THE TRANSLATING SUBJECT

THE TRANSLATING SUBJECT: TRACING THE HISTORY OF A NORTH AMERICAN FEMINIST LITERARY AVANT-GARDE

By MELISSA TANTI, B.A. (Hons), M.A.

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Abstract

This work examines women's relationships to language through the work of Canadian and American innovative women writers who write in, out of and through multiple non-English languages as a way of challenging English linguistic dominance and the patriarchal and imperial power structures upheld therein. The theoretical thrust of "The Translating Subject" is to explore the politics of multilingualism as an aesthetic strategy. Multilingualism, a notable strategy in women's writing of the last thirty years, permits the post-colonial writer to resist discursive colonization, as well as express bi-cultural identity through bilingual writing and what Evelyn Nien-ming Ch'ien calls "weird English." The three women about whom I write, Erin Mouré, Nicole Brossard and Kathy Acker, do not use multilingualism to express bi-cultural identity, but rather write in multiple non-English languages as part of a feminist knowledge project that challenges the dominance of English as a lingua franca and in so doing creates estrangement from western humanistic philosophical systems. While each writer's works have received much critical recognition, to date their use of multiple non-English languages across their corpuses remains one of the most striking yet under-theorized aspects of their writings.

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"For *Works* may have more *Wit* than does 'em good,/As *Bodies* perish through Excess of *Blood*."

---Alexander Pope ("An Essay on Criticism" 1709)

"My adventure is I'm going to wade knee-deep through blood and soar higher than the winds!"

--- Kathy Acker (*Empire of the Senseless* 1988)

Chapter One: Introduction: Why Language Matters

Nicole Brossard writes: "C'est par la fiction de l'Homme que nous sommes devenus fictives, sortons de la fiction par la fiction." (It is through Man's fiction that we have become fictional, so let us exit fiction via fiction) (*Elle Serait* 96). Each of the writers on whom I focus uses fiction as a model for a proposed multilingual reality that would disrupt Euro-American imperialism and hegemonic constructions of history as we have come to know it: "as the master discourse of the white, masculine, hegemonic, property-owning subject" (Braidotti 61). The theoretical thrust of my dissertation is to explore the politics of multilingualism as an aesthetic strategy by examining women's relationships to language through the work of innovative Canadian and American women writers who write in, out of and through multiple non-English languages as a way of challenging English linguistic dominance and the patriarchal and imperial power structures upheld therein.

In Erín Moure's[1] work the Galician language is nestled alongside other non-English languages including Romanian, Portuguese, Spanish, French and also English. Kathy Acker's work includes writing in Farsi, German, French, Spanish

[1] I will use the Galician spelling of Moure's name. She has spelled it variously over her career but this was the chosen spelling on her most recent publications and at her appearance at the International Festival of Authors 2015.

and English as well. Through the motif of translation and especially the implicit call in her latest work to read, study and write in a language one does not know, Nicole Brossard's texts open the reader to the possibilities inherent in interlingualism, intersubjectivity and *jouissance*. My dissertation traces an arc in these writers' works from Moure's Galician through Acker's Persian to the new formulation of an interlanguage in Brossard. Moure's use of Galician sets the stage for understanding the value of translation as a knowledge-making strategy. Her multilingual texts force the reader to rely on her body to make sense of the text rather than relying on an unquestioned sense of what one already knows about the language and the world in which the writing exists. Acker's use of Farsi challenges the reader to consider the source of her knowledge by weaving in Persian history as representative of all the non-western histories and worldviews that have been excluded by western stories of the world. Brossard's use of multiple languages, and particularly one narrator's experiment with writing in a language she does not know, shows the interlinguistic space -- the space between languages -- to be the space in which new subjectivities might emerge. The collective emphasis on multilingualism in these works produces a model of women as translating subjects. This idea repositions women in relation to language from being thought of as speaking subjects to being conceived as subjects always in translation. This shift imbues women's relationships to language with the activity associated with translation as opposed to limiting

