism and Political Economy* Harriet Rosenberg highlights the disparity between the value of women's caregiving labour in sustaining a political economy and its relative lack of prestige:

[F]or women who do the work of caregiving there are contradictions between the low status of the work they do and the seemingly high status of the role. "Mother," "motherhood," and "mothering" are words which bring forth flamboyant, extravagant romantic images. In contrast, the work itself includes many tasks which are not socially respected (188).

Unable to fulfill the dream of perfect motherhood, Ina fails to see that the fault lies not with her but with the dream itself. Embedded in the institution of motherhood is the notion that women's caregiving labour is equal, if not morally superior, to the secular work of men. The virtues of motherhood are extolled, domestic women praised as the "keeper of the hearth" and the "spiritual bosom" of the family unit. But, as Rosenberg indicates, these noble images of woman are incongruous with many of the duties a mother performs. Subsumed in the romanticization of motherhood is the hard reality of strenuous physical labour. Within the cliché "women's work" lies the reality that many tasks performed by a mother receive little social respect. Rosenberg underlines the disparity between the objectified role of mother and the devalued activities which comprise that role.

Monstrous though it is, the truth of the motherhood myth lies in many well-worn clichés: " 'just' a mother, 'just' a wife" (57). Seduced by the lure of promised equality, Ina never realizes that motherhood, as defined by patriarchy, is a "faceless" and " 'thankless job' " (57).

That is not to say that motherhood is a valueless occupation, but that women must be free to declare the value of their domestic labour on their own terms. Annie's analysis of patriarchal society and her understanding of Ina's no-win situation draw attention to the methods by which all women are caught up in a myth that encourages them to legitimize male perceptions of themselves. For instance, Annie's monologue on the definition of "lady," appearing as it does in sequence with descriptions of Ina's failure to meet that standard, demonstrates the lure of perfection. Seduced by an image of the ideal, women became perpetrators as well as victims of gender hierarchy:

lady, for instance. a word that has claimed so much from women trying to maintain it. the well-ironed linen, clean (lace at the cuffs, at the collar), well-tailored dresses and wraps, the anitmacassars, lace tablecloths . . . a certain way of walking, of talking, and always that deference, that pleased attention to the men who give them value, a station in life, a reason for existng. lady, *hlaefdige*, kneader of bread, mistress of a household, lady of the manor, woman of good family, woman of refinement and good manners, a woman whose conduct conforms to a certain standard of propriety ('lady airs'--singing true again) (32).

The first thought that springs to mind in reading this passage is the exclusive emphasis on form and the absence of any concern for woman's thoughts, feelings, or desires. This definition, enticing though it is as a model of sophisticated architecture, neglects to confer upon woman a consciousness. By this assessment, woman becomes an object rather than a thinking, moving, motivated personality; women become "the soothing background their men come home to" (35). Just as the clichés describing woman's domestic role belie the truth about woman's status (" 'just' a wife", 'just' a mother"), so the suppression of a woman's intellect becomes apparent in the expression "looking smart". As Annie says, how did that become the measure of intelligence in woman? (88). Denied consciousness and, by inference, morality, women derive their sense of self-worth from compliments which praise appearance at the expense of mental integrity. The phrase "looking smart" is itself an oxymoron since it confuses visual impressions with cognitive activity. Contemplating the death of Ina, Annie advances the theory that her mother dies because she simply gave up trying to conform to the standards of being a wife, a mother, a lady. Ina dies

out of a sense of hopelessness, out of a feeling of failure in never being able to match her experience to what was established as *true*. The very opposition true and false makes her experience, her imperfection, into a valueless heap of babblings. As Annie asks "what do you do when the true you feel inside sounds different from the standard?" (18).

When Foucault argues "through the mediation of madness, it is the world that becomes culpable . . ." he comments on a literary tradition that reaches at least as far back as King Lear's rantings in the fourth and fifth acts of Shakespeare's tragic play. In IV.vi King Lear's madness compels him to see things he could not see when equipped with the faculty of sight. For the first time, Lear comes to terms with evil as he never knew it: "Plate sin with gold,/ And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks" (162-163). As the gold plated sword wields its sin, so Lear learns that wealth and power in the wrong hands can bring an abrupt end to justice. Confronted with the treachery of Goneril and Regan, Lear learns that, at least in his kingdom, Cordelia's moral beauty is exceptional rather than universal. Ina has a comparable moment of insight in madness when she flies into a rage at her family preparing for Sunday morning church. With her "nerves at breaking point," Ina launches into a diatribe:

you're hopeless, you never remember, you expect me to do everything, be your char, be your cook, and then look smart on top of it all . . . look at you, going off to church as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouths, sitting there in that ridiculous pew for all the world like a Christian family, hypocrites, all of you go on, put a good face on it, i'm going to bed . . . hysteria (88).

Just as mad Lear underscores the disparity between appearance and reality, so Ina, in a fit of hysteria, points out the hypocrisy of her family. Sitting in the pew like a Christian family is an act of duplicity in that it is a posture which denies the suffering going on at home. Oddly enough, the scene is not unfamiliar, for it captures the exhaustion of a woman who tries but knows she can never meet the standard. Ina's family is not outrightly treacherous as is Lear's; hers is only guilty of commiserating in a fraternity that excludes females. Ina's call for help does not involve a release

from the responsibilities of wifehood and motherhood; rather, it is a cry for recognition. Caught in the paradoxical crux of a system that praises domesticity but grants it no respect, Ina reacts to the incongruity with hysteria. Although she cannot name patriarchy as the source of her anguish, Ina's incomprehension could not be more appropriate. It is left up to Annie, in the writing of *Ana Historic*, to name and thus redeem her mother's trauma.

In *Running in the Family*, Michael Ondaatje remarks: "why of Shakespeare's cast of characters do I remain the most curious of Edgar? Who if I look deeper into the metaphor, torments his father over an imaginary cliff" (179). Just as Annie contributes to her mother's hysteria, so Michael Ondaatje sees himself in the role of Edgar who torments his father into a state of suicide. But, according to Marlatt, there is a great distinction to be drawn between male and female hysteria or madness. If Mervyn goes mad it is not the same kind of madness as displayed by Ina, since the latter suffers from a peculiarly female condition. To be sure, Lear and Mervyn inhabit worlds which have gone awry for one reason or another, but their worlds are profoundly different from Ina's. Electroshock takes away from Ina the only means she possesses to express herself. Ina's fate is to have no voice at all. Unlike the madness that propels Lear and Mervyn into spasms of eloquence, Ina's hysteria causes her to lose even the capacity for prosaic outbursts. Lacking the power of speech, Ina eventually withdraws from a world that has already ex-communicated her because it does not recognize her speech as valid. Gilbert and Gubar make this distinction in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. According to these authors the mad woman, not unlike the hysterical Ina, is:

[u]sually in some sense the author's double, an image of her own anxiety and rage. Indeed, much of the poetry and the fiction written by women conjures up this mad creature so that female authors can come to terms with their own uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be (78).

Here Gilbert and Gubar draw a direct parallel between the lives of women authors and the female

characters they create. If the images of madness or hysteria in *Ana Historic* are, indeed, Marlatt's attempts to deal with her own feelings of "fragmentation," then Ina embodies the dark side of that struggle. Ina reveals that part of Marlatt which struggles and fails to express herself. Generally, it can be said that Ina is a classic tragedienne in that her suffering speaks not only for Marlatt, but for all women who have been silenced by internalizing standards which run counter to their own. In contrast to Annie and Mrs. Richards, Ina never challenges the "discrepancies" between what she is as a woman and what she is supposed to be. Ina is that woman on the brink of madness. Under different fictional conditions she could easily be the mad woman in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." If Gilbert and Gubar are correct in their assessment of the commonality of madness in literature written by women, then Ina is that dark side of Marlatt's own struggle to deal with the fragmentation she feels as a woman, and as a woman writer. Implicitly, Marlatt has drawn a parallel between the world of Ina and the world she and her contemporaries live in. To understand Ina's world is to shed new light on present society. This is the revisionary voice of *Ana Historic*.

Conversely, Annie Anderson is the revolutionary voice of *Ana Historic* inasmuch as her social criticisms do more than offer insight into the conditions of traditional women's lives. Annie is the positive side of Marlatt's attempt to portray a vision of the self that resists stability, consistency, and predictability. Through the process of writing, Annie reaches beyond the disintegrating female subject as portrayed by Ina, and creates instead a kind of female glossolalia in which to speak the many tongues of womanhood. In a sense, Annie turns back on patriarchy its own tactics. Defined as hysteric on the basis of gender, she then purposefully takes up the voice of an hysteric to proclaim her right to speech. Multivocal, disjunctive, and atemporal are the terms I applied to Ondaatje's writing style. These same words describe Marlatt's choice to write a text devoid of chronology and conventional sentence structure, but containing the voice of a narrator

whose identity continually elides into that of other characters.

Marlatt takes multiplicity and makes it the exclusive domain of the female. Nowhere is this more remarkable than in the opening pages of the novel. Excerpts from the first section of *Ana Historic* show Annie's propensity to confuse her narrative voice with other female voices:

Who's there? *she* was whispering. knock. knock. knock. in the dark. only it wasn't dark had woken her to her solitude . . . her parents who went out leaving her alone to defend the house. her mother who . . . *my* mother who (who) . . . voice that carries through all rooms, imperative, imperious . . . and now *you've* made your words come true, making it so by an act of will (despair). gone. locked up in a box. this crumbling apart of words. 'true, real'. you who is you or me. she. a part struck off from me. apart. separated (9-11, emphasis mine).