conceptions of various speaking beings that have dominated feminist language politics until now. Translation and multilingualism are distinguished in these texts in that translation operates as a set of writing practices informed by recent developments in translation theory while multilingualism is the field created by the coexistence of multiple languages in one text.[2] Multilingualism is a trend that has emerged within women's writing in the last thirty years as a strategy that permits the post-colonial writer to resist discursive colonization as well as existing as a" way for many women to express bi-cultural identity through bilingual writing and what Evelyn Nien-min Ch'ien calls "weird English." The three women on whom I write do not use multilingualism to express bi-cultural identity but rather write in multiple non-English languages as part of a feminist knowledge project that challenges the dominance of English as a lingua franca and in so

[2] Perhaps owing to the politics of difference that emerged in the 1980s and following on the heels of major decolonizing movements in the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980s saw the greatest changes in translation studies and theories of translation. Translation had traditionally been seen as "a site, not for theorizing about language, but for applying linguistic theories" (Venuti 138). Informed by semiotics, discourse analysis and poststructuralist textual theory, "defining equivalence inevitably came to be seen as a less urgent problem" (Venuti 183), with the autonomy of the translated text emerging as a new theoretical assumption. New theories proliferated as Translation Studies became its own discipline, separated from linguistics, literary criticism, and philosophy. See William Frawley, "Prolegomenon to a Theory of Translation" in Translation: Literary, Linguistic, and philosophical Perspectives, Newark, DE: U Delaware Press, 1984, pgs 150-75 regarding the new knowledge produced in translation as a "third code," also Shoshana Blum-Kulka "Shifts of Cohesion and Coherence in Translation," in Interlingual and Intercultural Communication: Discourse and Cognition in Translation and Second Language Acquisition Studies, Tübingen: Narr, 1986, pgs. 17-35 wherein she speculates that translating increases the semantic relations among the parts of the translated text. Experimental feminist translation strategies also proliferated such as those of Barbara Godard and Suzanne Jill Levine.

doing creates estrangement with the western humanistic philosophical systems upheld therein.

Moure, Acker and Brossard are each known for their highly experimental and overtly political agendas but they also share a deeply self-reflexive critical writing practice. Each also in some way draws upon the French feminist discourse represented most notably by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.[3] Like their French feminist predecessors, Moure, Acker and Brossard engage with concepts derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis. For example, each variously responds to Lacan's proposed conflation of patriarchal law with the acquisition of language that coincides with the subject's entry into social life. Most interesting, each seems to take up the analyst's challenge as well. It is taken as a sine qua non that anyone who plans to practice psychoanalysis must undergo and have undergone psychoanalysis him-- or herself (Israel 1171).[4] We might say, by extension, that a writer must interrogate her own language before she can write. Moure, Acker and Brossard each engage in multilingual strategies as part of their own linguistic self-analysis. Moure admits that her work on the texts of Galician

[3] These feminists initiated a concerted effort to challenge the disembodied ideal of masculine consciousness that underpins western discourse; in this sense, their contributions to current feminist discourse have been crucial.

[4] This rule is based on Freud's second fundamental principle of psychoanalysis and has been maintained by the various Psychoanalytical Associations, i.e International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA), Paris Psychoanalytical Association (Société Psychanalytique de Pariss SPP), etc. Lacan agreed, only taking issue with the definition of training analysis. For Lacan, there is no distinction between training and personal analysis -- all analysis is personal and should lead to becoming an analyst.

poet Chus Pato led her "to engage and question [her] own subjectivity in multiple historicized ways" (Moure and Pato 5). Acker has experimented with truth since her earliest Black Tarantula publications, working "past failure" (Acker, "Devouring" 23) until the I dissolves. In her first language experiments she placed "very direct autobiographical, just diary material, right next to fake material [and] tried to figure out who [she] wasn't" (7). In these experiments "what became more interesting to [her] wasn't the I, it was text because it's texts that create the identity" (7). As a result of this realization her later works reflect a more hopeful turn toward building a new kind of multilingual narrative with which she could identify. Aptly summarizing the self-reflexive writing practices of all three women, Brossard explains that "it is in *watching ourselves work* with language that we succeed in decoding...and it is in *watching ourselves be* in language that we succeed in creating an image of ourselves in relation to the world" (*Fluid* 231). In the pursuit to understand her reality Brossard found that lesbianism opened up deeper levels of linguistic consciousness; with lesbianism "questions started to flow about identity, imagination, history and more and more about language" (32). Her Québécoise consciousness positioned her "trembling ... engaging body and soul and with tooth and nail" (155) in relation to language. Her linguistic awareness, then, compelled her to "take up maximum volume in language" (155). She finds this more voluminous space within the linguistic range created by multilingual texts. Thus, these three writers represent a unique approach to

multilingual writing that is deeply engrained with their own self-questioning and opens the arguably more restricted field of French feminist aesthetics to queer and non-western others. My approach to the criticism of these texts is deeply feminist and in line with Moure, Acker and Brossard's writing practices, in that I cannot separate these works from the bodies producing them. As Brossard proclaims, writing is a "function of the body, that is, how the body renders itself a formal element of the linguistic turf" (24). Therefore, each chapter is steeped in archival work including diary excerpts, various print and electronic correspondences, eulogies, biographies and other forms of personal writing; I consider why this writing emerged from these bodies by connecting the form of each text to these writers' lives and their respective struggles with mourning, sexual identity, and post-colonial politics.

The Possibility of Not Knowing

In Moure's *O Resplandor* the narrator begins to realize that "[w]e constantly, giddyingly, mangle each other's languages, but in mangling them we enter them, we see each other fully, we acknowledge and thus open the possible, entirely, *as such*" (33). According to Marina Camboni, the aim of multilingual cosmopolitan criticism is to "pay greater attention to exploring the emotional and affective resonance of various artistic codes as well as different languages and their respective powers" (41). Ch'ien adds that multilingual texts highlight the

"ways communities grow proximate to or distant from one another through language" (202) and illuminate the ethic embedded in accepting our potential unintelligibility to one another. In this sense, multilingual literary practices speak to the very survival of the species, which "depends on our ability to recognize the borders between difference as fertile spaces of desire and fluid sites of syncretism, interaction and mutual change" (Friedman 66). In Paulette Regan's ruminations on the role of allies in Indigenous politics she contends that the "deepest learning [occurs] when in unfamiliar territory culturally, intellectually and emotionally" (17). She continues to advocate for the "space of not knowing" and not seeking to know as a "gift" one can continually learn from in new unsettling ways (17). Similarly, Elizabeth Ellsworth's critical pedagogy hinges on accepting "that all knowings are partial, that there are fundamental things each of us cannot know" -- a recognition that she admits is contrary to all western ways of knowing and speaking (310). Multilingualism as a literary practice resists the equilibrium or understanding that is the goal of dominant language games, cultural politics, epistemological thrusts and traditional pedagogical approaches by keeping meaning determinedly out of reach and refusing any explanation.

The editors of the Oxford journal *Contemporary Women's Writing* note in their inaugural issue that criticism and notions of the literary have to respond to, among other things, the fact that "we live in a world where a significant portion of the population is at least partially bi or multilingual" (Camboni 34). To be

responsive to the "increasing multilingualism of writers necessitates new strategies for reading the polyvocality of texts" (Eagleton and Friedman 3). Camboni summarizes the key aspects of this new "cosmopolitan multilingual criticism" (35) as follows. The criticism would consider:

> (1) the social, ideological and economic values of national languages and of language variations in relation to one another and to the politics of power; (2) the personal and emotional attachments each speaker/writer establishes with individual languages or dialects; (3) the semiotic processes that govern linguistic and cultural translations within and among cultures. In its reading of literary texts multilingual criticism would focus on the way writers respond to, criticize, or renovate each language's lexical and structural systems, as well as its monolingual discursive and power practices, from a gendered perspective and in tune with a cosmopolitan world view. (35)