Not only does this passage subvert the idea that a sentence must have a subject, but it introduces a series of shifts (as marked by my italics) whereby the identity of the speaker becomes obfuscated in a continual shifting of narrative perspective. In other words, while we have only been introduced to one person in the novel--ostensibly the woman awakening in bed--the voice of that woman shifts from the third person, to the first person, to the second person, and finally to a conflation of all three in the last line. "[Y]ou who is you or me. she." offers the reader three perspectives: You, Me, and She. Marlatt creates multivocality throughout *Ana Historic* by playing with the slippage that occurs between Annie's voice and the voices of Ina, Mrs. Richards, and women in general. In blurring the difference between character and narrator, Marlatt does more than eliminate the possibility of a "correct" or authoritative perspective on the novel; she sets up a trajectory of selves forever resisting coherence. That resistance is further reflected in the disjunctive manner in which paragraphs are assembled. As in Ondaatje's novels, Marlatt ignores such strictures as plot and chronology, choosing instead to have her characters continually interrupt each other in a seemingly random manner. At times it is impossible to know who is speaking. This cacophony of voices undermines whatever distinctions we make between Ina, Annie, and Mrs. Richards, since at some level the women's experience is common to all females.

Stylistically, Marlatt creates an environment in which Annie can use the symptoms of hysteria to declare the absence of a centre by which a woman's behaviour can be measured.

Stability, consistency, and predictability reduce woman to some essential form or nature. Annie resists these things because she believes them to be ideological tools used to control woman's behaviour through a complex system of value judgements. As seen in Ina, the woman who displays loud outbursts of rage is considered unstable and therefore a candidate for medical treatment. Motherhood, wifehood, and being a lady are similarly made into objective commodities whereby a woman can measure her success as an individual. In all of these cases, woman is made to appeal to an external standard to legitimize her existence. Annie's desire to speak for herself, to design her own code of values is not unique. Mary Wollstonecraft voiced a similar sentiment in the preface of her novel *Mary, A Fiction* (1788): ". . . these chosen [women], wish to speak for themselves, and not to be an echo--even of the sweetest sounds . . . the paradise they ramble in must be of their own creating." Annie's vision is somewhat less idealistic than Wollstonecraft's. Annie speaks for herself, but in speaking she recognizes the impossibility of re-creating the world anew (78). Language combined with the conventions of writing are themselves tainted with an ideology stemming as far back as the book of Genesis.

In telling her story, Annie arrives at the conclusion that woman's secondary status is, in part, a consequence of Eve's greater sin in the Garden of Eden. For this reason, original sin becomes more the property of woman than of man: "[t]he curse, the blood, the pangs of labour as the punishment for Eve's original sin" (87). In contrast to Adam who is cast out of the Garden of Eden as punishment for eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Eve is given the additional curse--the curse of pain in childbirth and the subsequent shame of all that is associated with reproduction. Ironically, as the function most integral to human existence, menstruation becomes conflated with original sin in the term "the curse." According to Annie, however, the true curse of woman lies

not in her biology, but in the socialization process which teaches girls to be soft spoken as an introduction to the silence of womanhood (no one likes a loud woman), and teaches boys to speak their minds in readiness for taking over the reins of power (boys will be boys). "That child, one with her body not yet riven, not split in two" suggests that if a spiritual fall exists at all, it exists as the product of a youthful mind wrongly convinced of its own depravity.

Sin for Annie is not original; it manifests itself in the female shame that mothers pass on to their daughters: "the sins of the mothers. hating our bodies as if they had betrayed us" (62). Recognizing that the blame for this sin lies as much with society as with individuals within that society, Annie continues to show how the anatomical slang she learned from her peers--"cunt, slit, boob" (62)--works as a socializing agent to teach boys and girls to devalue that which is female. Nevertheless, underlying the shame that makes her a commiserator with her female peers, Annie recalls a still small voice that recognized the injustice for what it was. Even as a child, Annie identifies, at least emotionally, the betrayal that exists in the way women denigrate themselves by accepting terms which rob them of their physical dignity. "On the rag again," "got the curse," and "falling off the roof" (62), are not comical; they are, in Annie's words "catastrophic phrases" which reveal the emotional injustices done against women by a society that turns life into profanity. Confronted with these terms as a child, Annie confesses that even then the familiarity and triviality were inappropriate because they were "too small for what i really felt." She redefines woman's sexuality, not as something catastrophic or menacing, but as a moment filled with "promise: the budding of some secret future in me . . ." (62). With this line, Annie reclaims her sexuality as something immensely desirable.

Particular words and phrases become the focus of Annie's "rantings" in *Ana Historic* because she sees them as ideological tools which diminish woman's femaleness. Again and again, Annie attacks language and linguistic conventions because she understands the power words have to

fashion values and thought. Annie takes the conventional novel form to task with the phrase: "a book of interruptions is not a novel" (37). This line, appearing as it does on an almost otherwise blank page, marks Annie's temptation to assimilate the dicta of a literary convention that freezes out narrative "interruptions" in order to achieve the seamless, unambiguous "truth" of a single voice conferring only with itself. As far as Annie is concerned, the interests of patriarchy are embedded in literary conventions to the extent that both extoll the virtues of truth, unity, and consistency. Literary conventions and patriarchy succeed on the presupposition that these elements are *natural*, existing on the strength of their own authority. However, truth, unity and consistency do not exist *a priori* since, as Michael Ryan points out: "the pretence to self-evident truth which would transcend history, annul contestation, and not require practical realization in order to be "true" is itself an ideological weapon in class warfare" ("Self Evidence" 3). Ryan's statement effectively summarizes the reasons for Annie's discomfort with the conventional novel form. Embedded within a novel that seeks closure by offering truth, unity, and consistency is an ideological system that profits from the suppression of everything not homogeneous. Difference of any sort cannot be tolerated because it brings a kind of anarchy to the text, thereby destroying the authority and the integrity of that power structure. Clearly, Annie considers herself engaged in the sort of class warfare described by Ryan. In using the weapons of the dominant class, in this case language itself, Annie subverts meaning to her own end. As in the case of *hysteria*, Annie infuses the word with new significance by making it the method of her attack on patriarchy.

Glossolalia is a revolutionary tactic for it turns on patriarchy the very sound of woman's hysteria. Hysteria is the essence of revolt in that it knows no logic, no reverence, no morality. It knows only the strength of its voice. In citing the work of Mark Kann, Michael Ryan names what has until now been unnameable. Ryan identifies the presence of hysteria in that golden domain of logic:

Men . . . tend to detach themselves from women's violence and "hysteria", especially when it is directed against male rationality and domination . . . Male theoretical detachment in the face of feminine "hysteria" is, like all theory that succeeds always in balancing all the equations, simply a less evident form of hysteria and violence" (*Marxism and Deconstruction* 121).

To the question "what is logic?," one might answer that it is an activity entirely preoccupied with disguising a "hysterical" reaction to anarchy. Logic exists on the basis of its ability to suppress all facts that challenge the standards by which it defines itself. From this perspective, "male theoretical detachment" (as compared to female emotional involvement) is little more than a posture which disguises the violent preconditions under which men propel and maintain themselves in a position of dominance. Language/meaning/reason only exist as compatriots through the violence sustained by the devalued positions of hysteria/meaninglessness/unreason. Ryan offers a further insight when he says that "female hysteria might be a 'rational', therapeutic, and potentially revolutionary form of violence" (121). From this standpoint, female hysteria need not oppose rationality, since within the chaos of rage lies the seed of revolutionary change. If change is the goal, then hysteria possesses its own kind of rationale.

In *Ana Historic*, Richard Anderson becomes the literal and figural voice of patriarchy as he looks over Annie's shoulder and announces "you're just circling around the same idea--and all these bits and pieces thrown in--that's not how to use quotations" (81). As a professor of history and husband to Annie, the comment is not without impact. Unable to explain herself, Annie writes on, irritated at the question and at the absence of a language free from the linguistic "deadfalls" of someone else's value system. As we have seen, Annie resists unity and closure in her writing because she knows these are other concepts which make *prototype*, *pattern*, *ideal woman* possible.

Annie's only response to Richard is a small aside to Ina: "--another quotation, except i quote myself (and what if our heads are full of other people's words? nothing *without* quotation

marks)" (81). In one stroke of the pen, Annie denounces traditional styles of writing. On the other hand, she rejects the subservience implied by quotation marks; she does not want to be part of a writing tradition whose credibility is maintained by continual appeals to authority. Moreover, Annie contests the guarantees of success embedded in a language system that uses quotation marks as a way of obscuring the fact that language sustains its own authority. With the clarity of an outsider, Annie observes: "words, that shifting territory. never one's own. full of deadfalls and hidden claims to reality others have made" (32). Quotation marks are not what they might seem: they are not simple appeals to authority; rather, they are encoded acknowledgments of the way language succeeds in disguising the shared interests of literary convention and patriarchy. If language is the agent of a power brokerage, then Annie's superficially comic remark is true: women *should* respect that language reflects the interests and values of men and place their entire heads (or selves) in quotation marks. Men are the authors of women in that patriarchy dictates female behaviour.