In line with this agenda, Moure, Acker and Brossard enter into this literary practice and criticism invested in resisting what is, in Rachel Blau DuPlessis's terms, "culture as constituted" (241). These writers explore "language as a mine whose riches are still to be sounded" (Camboni 42). Their works exhibit the level of engagement with language to which one must be committed if one is "to distance [oneself] from imperialistic or colonizing and patriarchal discursive literary habits" (42). Each modality of translation operating in their works challenges the axiom underlying western metaphysics that a thing can be known outside its context and other relational factors. Translation enters these texts as an inherently combinatory process that unleashes "the power of language in all its sufficiency," considered as such by Jean-François Lyotard because of the "infinite

number of associations for the mind" that are embedded in words and revealed through experimentation with syntax ("Newman" 335). As a result of their multilingual literary innovations, Moure, Acker and Brossard create the "unexpected moves" (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 16) that are necessary to displace the power inherent in the conventions of language games.

This notion of language games is even more poignant now than it has ever been before. As I write this treatise on language I am aware of the crucial nature of this conversation in light of recent shifts in the political landscape across the West heralded by the election of business tycoon Donald Trump as the new President of the United States. His campaign trail is littered with language that can easily be equated with hate speech and the permission that his unabashedly homophobic, misogynistic and racist platform has given to others who share his views to spew similar rhetoric is no less than terrorizing. Historically speaking, language has always been the first battleground within civil rights movements, and never has the meaning of words been of greater consequence. From the early "persons case" in Canada, to the meaning of emancipation within the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the war on the legal rights to civil union, or marriage, across Western Europe and its former colonies in the Northern hemisphere, the relationship between language and discourse is everywhere apparent. Linguistic minorities have always been aware, in a way that is only becoming clear to those whose positions have until now felt secure, that there are

so many words to increase or diminish the body's threshold of tolerance; the body is, in fact, as Brossard explains, "under the influence" of words (*Fluid* 68). According to Catalan poet Marti Sales, the situation is "life or death in the face of big languages" (IFOA). Sale contends, however, that "the more you play the better the game." Moure, Acker and Brossard write in and out of multiple languages in order to set the ground work for a new language game that disrupts the hegemony of English, thereby forcing readers "to acknowledge an uneven linguistic environment rather than a seamless monolingual one" (Leigh 80). In Barrett Watten's terms, multilingual texts become sites "for asking questions about language rather than being a transparent enforcer of communicative norms" (3). At the same time, Standard English "is the language of conquest and domination ... it is the mask which hides the loss of so many tongues" (hooks 168). According to Janet Leigh, "writing in multiple languages and nonstandard varieties of English directly challenges the implementation of English as a form of colonization" (71) by allowing for the expression of bicultural identities and ways of being that exist outside of the discourses embedded in an English linguistic system. These multilingual texts, then, open a space "to negotiate conflicts between monolingual enforcement and multilingual experience" (71) that deconstructs the illusion of and exposes the power dynamics within a monolingual environment.

According to Lyotard, language games are "the effects of various types of discourse within which various types of utterances are used" (*Postmodern* 10). This game of language is constituted by its rules: "if there are no rules there is no game" (10). Lyotard points out that the rules are the product of a social contract, explicitly or not, between players and more importantly that "any slight modification in the rules changes the nature of the game" (10). Most interesting is his claim that "a 'move' that does not meet the rules does not belong to the game they define" (10). Ch'ien seems to suggest the same when she claims that in the "weirding" (11) of English practiced predominantly by immigrant or non-native-English-speaking writers, "the invention of the rules happens after the creation of the language" (9). She declares: "the game happens; the rules follow" (9) and perhaps what is invented, then, is a new game. This game not only invites a new community but also has the potential to disrupt the "mercantilization of knowledge" (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 5) that for Lyotard defines the postmodern age. Lyotard observes that in advanced industrial societies anything that cannot fit into or be operationalized to fit with new channels of communication and turned into "quantities of information" that can be easily exchanged as an "informational commodity" (4-5) will be abandoned. This explains English linguistic domination. English is given priority worldwide because it is the language into which most of the information being generated in the world is translated and operationalized -- or at least the information deemed important for entry into or functioning within

the circuits of global production and exchange. Lyotard argues that the direction of new research will be likewise dictated (4). Within the "computerization of society" (7) knowledge ceases to be an end in itself; it loses its "use-value" (5) and enters into the market as exchange value.

The central question for Lyotard is who will direct this information and who will guarantee that the right decisions are made; who are the decision makers? (14). Other critics of high capitalism have noticed the system's ability to easily incorporate opposition.[5] This is what for Lyotard necessitates "unexpected moves" rather than countermoves, which only play into "the opponent's strategy" as programmed effects that have no effect on the balance of power (16). Within this context the limits imposed on language by various institutions (bureaucracy, the military, academic disciplines, religion) and their authorizing discourses are "the stakes and the provisional results of language strategies within the institution and without" (17). For Lyotard, new moves derive from asking

> Does the university have a place for language experiments (poetics)? Can you tell stories in a cabinet meeting? Advocate a cause in the barracks? The answers are clear: yes, if the university opens creative workshops; yes, if the cabinet works with prospective scenarios; yes, if the limits of the old institutions are displaced. (17)

In order to displace hegemonic masculinity in particular as it is upheld in language Louky Bersianik argues,

[5] I am referring here to Frederic Jameson *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

> Don't wait any longer for permission to act, speak and write as you please. Make mistakes on purpose to re-establish the balance between the sexes. Invent neutral terms, make grammar more flexible, subvert spellings, turn the situation to your own advantage, establish new styles and new expressions, circumvent problems, deviate from literary genres, simply turn the whole thing upside-down. (204)

Bersianik's call recognizes that "the spirit of language is in the tongues of the people and not in paper rules" (204). Antonio Gramsci explains this relationship as that between spontaneous grammar and the prevailing normative grammar, or "tongues" and "paper rules" in Bersianik's terms. Gramsci notes that the tongues of the people played a significant role in the history of Italy's development into a nation. Despite the Catholic Church's attempts to institute its hegemony by making Latin the universal language in the Middle Ages, the Florentine dialect flowered in the communes, becoming "a noble vernacular" (Gramsci, *Selections* 131). By the nineteenth century this vernacular had defeated literary Latin to become the language of the new Italian nation state. Although spoken Florentine had by this time become a literary language -- "a language for scholars rather than a language of the nation" (131) -- the vernacular persists in the existence of dialects as the mother tongue in many Italian regions in the present, despite the development of the mass media and the universal education that spread through Italy in the twentieth century. The persistence of the vernacular represents the persistence of the oral quality of a language since, as Moure explains, "the vernacular desires;" "there is complicity in it -- with the other people using it"

(Eichhorn 221). According to Moure, "the most beautiful thing about vernaculars is they are everyday, thus common or transparent and at the same time particular to a group, thus rare or opaque" (222-3). In other words, the vernacular applies to ordinary, everyday exchanges that may incidentally be universal in form but are through the vernacular given localized and particular meaning.

According to Friulian poet and film director Pier Paolo Pasolini, the features of oral language are the features of reality: continuity, materiality and necessity (Marinello 120). Oral language has the potential to offset the seamless transmission of ideology because it is aligned with the unique bodily experience of speaking and the flux and complexity of this activity. As such, oral language stands in the way of the promised fulfillment of a symbolic system in which everything is "explained, integrated, unified, stabilized and systematized" (Hurst 216). Moure, too, observes that "her mother tongues resist all attempts at technical language" (*Unmemntioable* 19). For this reason, the narrator of *O Resplandor* reveals that she is "interested in the signature and the mouth and throat ... interested in how ear and throat receive language" (142). Referencing a series of tests originally conducted at the University of Wisconsin, the narrator of *O Resplandor* discovers that pictures can be transmitted to the brain using receptors in the tongue.[6] The narrator concludes that "the stimulation of the