Using a humorous image, Annie refers to the silencing of women's interests in historical texts, and in the institutions of marriage and motherhood which promise recognition but deliver low social prestige. She also points to the ostracism of female texts which undermine the *status quo*. Annie writes her story, but in writing she hears the voice of Richard: "this is nothing, i imagine him saying. meaning unreadable. because this nothing is a place he doesn't recognize" (81). While Richard might think his comment underscores Annie's inability to grasp the style or form of good writing, in reality his words simply emphasize that Annie has acquired a means of expressing a value system at odds with his own. Comprehension is intricately related to writing style, an aspect of language Richard is not able to grasp.

This is not to say that all writing by women is good writing. Certainly this is not the case. What Annie argues for here is that all writing is valid writing if it is the true expression of one's

feelings. However, it must also be said here that the issues of *validity* and *artistic excellence* are not entirely unrelated. If we agree with Annie that the tools of literary expression--that is to say words, phrases, and idioms--are the products of men's rather than women's values, then language will always resist that which it perceives as being alien to itself. Words have a way of insinuating legitimacy or illegitimacy, validity or invalidity. For instance, dichotomies such as "(virgin/tramp)" (56) capture not the polarities of womanhood--who said womanhood was a polarity anyway?--but the politics of a value system that objectifies woman by using sexuality as the omnipotent measuring stick. Synonyms for this duality of female sexuality are myriad; correlatives for male sexuality are comparatively non-existent. Another case in point is Annie's comment about the word "tomboy." Ironically, the word which describes a young girl contains a double masculine: "tomboy, . . . tom, the male of the species plus boy. double masculine, as if girl were completely erased. a girl, especially a young girl, who behaves like a spirited boy--as if only boys could be spirited"(13). Here, again, language displays the masculine bias of its measuring device. One must ask why there is no word to describe a spirited girl without reference to the masculine. One must ask why women are overwhelmingly defined in history and in literature as sexual objects. Is there a space for woman to escape the paralytic death of the pedestal, thereby creating a vision of womanhood that is at once various, precarious, and complicated? Is there a space for woman to escape the exile of Eve's fallen condition and rise beyond a judgement call? The choices are not pedestal or exile. As women write, the possibilities increase that between the altar and the back door an unexplored space exists which transcends the banality of these oppositions.

Annie's revolt against the power of patriarchy to turn her into a stable, consistent, and predictable subject is felt at a number of levels. Not only does she display a narrative style that thwarts distinctions the reader might be inclined to make between herself, Ina, and Mrs. Richards, but in refusing to fix herself in a single narrative voice, Annie declares her dissatisfaction with

language conventions in general. Shifting continually between "I," "she," and "you" is a revolutionary device aimed at deferring the stasis of a unified self whose stability *invites* prescriptions of a value system other than her own. Annie discards conventional novel form for the same reason that in the lines of an experimental text she is everywhere able to dispel and disperse the significance of the grammatical subject. As the "I," "she," and "you" distinctions are obscured and negated, Annie's voice in *Ana Historic* adopts the reverberations of glossolalia. Annie is everywhere and she is nowhere in the text. Her voice is fractured and amplified by her ability to subvert language to her own end. Language becomes Annie's special target of interest in that she understands that words are not benign symbols in the service of a user/writer; rather, they are an ideological tool which supports the political interests of the dominant male class. In challenging the meaning of words, Annie does two things: she reveals the indeterminacy of language--its inability to fix meaning absolutely; and she manipulates words for her own political ends. It is on this basis that Annie appropriates the meaning of *hysteria* and makes it a writing style rather than a female sickness. In demonstrating her own power over words, Annie becomes as treacherous as the enemy she attacks. She turns back on patriarchy her own value structure as embedded in language. Moreover, Annie points the way to a language system which supports no single meaning, but instead defers meaning endlessly.

Figuratively speaking, Annie's revolt against a unified self is a two-edged sword. On one hand, she must reveal the ways in which language and language conventions successfully suppress the interests of women. On the other hand, her method of attack is also linguistic which means that she must also manipulate language to her own ends. Paradoxically, Annie must enter the very system she wishes to destroy. Nowhere is this paradox more acutely articulated than on the last page of *Ana Historic* where Annie has a lesbian encounter with Zoe: "we give place, giving words, giving birth, to each other--she and me. you. hot skin writing skin" (153).

Within the embrace of her lover, Annie recovers the ecstasy and wholeness of her youth. In this moment of intimacy she is aware of the "trees out there" but instead of feeling afraid she is empowered by her feeling. The language here is highly reminiscent of Marlatt in *Touch to My Tongue* where wilderness landscape offers the poet a means of describing her lover's body while subverting the constructs of language which force an I/you; self/other dichotomy. Of particular interest in the above line is the pronoun "she," which effectively refers to both women without the necessity of a gender shift. "She" elides easily into "me" and "you." A trajectory of female sexuality is established.

Our first encounter with the elision she/me/you appears in the first pages of *Ana Historic* as the narrator's shifting perspective you/me/she. At that point, the elision of voices appears as a linguistic strike aimed at exploding the myth of the self as an identifiable and stable grammatical effect. With this latter appearance of a she/me/you elision, however, Annie completely erases the presence of the male. Unlike the first elision, the second is a sexual act effectively suppressing the masculine pronoun. Annie's act of lesbianism is the most revolutionary and anarchical act of all. Lesbianism is a two-edged sword in that it not only provides Annie with the autonomy she seeks in the writing of *Ana Historic*, ~~it erodes the presence of the male in a female hegemony comparable to patriarchy.~~ Is lesbianism an occasion of personal choice or is it a hysterical reaction to a dominant male ideology? This question is only posited--not answered--at the conclusion of Marlatt's novel. What we can establish is the revolutionary nature of lesbianism. It is the most wanton act of all. Indeed, what is a man to do with a woman who, by taking another woman as a lover, subverts the myth that "in matters sexual women really want what men want from women" as Catherine MacKinnon suggests in *Towards a Feminist Perspective of the State* (141). As a personal choice, lesbianism is an understandable, perhaps even inevitable, choice for Annie because it allows her to deal with her anger, fear, and sense of violation by making

a bold and political movement away from heterosexuality. That is not to say that Annie recognizes her actions as political but that her values have shifted so significantly in the process of writing that she no longer has anything in common with Richard Anderson and everything in common with Zoe. Relegated to the devalued side of a male/female dichotomy, the eroticization of this gender hierarchy explodes in the coming together of two female bodies. Indeed, this is the "fact", the (f)stop of "act" that Annie keeps talking about (31).

Since sex is the physical arena in which much of the psychological domination/submission roles of everyday life are enacted, Annie's choice for Zoe is really a choice for herself. Annie is a sexual creature determined to define her own sexuality. Her play on the word (f)act underscores the relationship between "act"/"fact" and the "f" act which is "fuck." For Annie, "fuck" is the end stop of "fact." In other words, Annie's position is quite radical in that she sees heterosexuality as a powerful tool, which like language, serves the interests of patriarchy. A heterosexual act is the prototype for all binary oppositions--the very oppositions that keep lesbian sex on the margins of what is "proper," "reasonable," or "normal." That is not to say that heterosexuality is wrong, but that it has been used as a way of legitimizing the concerns of the dominant class--men. When Annie connects "sex" with "fact" and "act" she points out the power that devolves into the hands of men over their ability to define heterosexuality as the norm, and hence the only (f)actual method of having sex. MacKinnon makes the following comment on the fraternity that underlies our judiciary and legal systems:

When [the state] is most ruthlessly neutral, it is most male; when it is most sex blind, it is most blind to the sex of the standard being applied. When it most closely conforms to precedent, to "facts", to legislative intent, it most closely enforces socially male norms and most thoroughly precludes questioning their content as having a point of view at all. . . . Abstract rights authorize the male experience of the world. Substantive rights for women would not. Their authority would be currently unthinkable: nondominant authority of excluded truth, the voice of silence (248, 249).

Annie sees heterosexuality as little more than a mask for the homosexuality which legitimizes the

state's right to power. Heterosexuality is a means of appeasing woman by offering the illusion of inclusion in a system which otherwise works to exclude her. As MacKinnon suggests, the State is at all points male. Its manipulation of the "standard," "precedent," "facts," and "legislative intent" to present themselves as neutral or "sex blind" is, to use Ryan's terms, a weapon of class warfare. Heterosexuality serves the interests of the State, not because the State is egalitarian, but because in the labour division between heterosexual couples men accrue power by denying women access to the public sphere. Women support the fraternity of the State by participating in a relationship which declares equality, but in fact delivers poverty and low social prestige.³

Lesbian sex, by its very nature, profoundly subverts a male/female dichotomy. That our final vision of Annie depicts her in a sexual act should be no surprise since in that act Annie discovers a you/me/she elision which irrefutably displaces the subordination of woman in an hierarchical male/female dichotomy. The you/me/she elision marks the possibility of difference without opposition or hierarchization. Lesbianism becomes one more stratagem on Annie's part to refuse compartmentalization. Through lesbianism and through her attack on language and language conventions, Annie dismantles patriarchal authority as it exists in textual and social contexts. As Annie sets out to prove the principles which support the distinctions between fact/fiction; history/fantasy; truth/falsity are as ideologically laden as male/female gender roles. Indeed, this is Annie's point when she describes the comments of the historians who try to classify Mrs. Richards's journal:

. . . they think her journal suspect at the archives. 'inauthentic,' fictional possibly, contrived by a daughter who imagined (how ahistoric) her way into the unspoken world of her mother's girlhood . . . it's Mrs. Richards' private world, at least that's what they call it. that's why it's not historical--a document, yes, but not history. you mean its not factual (30-31).

In this passage, Annie calls into question the lack of critical awareness in historians who fail to see that their own perspectives impose a meaning on history in a way that is indistinguishable from the

fiction Annie creates around Mrs. Richards's life. The historians are like Annie since both engage in the process of writing with a set of presuppositions about the subject. To call Annie's imaginings "inauthentic" is to suggest that somewhere there exists an authentic version of Mrs. Richards's life awaiting discovery. This is but another appeal to the authority of self-evidence. The criteria which define "authentic" are themselves derived from a set of ideological principles. Indeed, Annie's point is well taken here since this is a sentiment we have already seen in *Running in the Family*. Annie concurs with Ondaatje in suggesting that generic distinctions between "authentic" and "inauthentic" modes of writing are value judgments, rather than so-termed objective assessments of something so vague as a work's "inherent integrity." On this basis, autobiography or journal writing is neither more nor less authentic than other forms of writing.

Without realizing it, historians who speak of (f)actual history ignore the entirely subjective criteria which distinguish history from fantasy, fact from fiction. Moreover, to say a work is inauthentic because it is private rather than public, as is Mrs. Richards's journal, is, again, to place an unspoken value judgement on all that has consumed women's lives since the beginning of recorded time. If one disbelieves the low social value of domesticity one has only to ask why so few books are written about women's lives and so very very many written about the exploits of men: "the ships men ride into the pages of history. the winning names. the nameless women who are vessels of their destiny. the mute matter of being wife and mother--ahistoric" (121). How has the definition of "heroic" come to mean only those adventures on the high sea? As Annie suggests, a whole half of the world has gone down into the anonymity of ahistory as a consequence of the value judgements involved in defining heroism. In the writing of *Ana Historic*, Annie undermines traditional values of heroism by establishing her own set of criteria with which to assess the significance of women's labour in the domestic realm.

Annie's use of disrupted narratives, simultaneous plot lines, and multiple voices is not

merely a structural choice, it is a methodological tool aimed at dismantling conventional theories of fact, fiction, and history. To the extent that plurality of voice, style, and structure overturn the presupposition that (f)actual history and truth are innately connected, *Ana Historic* is about the ultimate unseating of authority. Specifically, Annie is concerned to unseat patriarchal authority. In order to achieve this end she must set up her own authority since without a voice her concerns will never be realized. Annie recognizes the complexity of her plight as depicted in the terror with which she confronts the wardrobes in the opening scene of the novel. The phrase "wardrobes. wordrobes. warding off what?" (9) succinctly captures the impetus of Annie's fear. Quite simply, she is well aware of the treacherous game she engages in when she takes up the pen to write. She must reveal the ideological power of words, but to do so she must aggressively posit her own words. Annie's task as a revolutionary is a difficult one since she must engage in a power struggle that, ideally, will leave neither men nor women in power. In Annie's elision between "wardrobes" and "wordrobes" and countless other elisions that occur in the novel, there surfaces a pattern of thought devoid of hierarchical structuring. With the unseating of patriarchal authority must come the ultimate unseating of all authority. Roland Barthes explains in his classic essay "The Death of the Author":

writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature . . . , by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as a text"), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases--reason, science, law (47).

↳ God just a word?

Multiple voices present multiple viewpoints, and therefore, the impossibility of a single author in possession of the text's secret meaning. The revolutionary nature of *Ana Historic* lies in the self-consciousness with which it attempts to demonstrate the ultimate failure of language to fix meaning. From this perspective the elision you/me/she could easily continue to include he/us/they. While the interests of a male-centred society might have us believe that certain

"truths" are natural or innate to humankind, if one presses language far enough, these "truths" soon reveal their subjective origins. Annie's fear as she approaches the wardrobes which turn into wordrobes is complex. She must expose the theological activity maintained at the core of such rudimentary oppositions fact/fiction, history/fantasy, truth/falsity; but she must transcend this "hypostasis," as Barthes calls it, to show the truly revolutionary ability of language to exist in a state of constant deferral. Nowhere is this more clearly dramatized than in the slippage that occurs between the women's names: Annie, Ana (Mrs. Richards), Ange, and Ina. Written as an epigraph to one of the novel's sections is the post-structuralist notion that the *différance* between "Ana" and "Ina" is "the difference of a single letter, the sharing of a not" (67). The women are distinguished from each other by the moot difference of a single letter; each woman's personality exists only as a relational distance from the next. Annie, Ana, Ange, and Ina only become linguistic slippages in a text forever seduced by their mutability. Far from being stabilized metaphors for particular individuals, these names are wont to turn at will into other entities and abstractions. Not only will *Ana Historic* turn into the facelessness of *An Ahistoric*, but "Ina" turns easily into random particles of speech: "I-na, I-no-longer, i can't turn you into a story" (11). "Ange" turns easily into the scrawled inscription "a-n-g-e-l" on a child's writing slate (91). Annie Anderson's ability to metamorphosize comes in the ease with which she turns, for a few brief pages, into Annie Torrent. In the midst of all this word play one wonders if Marlatt is not posing a visual joke at the reader's expense when she provides *Annie*, the alpha position of the Roman alphabet ("aardvaark? Out of the ark, Ana, and off Ararat--please", 91), with a lover named *Zoe* who appears at the novel's end. Bracketing the alphabet allows Marlatt to invoke closure only to undermine that closure in the final lines of the novel: "the reach of your desire" is a gesture that has the synchronous effect of "reading us into the page ahead" (153). The novel ends with a movement into another text. Closure is escaped once again.

Identity is an unstable, inconsistent, and unpredictable state for Annie as it is for the other women of *Ana Historic*. Through the slippage of female pronouns she is able to move in and out of the personas of Ina and Mrs. Richards. The process of writing becomes a way for Annie to interpret the trauma of Ina's past and to create a history for the ahistorical Mrs. Richards. In the following passage, Annie draws all three women together through her reference to fear and the woods. Notably this is an "anonymous territory where names fade" :

i want to talk to you. (now? when it's too late?) i want to say something
tell you something about the bush and what you were afraid of, what i escaped
to: anonymous territory where names faded to a tiny hubbub, lost in all that
other noise . . . i was native, i was the child who grew up with wolves,
original lost girl, elusive, vanished from the world of men . . . but you,
a woman, walked with the possibility of being seen, ambushed in the sudden
arms of bears or men. 'never go into the woods with a man,' you said, 'and
don't go into the woods alone' " (18).

Remarkably, Annie addresses herself in this passage as well as Ina and Mrs. Richards. "[i] want to talk to you" is a comment directed to all three women. Ina's presence is felt in the comment repeated from Annie's childhood: " '[N]ever go into the woods with a man,' you said". Mrs. Richards's presence is also felt in Annie's gesture of understanding: "i want to . . . tell you something about the bush and what you were afraid of" This is clearly a reference to Mrs. Richards's encounter with the two Siwash men in the forest. Surprised by the two men who appear on the path before her, Mrs. Richards, paralyzed with fear, stands alone and foolish after the men crowd harmlessly past. They had only meant to pass but Mrs. Richards is left feeling perplexed and embarrassed by her fear. Annie is no stranger to fear either. She has heard her mother's warning about the forest. Unheeded as a child, she experienced no harm. As an adult, however, the phrase "but you, a woman, walked with the possibility of being seen, ambushed in the sudden arms of bears or men" applies equally well to Annie as to any other woman. All women walk "with the possibility of being seen [and] ambushed." Indeed, this is Annie's specific terror when she approaches the wardrobes in the opening scene of the novel. She describes her plight into the night

"trembling and bare-armed (in nightie even)" (10), poised before the wardrobe clutching a carving knife. In this state she awaits a "Frankenstein" she imagines breathing heavily on the other side of the door.

Annie, Mrs. Richards, and Ina experience fear. But while the latter two women shrink from their fear by avoiding the woods, Annie confronts both the woods and the wardrobes. Mrs. Richards becomes a focal point for Annie in that she extends backwards from Annie's world into Ina's. Having known the ecstasy of writing and the freedom of the woods, Mrs. Richards succumbs to her fear and recedes into the silence of marriage. In assuming the name Mrs. Ben Springer, Mrs. Richards rejects the forest and the process of self-expression that comes with writing. Mrs. Richards becomes like Ina in that both women embrace marriage as "a woman's place. safe. suspended out of the swift race of the world" (24). When Annie says she wants to tell the women something about their fear, that something is the innocence of the forest. Contrary to what they are told, the forest is a wilderness of self-discovery, its joys those of prelapsarian Eden:⁴

the sighing, sighing of bodies, the cracks and chirps, odd rustles, something inhuman i slipped through. in communion with trees, following the migratory routes of bugs, the pathways of water, the warning sounds of birds, i was native . . . (18).

What are the women to make of their fear? Annie's experience in the woods as a child proves the harmlessness of the forest. And yet, the women's fear is real. Mrs. Richards's fear is intense enough to convince her to marry and never enter the woods again. Ina never went into the woods in the first place. Annie, on the other hand, is terrorized not by the woods she knows to be harmless, but by some unknown marauder in the wardrobes. Not surprisingly, Annie provides the answer to the female fear that permeates *Ana Historic*. Annie opens the door of the wardrobe to find that it is empty. This motion of aggression is not unlike the situation forced upon Mrs. Richards in the forest. The harmlessness of the Siwesh men is foisted upon Mrs. Richards to an embarrassing degree. Every apparent situation of danger ends in nothing. The true facts remain; no one--

specifically *no woman* --gets raped, murdered, or disfigured in Marlatt's novel. Forest and wardrobes present a sense of impending doom, but that doom is never realized. Mr. Springer never gets to rescue his bride; Richard Anderson is never forced to retrieve his wife from the molesting arms of Frankenstein. However much these women appear to be maidens in distress, the facts show their physical danger is non-existent.

Clearly, Marlatt is saying something about female autonomy and its relation to writing. In the woods Mrs. Richards displays self-direction and self-expression. Regrettably, however, she misjudges the locus of her fear. She wrongly assumes her physical safety is at stake. Had she recognized that the real danger lies, not in the woods, but in the conspiracy to keep her out of the woods, Mrs. Richards would never have laid down her pen with the end stop of "Today I have accepted [Ben Springer]" (146). In giving up the pen, Mrs. Richards accepts the fantastic legacy of drunken sailors, wild Indians, and hungry bears--all of whom fail to appear. She accepts the myth that without men women are imperiled. In *Literary Women* Ellen Moers discusses the myth that has traditionally kept female heroines' adventures out of the forest and inside interior settings. Moers cites the Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe as one author's compromise with the strictures of society and her desire to send women on dangerous and exotic voyages of discovery. Inside Mrs. Radcliffe's castles her heroines "can scuttle miles along corridors, descend into dungeons, and explore secret chambers without a chaperone, because a Gothic castle, however much in ruins, is still an indoor setting and therefore a freely female space" (126). As Moers remarks, Mrs. Radcliffe has managed to simulate in the labyrinth of the castle all the uncertainties and perils experienced by the heroines' male counterparts in an outdoor landscape. This female substitute for the picaresque novel allows heroines the appearance of mobility and autonomy while retaining their virtue.

The distinction between an indoor and outdoor setting is a question, then, of propriety.

While it is proper for a woman to experience the indoor realm, it is improper for her to expose herself to the dangers of the forest. Without coming right out and asking about the relationship between impropriety/propriety/proper/*property*, we can assume that the women of *Ana Historic* are warned to stay away from the woods because it is not a fit place for women to travel. To be sure, Mrs. Richards manages to walk that fine line between propriety and impropriety. Although the location of her ramblings is questionable she manages to maintain her respectability through the activity that brought her there. That is to say, walking has long been considered an appropriate past-time for a woman. As Moers notes, "a whole history of literary feminism might be told in terms of the metaphor of walking" (30). Walking is the activity we most associate with Mrs. Richards. Not only do we see her frequently walking in the forest and to and from the school house where she teaches, but sections titles such as "Walking to Gastown" and "Walking in Gastown" reiterate the image of Mrs. Richards out alone on foot. Walking in the forest is simply a metaphor for her decision to come to Canada. Lacking the escort of a husband, her journey is a solitary venture. On one hand, Mrs. Richards is remarkable in that she easily abandons ideals of "acceptable female behaviour" by choosing a path declared safe, and by attempting to describe that experience in writing. On the other hand, her sojourn on foot allows her to retain the dignity of a lady. One thinks here of all the 'proper' Victorian women one has encountered taking turns in the gardens of novelists such as Jane Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot to name only a few. Confident yet refined, Mrs. Richards displays those qualities which make her a respected school teacher as well as a survivor in the same rank as Susanna Moodie.⁵

Even so, we are forced to wonder with Annie at the circumstances which precipitate Mrs. Richards's decision to marry and to give up writing. If we ponder for a moment the image of Mrs. Richards hovering over her notebook, something of the woman's courage emerges in the deliberation with which she sets about to tell her story. She writes and edits her writing, somehow aware of an

onlooker about to scrutinize her work: ". . . the roots of enormous Trees going down into--its brackish waters evade the eye--'Tis a nameless colour as if stained by the Trees themselves, darker than tea . . ." (46). In this passage she has crossed out the word "brackish". This practise continues episodically in *Ana Historic* until Mrs. Richards ceases to write at all. Annie traces the end of the school teacher's writing to the occasion of her marriage to Ben Springer: "history married her to Ben Springer and wrote her off . . . 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 writing stops" (134). Herein lies the key to Annie's obsession with Mrs. Richards. This passage focuses the issues of fear, propriety, danger, the forest, and domesticity as these things relate to female writing. Mrs. Richards married Ben Springer and gave up writing because she became involved in a process of self-censorship. The canceling out of words is a direct parallel to the self-negating impact of fear in Mrs. Richards's life. Since the fear is inconsequential, the imagined censor standing over Mrs. Richards's shoulder is non-existent. Virginia Woolf offers a provocative insight when she describes an image of a woman who, like Mrs. Richards, bends over a notebook inscribing her thoughts. A shadow, suddenly, falls across the page. In the middle of a sentence, the woman abruptly ends her writing. As Woolf describes in "Professions for Women" it is the Angel in the House casting her long shadow of self-censorship:

You may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House . . . She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish . . . And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words . . . She slipped behind me and whispered: 'My dear, you are a young woman . . . Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own' (28).

The shadow which falls across Mrs. Richards's page compelling her to give up writing is the line of fear. And while this line of fear is self-imposed, its shape is that of the patriarchy. Somewhere in the shape of her line, Mrs. Richards has accepted the truth about the woods as explained by Ben Springer. She believes she is in need of a protector in the same way she believes she is in need of

editing. Both are self-canceling acts.

Danger, then, is not inherent in the forest but in an ideology that restricts woman's activities to the silence of the domestic sphere. Danger lies in opening oneself up to censorship, to the opinions and values of those whose interests are at odds with one's own. As Annie points out in the above line, within the title "Mrs.," Mrs. Ben Springer finds the sanction of a society that pronounces a woman "good," because she retreats into the safety and silence of a home. There is only one other choice and that is "the street." Not only does a woman receive the misapprobation of society for her implied illicit activities there, but by implication the writing and notoriety of her public exposure send her down in infamy. In contrast to the woman who retreats to the sanctuary of marriage, the latter is an "evil" woman. The following equations arise:

writing--speech--presence--forest--street--danger--public = a bad woman

silence--anonymity--absence--home--domesticity--safety--private = a good woman

Patriarchy must necessarily keep the pen from women because within the activity of self-expression women assert their presence. For instance, the woman who writes will discover that the essence of *propriety* is *property*. The word p-r-o-p-e-r-t-y is shockingly embedded in the structure of p-r-o-p-r-i-e-t-y. Inasmuch as "i" is a metaphor for the self, the absence of this "i" marks the only difference from *propriety* (to behave well, to act within the bounds of good behaviour), to *property* (an owner's possession). A woman who does not write will never see this. A woman who does not express herself will not see the way in which female behaviour is controlled by an interest group which, until recently, openly referred to women as chattels.

Writing is the only way Annie can forestay absence. In writing about Ina and Mrs. Richards, Annie forestays the ahistory that threatens to envelope them all. Perceptively, Annie has hit upon the fact that language is a wild zone. Language is the carrier not of truth but of

ideological values which are as variant as the writers who posit them. Within that wild zone--the text of *Ana Historic*--Annie crosses out the "I" as a subject worthy of subjectification. She drops it from her grammatical sentence. When forced to use it she elides her essence into other forms: me/she/you. In the quintessential "I" Annie sees not herself but a process that dichotomizes the world into an I/you opposition. That opposition has done everything to devalue the voice of women since it always throws on women the weight of being the *you*, the *other*, the *object* on the devalued side of a masculine *I*, *self*, *subject*. Even when women use the "I" they are engaging in a language system that supports the interests of patriarchy. To explode the "I" and make the self unstable, inconsistent, and unpredictable is to contest the objectification of woman as a commodity.

one way or another
 isn't God in a C
 all
 quality

CHAPTER THREE

Ondaatje & Marlatt Resist the Death of the Author

Inasmuch as *I am and follow after* my father, I am the dead man and I am death. Inasmuch as *I am and follow after* my mother, I am life that perseveres, I am the living and the living feminine. I am my father, my mother, and me, and me who is my father my mother and me, my son and me, death and life, the dead man and the living feminine, and so on. There, this is who I am, a certain masculine and a certain feminine.

Jacques Derrida

If we grant that Marlatt and Ondaatje succeed in portraying characters who resist closure through their ability to defy social and textual conventions, then the next logical question should be whether or not the authors are themselves in any way affected by their depictions of indeterminate selves? Clearly the answer is *yes* on a number of levels. Both Marlatt and Ondaatje use the occasion of multivocality in their novels to elide their authorial voices with that of a surrogate character. Ondaatje does this in the latter pages of *Coming Through Slaughter* through the voice of Buddy Bolden. Likewise, Marlatt reveals her authorial voice through the surrogate voice of Annie Torrent towards the end of *Ana Historic*. These moments of autobiography are interesting in that they seem to work against the basic premise of the authors' works. In other words, insofar as *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Ana Historic* implicitly support Barthes's post-structuralist theory that "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning

(the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original blend and clash" ("The Death of the Author" 146), the presence of Ondaatje and Marlatt in their own texts contradicts their otherwise successful bid to thwart authority. To be sure, it can be said that the presence of Ondaatje and Marlatt in their own novels obscures the difference between author and character which is a *de-centralizing* of authority. I will attempt to show, however, that these moments of autobiography are, instead, a last attempt to forestay the vertigo which threatens to engulf the text, obliterating with it the author's signature. Both writers clearly understand the artifice of the word "I" as applied to a character, a narrator, an author, and especially to an autobiographer; both writers understand that "language is the first and last structure of madness" (Foucault, *Madness & Civilization* 100). Yet this must necessarily be an unsavoury position for an author who signs her/his name to a text. To acknowledge the absolute madness of words is to conceive of texts without Authors. Taken to this extreme, writing is an indeterminate space without authorship; it is that space which absorbs all other forms of madness and makes them possible.

Whereas chapters one and two of this thesis examined the *characters* in Ondaatje's and Marlatt's novels, this final chapter will focus specifically on the impact of multiplicity on the *authors* themselves. In considering the autobiographical moments that appear in *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Ana Historic*, *Running in the Family* takes on special significance because of its explicit and thorough going interest in autobiography. For this reason, the latter half of this chapter concerns itself with the problems that surround Ondaatje's decision to invoke an autobiographical "I" in *Running in the Family*. Ondaatje's decision to incorporate a multitude of voices in this latter text has far greater implications than simply his desire to erode traditional views of the self at a fictional level. That is to say, Ondaatje calls into question the power of language to evoke even the semblance of an author's voice. As Paul de Man argues in

"Autobiography as De-facement" the process of telling one's own story is far from mimetic. The autobiographical "I" is an invention of language rather than the other way around. Autobiography creates the "I" then stands back from it to declare *itself* the product of an extratextual referent. Autobiographical moments as well as autobiographical texts are consequentially at all points caught up in denying the entirely linguistic nature of the selves they project. On this basis, an author's signature is merely another means of contesting his/her own tropological existence. Indeed, the crux of the paradox is focused most poignantly in the signature itself, since without the inscribing power of tropes the author is nowhere present.

Ondaatje's autobiographical moment in *Coming Through Slaughter* addresses on a lesser scale the general question of authorial voice which extends throughout *Running in the Family*. Through an encounter with Bolden, Ondaatje not only asserts his authorial presence but he demonstrates the impossibility of maintaining such a position in a text that denies the existence of the self as subject. Glass, mirrors, and ice are images that permeate *Coming Through Slaughter* as a way of connecting and creating the growing fragility, and potentially lethal nature of Bolden's life. Not surprisingly, Ondaatje uses this motif as a point of entry into the character of Bolden. Towards the end of the novel, after Bolden has disintegrated into madness, Ondaatje reintroduces the investigative "I" initially encountered in the opening scene of *Coming Through Slaughter*. As in that first encounter, the investigative "I" describes in detail the home town area of the now forgotten Bolden. With the phrase "Died 1931" as it appears late in the novel, however, the investigative "I" turns into Michael Ondaatje the author. To demonstrate this point consider the discursive turn in the following line: "when [Bolden] went mad he was the same age as I am now." Is it more than a coincidence that Bolden died at 31 and, given the 1976 publication date of *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje was likely 31 when he began research on the novel? In arriving as a stranger in Bolden's home town, the investigative "I" introduced at the

novel's beginning and end appears to be none other than Ondaatje about to embark on a journey to recover and invent the memory of Bolden who bears more than a passing likeness to himself:

The photograph moves and becomes a mirror. When I read he stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself, there was a shock of memory . . . Why did my senses stop at you? There was the sentence, 'Buddy Bolden who became a legend when he went berserk in a parade . . . ' What was there in that, before I knew your nation your colour your age, that made me push my arm forward and spill it through the front of your mirror and clutch myself? (134).

The gesture of reaching through the mirror to grasp Bolden is an act of self-invention and self-annihilation. By recognizing himself in the photo of Bolden that turns into a mirror of himself, Ondaatje enters a looking glass world where his essence is defined and proliferated by the character he has created. Ondaatje is imbued with life by the Bolden of *Coming Through Slaughter*, just as that Bolden is endowed with life by the historical figure on which he is based. Essentially, Ondaatje says with Derrida in the epigraph to this chapter "*I am and follow after*" (*The Ear and the Other*, 16). Whereas Derrida means the statement in a genealogical way, Ondaatje's tracing in the footsteps of the historical and fictional Boldens is a confession of the fact that without that character--specifically, without that character *in writing*--he, the author, would not exist. In tracing his face in the image of Bolden, Ondaatje invents himself by forging his presence onto the novel. Ondaatje *is and follows after* the fictional Buddy Bolden, a character who *is and follows after* the historical Bolden. As Sam Solecki remarks:

Given our knowledge of contemporary cultural history it is almost impossible not to see the suicidal cornetist Buddy Bolden as representing not just Ondaatje but also a particular kind of modern artist--the artist as exemplary sufferer [behind whom] we inevitably discern the shadowy presences of Plath and others (247).

Solecki extends the trajectory to include other artists who besides Bolden and Ondaatje are marked by their ability to push beyond the boundaries of accepted art.

However much Ondaatje's reach through the looking glass reifies his existence, that reach is also an embracing of death. Ondaatje becomes like Narcissus who falls in love with his own

reflection, and is consequentially incapable of tearing his eyes away from the pond into which his image is cast. In the act of self-reflexivity there is a kiss of death in that action and life are suddenly and completely arrested with a gaze that folds back on itself. Implicitly, Ondaatje acknowledges the self-annihilation in his gaze as seen in the fact that the gaze through the mirror is succeeded by Bolden's description of his catatonic existence in the House of Detention. The final image of the novel invokes the ambiguous figure of a man seated in front of a barred window. Desolate and alone, the man's posture anticipates death. Between the mirror and the barred window Ondaatje has chosen not to separate himself from Bolden. The two are conflated in the image of the man awaiting death. Ondaatje achieves this grammatically by confusing the identity of the speaker so that the "I" who speaks of "three needles lost in me" is also the investigative "I" whom we encounter again on the street (134,135). So framed between life and death, Ondaatje's autobiographical moment in *Coming Through Slaughter* looks forward into existence and backward on the paralysis of death.

In *Ana Historic*, Daphne Marlatt has a comparable moment of autobiography which similarly invokes the ambiguous state of authorial life *and* death. During a conversation with Zoe, Annie Anderson elides into the character Annie Torrent:

i suppose i'm getting near the end, i offer. it's just that i don't know what to do with them.

it's your novel, she [Zoe] says.

but that's the trouble with characters . . .

'characters.' you talk as if they were strangers. who are they if they aren't you?
(140)

When Marlatt, in the guise of Annie Torrent, says of the novel's characters "i don't know what to do with them", she insinuates herself into a text that otherwise denies her existence. Using the pseudonym Annie Torrent may give the illusion that the author is merely another voice in a

trajectory of female voices, but through the power of suggestion, Marlatt raises for one last time the issue of authorial omnipotence. Of course, Marlatt allows Zoe to undermine Annie's comment, thereby forcing the narrative back into its former register of consciousness, but the damage has been done in the moment Ana Richards, Annie Anderson, Ina and the other female characters are described as "characters." In that moment Marlatt divests *Ana Historic* of its reality by foisting upon it an extrafictional reality as embedded in the term "character." According to this terminology the women are not people, but authorial constructs.

Ostensibly, Marlatt is trying to make a point about the artifice which divides characters from "real people." The politics of the novel compel her to deflate the distinctions between fiction and the "real world." This is a point Marlatt reiterates later when Annie Torrent refers to the process of writing as "fooling myself on the other side of history as if it were a line dividing the real from the unreal" (152). Marlatt's point is well taken. The obfuscation of identities that occurs in *Ana Historic* must necessarily extend to include the author. Ironically enough, however, in drawing attention to the artifice which separates art and reality, Marlatt unwittingly embraces the death that comes to her characters at the close of the book. That Marlatt is aware of this impending death is everywhere seen in the myriad ways she draws attention to the novel's end. At one point she says: "the story is 'only a story' insofar as it ends". A few lines later she comments: "i don't know how to end it, i don't think i even want to" (150). Even the last line of the novel looks forward to another text: "the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead" (153). Sensing the inevitable close of the novel, Marlatt--in the voice of Annie Torrent--disavows the ability of the text to close back on itself and with that gesture bring death to all its characters. Annie Torrent speaks and with the power of speech holds out one last hope that page 153 will be but the beginning of another text.

So caught between the life and death of the text, Marlatt strikingly captures the moment in

the following image: "Annie Torrent, i said. (she looked up from the water she was floating something on in the dark, white robes or words, silver boats)" (152). Like Ondaatje's gaze into the mirror, Marlatt's turn to gaze into the eyes of Annie Torrent is a self-conscious recognition of herself as creator and creature of the tropes that comprise *Ana Historic*. Annie Torrent has already identified herself as the authorial "i" of the novel--the author who possesses omnipotence. Hence, the "i" in the above passage is Marlatt's shedding of all proper names to present and disguise herself anew in the pronoun "i." Marlatt is both Annie Torrent who floats suspended in dark waters of "white robes or words, or silver boats", and she is the "i" who addresses Annie Torrent. She is the self calling out to her own reflection. Marlatt is Narcissus, as is Ondaatje, in that she also casts her image into the water and then calls for that image to return to her. The appellation "Annie Torrent" is a self address. It is the self calling to the self; it is Marlatt calling herself into being.

That Marlatt recognizes the transience of her presence in *Ana Historic* is seen in the physical position of Annie Torrent. The general surrealism of the woman as she lies suspended in dark waters is reiterated by the fact that she floats only on white robes, robes which on second glance remarkably reveal themselves as "words." Just as Annie Anderson calls up the metaphoricity of language in her elision of *wardrobes* and *wordrobes*, so Marlatt points to the ability of words to transform themselves from one thing into another. Words are like robes in that both act as agents to reveal and to conceal a hidden identity. Just as a garment reveals or conceals a body depending on whether the garment is embraced or thrown off, so words reveal and conceal meaning depending on the nature of the ideology being embraced or eschewed. Words, then, are not the vehicles of fixed interpretation, but of indeterminate meanings which stand suspended in a watery aporia.

As the "i" of Marlatt continues to gaze at herself who is Annie Torrent, the "white robes"

which are "words" transform themselves again--this time into "silver boats". With the incisiveness of a poet Marlatt makes the transformations concomitant rather than sequential. "White robes," "words," and "silver boats" exist synchronously because they are metaphors for each other, as well as a collective metaphor for the ability of language to suspend meaning indefinitely. Although words might present themselves as signifiers of meaning, as Marlatt's image suggests, words and meaning are suspended *together* over a dark watery aporia which is itself fluid and unsettled. In this scenario there is no transcendental signifier because every element is in a state of suspension or flux. Only the woman exists as a hologram projected by the ability of words to present themselves as stable bearers of meaning. In "The Death of the Author" Barthes argues:

writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing (142).

Marlatt's image of a woman suspended on a sea of words graphically demonstrates Barthes's theory as well as the unsavoury fallout of such a theory for an author who desires to inscribe her/his name on a text. If writing is a "neutral, composite, oblique space where the subject slips away," then there can be no author except for the holographic author projected through a trick of words. In addressing the woman/author she has created, Marlatt makes a last great effort to forestall the dissolution of her own voice in a text that continually points to the tropological nature of the pronoun "i." For an author to say "i" as does Marlatt is to participate in the illusion that behind a text, especially an autobiographical text, lies the Author--the transcendental signifier in whom all meaning is anchored. Uttering the word "i" is to assert the presence of the self. However, as Marlatt's elliptical self conveys, to say "i" is merely to beg the question of presence since the author is nowhere present except as an effect of language. An autobiographical "i" such as the one Marlatt uses to address herself is caught in its own aporia between life and death. In the moment of

utterance the self appears, but it is a self containing only the power of a hologram. That is not to say that the Author does not exist, but that he/she exists only as the occasion or the autobiographical moment of saying "I." In Barthes's words: "[I]nguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as / is nothing other than the instance saying / : language knows a subject not a person" (145). From a feminist standpoint the argument could be continued here to show that patriarchy succeeds on the basis of its ability to use language to turn persons into subjects. Hence, the occasion of the / in language is both the cause and the effect of a set of power relations which convene to tie the individual to him/herself through the force of gender stereotypes. Under such a system, men profit from the fact that gender automatically ties them to certain privileges to which women are not given access.

Early on in *Ana Historic* Annie Anderson says of her mother Ina: "if only I'd . . . provoked you into a torrent of words" (49). That statement is offered as Annie's insight into the fact that Ina's hysteria and the somnolence ensuing electroshock could have been cured with a *torrent* of words. Unending speech is the avenue to truth and psychological health only because with speech comes self-expression and the presence of self-identity. Without speech there is nothing but absence, a point Annie repeats as a way of understanding Mrs. Richards's ability to write herself into history through the inscriptions in her journal. When those entries end, there is only silence and the absence of ahistory. In using the name *Annie Torrent* for her surrogate self, Marlatt again links presence with language (written and spoken). Even in the configuration of her name, Annie Torrent points to the power of language to project presence even though that presence is everywhere at work denying its tropological nature.

As these autobiographical moments demonstrate Marlatt and Ondaatje insert themselves into their respective novels as a way of acknowledging and defying the ability of an Author to imprint the text he/she writes. At one level, *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Ana Historic*

employ a myriad of voices as a way of flouting the idea that there can be a "correct" perspective to a text. This cacophony of voices, stylistically, allows Marlatt and Ondaatje to interrupt their texts without leaving a wave of authorial "wisdom" which the reader is admonished to follow. At a theoretical level, however, the imprint is there. The moment the author enters the text, he/she invokes his/her own death by becoming, like the characters, an effect of grammar. The self who looks at itself is immediately paralyzed through an ensuing arrest of action, and through the endless possibilities that are annihilated in the moment the self becomes subjectivized. Autobiography is life because it allows the author the fleeting and powerful presence of the pronoun "I"; and it is death because the process of self-scrutiny ties the individual to him/herself and submits him/her to others in this way.¹

Ondaatje's voyage into autobiography in *Running in the Family* is a sustained example of the life and death stroke contained in the word "I." As most critics of *Running in the Family* are inclined to point out, Ondaatje's text is an experiment with the boundaries of autobiography as a genre bordering fiction and history. *Running in the Family* has variously been called an existential biography, a personal history, an oral history, a memoir, and a historiographic metafiction.² But these definitions are lacking because they sidestep the artifice of the pronoun "I" in their fervour to uncover the artifice of generic categories. In her article "The Alphabet of the Self: Generic and Other Slippages in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*," Smaro Kamboureli draws attention to Ondaatje's "I" by suggesting that his text is "not a genre but a rhetorical trope which reveals the subject's double desire to see the self verified by writing and to imitate writing" (81). This statement seems to come the closest to defining Ondaatje's work as the author's attempt to invent himself, and to obscure the simultaneous death knell which accompanies that attempt. Excepting the single page which precedes "Asian Rumours," *Running in the Family* is narrated by a myriad of voices which find their resting point in the voice of the "I"

which first appears on page 18. As Linda Hutcheon says: "this 'I' of the text is a constant presence, the one who is constantly 'running' " (*The Canadian Postmodern* 86). Specifically, the "I" is Michael Ondaatje, as implied by the descriptions he offers of the dream which inspires him to travel to Sri Lanka in search of his past. Ondaatje's "I" appears throughout *Running in the Family*, guiding the reader through various scenes and dialogues which find their focal point in the maternal and paternal histories of the author's family.

Michael Ondaatje as he appears in the pages of *Running in the Family* is an unstable, unreliable, and whimsical narrator. Not only do these qualities allow Ondaatje to obscure the identities of his characters, but, as we shall see, Ondaatje's participation in this realm of obfuscated selves contains some rather grim side effects for an author who is still attached to his signature. Interestingly enough, at one particular point Ondaatje manages to slip momentarily into the persona of his father, Mervyn Ondaatje. This is a crucial moment in *Running in the Family* since it provides Ondaatje with just such a moment of autobiography as we have observed in *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Ana Historic*. Certainly, *Running in the Family* differs from the other two novels in that it aspires to be autobiographical throughout. The "I" is sustained throughout *Running in the Family* as it is not in either *Coming Through Slaughter* or *Ana Historic*. Nevertheless, there is a moment--again toward the end of the work--where Ondaatje calls particular attention to autobiography as an act of self-referentiality. In the section "Thankikama" Ondaatje describes his father's drive to Colombo, his meeting with Doris, and his later drive to the various roadhouses along the road to Kegalle. With a cursory shift from a third person narrative to the first person voice, Ondaatje elides himself with the character of Mervyn. Ondaatje describes the family home on a moonless night and the case of liquor under his father's arm. Then, at the turn of the sentence, the "he" turns to "I": "I sit on the bed like a lost ship on a white sea" (188). Subsequently, the narrative turns back to the third person with "[h]e

saw himself with the bottle. Where was his book. He had lost it". The search for the book is a curious one, for on the following page it is mysteriously discovered:

[h]e knelt down on the red tile, slowly, not wishing to disturb their [the ants'] work. It was page 189. He had not got that far in the book yet but he surrendered it to them. He sat down forgetting the mirror he had been moving towards. Scared of the company of the mirror (189).

Notably, Ondaatje has achieved an elision with his father by making Mervyn's book the text of *Running in the Family*. The statement "[i]t was page 189" marks the precise moment at which Ondaatje and his father elide. Both men mark their presence on page 189. Unlike our vision of Ondaatje in *Coming Through Slaughter* where the author reaches through a photograph which turns to a mirror image of Bolden, in this scene Ondaatje is afraid of the mirror. The mirror is merely a gratuitous image for what Ondaatje has already managed to do through the grammatical shifts he/I/he. Language, especially as it appears on page 189, acts as a mirror to reflect not only the elision of father and son, but the dissolution of both figures in a sea of tropes. Consequently, Ondaatje's fear not only involves the shock of self-identity that comes with a gaze into the mirror, but it also entails the resisted knowledge of the illusory nature of self-inscription. Every gaze into a mirror is self-effacing in that it casts attention away from material existence, conferring it instead upon a shadowy self that can only simulate presence.

The interplay between father and son as subjects of a text dramatizes the mortalizing impact of language. Paul de Man explains the relationship between author and autobiography:

We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all aspects, by the resources of the medium? ("Autobiography as De-Facement" 69)

Ondaatje's experimentation with autobiography is already an acknowledgement of the ways in which language presents a skewed vision of the self. The author's slippage between fact and fiction highlights the selection process called upon to govern which aspects of a life are exposed and which

are suppressed. Language, as it appears in autobiography, necessarily works to reveal certain facets of a life at the expense of concealing others. Ondaatje's interest in scandal only underscores the fact that autobiography is always already replete with omissions and deletions. Paul de Man takes this point further, however, by suggesting that autobiography is not merely a partial telling and suppression of the truth about oneself. At this level, autobiography sustains, intact, the figure of the autobiographer standing behind the text as its ultimate referent. Contrarily, de Man argues that the self is at all points an invention of the text. That Ondaatje knows this at least subconsciously is apparent in the fear he expresses toward the mirror. In his reference to the mirror, Ondaatje takes *Running in the Family* to its greatest extremity by referring to the ever-present threat of self-annihilation that autobiography poses to its author. To look into the face of the mirror is to paralyze the self by making it into a subject no longer capable of endless possibilities. The self which looks back on its life is a self determined to force meaning and closure onto a history that is otherwise disparate and polysemous. To look back on one's past is to engage in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy in as much as meaning is imposed *after* the events have been lived. Autobiography is a means of subjectivizing the individual by tying to it a post-mortem identity.

The process of writing about one's life produces an image of the author that appears authentic but is fictional to the extent that the author has been intricately involved in determining his or her own image. This much Ondaatje overtly acknowledges in his repeated references to the fictional elements contained in *Running in the Family*. But de Man's point is more aggressive than this. In reference to autobiography he asks:

[D]oes the referent determine the figure, or is it the other way around: is the illusion of reference not a correlation of the structure of the figure, that is to say no longer clearly and simply a referent at all but something more akin to a fiction which then, however, in its own turn, acquires a degree of referential productivity? (69).

De Man's theory is a challenging one in that it thoroughly undermines the traditional view of autobiography as a mimetic representation of an individual life. In this passage de Man suggests that autobiography is an authorial construct whose success depends on its ability to obscure the artifice involved in positing the "I" of the author. Once the occasion of the "I" is uttered, the text then assumes its own power of "referential productivity" by disguising the entirely constructed nature of the self it portrays. This, of course, is primarily a question of authority. The author who says "I" has power in the moment of inscription, but following that moment the text assumes authority for the author who is nowhere present except as a trope. With the cessation of writing, the burden of presence shifts from the author to the autobiography. Ultimately, autobiography points to an author whom it has invented. But latent within that gesture is always already the author futilely trying to recoup the occasion of her/his writing presence. Both the text and its author compete for the position of referent struggling to confer on the other the position of figure.

Autobiography, then, succeeds to the exact degree that it compels the reader to collude with the author's artifice. This is the life-giving power of autobiography. The self-annihilation principle of autobiography can be explained in a number of different ways. Autobiography brings death because it forces the autobiographer into the position of Narcissus. A self-reflexive gaze is self-defacing because life and action are arrested with the paralysis that comes from looking in a mirror at oneself. The elliptical gaze folds back on itself bringing with it the post-mortem reality of history. And while the self may be recovered through history, that self is but a shadowy substance derived from the forcing of past events into the narrow roads of a singular interpretation. A further reduction of life occurs through the subjectivizing and mortalizing impact of language. Not only does the telling of one's life tie the individual to him/herself in a reductive way, but to communicate that autobiography in writing is to participate in the privatizing impact of language. As Paul de Man explains, language succeeds to the exact extent that

it deprives the reader of his/her direct link with the physical world:

To the extent that language is figure (or metaphor, or prosopopeia) it is indeed not the thing itself but the representation, the picture of the thing and, as such, it is silent, mute as pictures are mute. Language, as trope, is always privative (80).

To illustrate de Man's point here consider the word *rose* which when uttered, invokes a memory but never the sight, feel, and aroma of the flower. The word *rose* acts as a metaphor for the flower whose presence is materially denied. Language, then, is a trope which continually points to a concrete physical world which we are, at every point, denied. In this sense language is deprivation and negation. The process of autobiography heightens the privative impact of language because the more complex, various, and precarious the life under review, the greater its subsequent reduction into tropes. Autobiography succeeds then to the extent it is able to obscure the fact that the reader's access to reality is figural; language succeeds on the basis of sensory deprivation. Paul de Man phrases it this way: "the restoration of mortality by autobiography deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores" (81). Thus, when Ondaatje says "I" as he does on page 188 and as he implies on page 189, that "I" is articulated at the expense of the reader's direct experience with the author. Between the author and the reader rises the specter of the "I". *Running in the Family* is a substitute, a fiction, for the author whom we never encounter except as the effect of a trope.

Ondaatje's signature to *Running in the Family* advances autobiography's most strenuous effort to deny the implicit death knell of the genre. Michael Ryan calls this signature into question:

It is the identity of the proper name, the 'deep subject' of autobiography, which guarantees untroubled reference from the text to an 'indubitable' extratextual referent, the author, and which 'conjures' away the 'vertigo' opened up by the possibility that the 'I' might be indeterminant or else an effect of grammar (5).

The work of Paul de Man opens up rather than suppresses the inevitable vertigo which arises when the identity of the autobiographical self is questioned. In challenging the nature of the "I" who

writes his/her life story, de Mann problematizes the previously "untroubled reference" between the text and the author standing outside the text. As Ryan suggests, within the autobiographer's signature lies the crux of the paradox which spans the distance between writer and text. The signature is merely a last great effort to forestall the vertigo of a self who has always already borne the strain of the knowledge that it is nowhere material and everywhere topological. Within the autobiographer's signature come to rest all the intransience and artifice of the "I" as it forges its network of pseudo-reality in the text.

The writing of *Running in the Family* as well as the autobiographical moments of *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Ana Historic* raise profound questions about an author's ability to inscribe his/her imprint on a text. By creating characters who are unstable, unpredictable, and inconsistent, Ondaatje and Marlatt anticipate their own de-facements. In portraying characters who resist closure, both authors create scenarios which implicitly endorse Roland Barthes's contention that a text is an interstice of meanings continually competing with each other for expression. Moreover, the responsibility to privilege one meaning over another lies with the reader and not with either the author or the text.³ To interpret writing as a multi-dimensional space is to explode the line of power that extends from the autobiographer to his/her text. From this perspective, Ondaatje and Marlatt invite their own defacements by writing texts which everywhere call for the destruction of all voices claiming origin. The multi-vocal writing styles of Ondaatje and Marlatt implicitly call for the death of the author, a death that is resisted most strenuously in the authors' signatures. As Michael Ryan points out, a vertigo opens up in the destruction of the first-level link between an author's signature and his/her text. Indeed this is the case, since without the author's signature there can no longer exist the illusion of a God/Author standing behind the text inscribing its meaning. Paul de Man calls for the death of the author on a different score. Writing is not merely the destruction of every voice;

in relation to autobiography, it is the destruction of the artifice involved in the pronoun "I." As de Man shows, autobiography succeeds to the extent that it is able to disguise its tropological and privative nature. Ondaatje and Marlatt are consigned to an end not unlike the madness of Bolden, the deaths of Lalla and Mervyn, and the divergent hysterias of Ina and Annie. They, too, become tropological figures in a linguistic landscape that knows only the vertigo of madness and death. To the extent that the signatures Ondaatje and Marlatt are the effect of tropes, these authors are propelled into madness--the madness of words.⁴

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. This is the subject of Paul de Man's essay "Autobiography as Defacement" (67-81).

2. I adopt the word *aporia* from A.H. Abrams's discussion of "Deconstruction" in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th edition. According to that definition *aporia* is "an irreconcilable paradox [in a text] which subverts its own grounds and coherence and disperses its seeming meanings into indeterminacy" (40).

CHAPTER ONE

1. This, in fact, seems to be a major thrust of much of Ondaatje's writing. For one reason or another Ondaatje's characters often find themselves victimized by a world that at best seems indifferent to its inhabitants, and at worst outright hostile.

2. Michel Foucault discusses this relationship in *Madness & Civilization*: ". . . in the last years of the [15th] century this enormous uneasiness turns on itself; the mockery of madness replaces death and its solemnity. From the discovery of that necessity which inevitably reduces man to nothing, we have shifted to the scornful contemplation of that nothing which is existence itself. Fear in the face of the absolute limit of death turns inward in a continuous irony; man disarms it in advance, making it an object of derision by giving it an everyday tamed from . . . Madness is the *déjà-là* of death" (15-16).

CHAPTER TWO

1. I define *patriarchy* as a world in which men gain dominance at the expense of women's spiritual and physical subordination. As a governing body, men assume the right to establish a set of values aimed at preserving their particular, and sometimes exclusive, interests.

2. The daughter's sexual desire for her father is the reverse of the Oedipal Complex as described by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

3. "Women as mothers are like women in many other work situations: they have the appearance of wide 'decision-making latitude' or control, but in reality they have little power to define their work situations . . . [i]n motherwork, one of the most devastating aspects of lack of control is the absence of feedback. The isolation of the job severely limits feedback which is so essential to decision making . . . [s]ome mothers have compared their isolation to being a prisoner of war" (191-192), Harriet Rosenberg, "Motherwork, Stress, and Depression: The Costs of Privatized Social Reproduction," *Feminism and Political Economy*.

4. There is much to suggest in *Ana Historic* that the forest as experienced by a child is prelapsarian Eden. Untutored in the conventions of gender or the doctrine of original sin, a female child knows nothing of her secondary status or the general curse of humankind as described in Genesis. The forest, then, is a metaphor for innocence and the beauty of direct perception.

5. The 1832 immigration of Susanna Moodie to Canada, as described in *Roughing it in the Bush*, makes her almost a contemporary of Mrs. Richards who arrived in 1873.

CHAPTER THREE

1. In "The Self as Subject" Foucault suggests that there are three types of struggles: "against domination (ethnic, social, and religious), against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce, or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission)", 781.

2. Bharati Mukherjee calls *Running in the Family* "an existential biography" and "a personal history"; Leslie Mundwiler calls the book an "oral history"; Christopher Reid uses the term "memoir"; and Linda Hutcheon employs the term "historiographic metafiction."

3. As Barthes argues in "The Death of the Author" the text is a composite of "multiple writings . . . focused in the reader" (148).

4. "[T]he madness of words" is a phrase borrowed from Paul de Man in "Shelley Disfigured" (122).

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