[6] Originally conducted at University of Wisconsin at Madison, these tests were validated by neuropsychologist Maurice Ptito of Université de Montréal along with colleagues in Denmark and the United States, with the goal of allowing "blind people to 'see with their tongue'" (Langlois).

tongue by the word is electro-tactile, and I am sure it activates the visual cortex, not just the language centres" (97). She reasons, "just as Braille reading activates the striate and extrastriate cortices in blind people, putting the word to be translated into the mouth causes significant changes in several areas of the brain that process space and light, *ergo* vision" (97). One may conclude, then, that translation might not only alter language but might even alter vision. This is a significant revelation given the privileged place that vision holds within western metaphysics and its resulting knowledge systems.

Dissolving Boundaries, Revealing Mythologies

In order to override the dominance of the eye/I in western epistemology, Moure, Acker and Brossard invest their works with tongues, breath and body.[7] Luce Irigaray explains that within the epistemological systems set up by western philosophy, "the eye cuts itself off from the body in order to see into it better" (*Speculum* 183). The philosopher aims to see "in a clear and distinct fashion, without the profusion of nerve impulses that jumble the parts of the body and the environment all up together: sensation, imagination, memories" (183). However, this idealized separation between body and intellect is not natural but political, evidenced by the fact that this has not always been how good knowledge has been generated. Ramsay Cook points out that pre-Enlightenment "hearing, touching

[7] Acker frequently conflates the two in her texts to make this critique clear, as in "[t]ourists, you know, from the Isle of Man. Catches the eye. (I), you see" (*My Death* 268).

and smelling" took precedence over seeing, a sense associated with the science of classifying and ordering (xvii). It is apparent then that this separation had much to do with Enlightenment ideals related to order and proper bodies rather than reflecting and entirely natural evolution of human consciousness. Descartes articulates key Enlightenment principles in his "Rules," which is meant as a guide to metaphysical inquiry. He instructs the philosopher to apply a mathematical approach: "break your work up into small steps that you can understand completely and about which you have utter certainty, and check your work often" (Robinson). These instructions to break the world into manageable pieces in order to gain utter certainty reflect a desire for mastery over the physical world rather than a desire for holistic understanding. Irigaray observes that the subject of philosophy "enters the world greedy for scientific powers -- any (other) fantasy and (other) dream disturbing the precision of his theoretical instruments must be frozen" (*Speculum* 185). As a result, human perception and the capacity to know are separated and hierarchized into a fallible body and an infallible intellect. The problem for women is articulated by the protagonist of Acker's *Empire*: "since the I who desired and the eye who perceived had nothing to do with each other and at the same time existed in the same body -- mine: I was not possible" (33). This scientific dissection of experience divides women from reason and knowledge in an attempt to cut off the Medusa's head as Hélène Cixous puts it in her manifesto

of the same name.[8] Since women are associated with the denigrated body -- constituted within western metaphysics as merely inert matter -- they are subsequently without subjectivity; any alternative is beyond reason and, so, monstrous.

Pasolini observed that the predominance of sight was further institutionalized with the advent of writing, after which "the sense of sight prevails" (Marinello 122) and with it the practice of isolating words and dissecting language in the search for absolute meaning. The compartmentalizing of qualities according to the scientific method contrasts starkly with the knowledge gained, for example, through hearing, which in essence harmonizes and connects. Pasolini argues that "poetry is able to reproduce that world in which words are not separate from the living present" (qtd. in Marinello 123). Moure, Acker and Brossard's multilingual novels are more akin to poetry than prose in that they are grounded in the principle of expenditure versus preservation. Expenditure refers to strategies that proliferate meaning by accentuating the semiotic movement in language, while preservation refers to the purpose inscribed in the symbolic order to delimit meaning in order to facilitate the instrumental purposes of language. Moreover, these texts introduce "semiotic violence" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 79) by using multiple non-English languages to break through the symbolic border that

[8] See Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 1.4, 1976, pp. 875-893.

locks meaning within hegemonic discourse. When writing for the first time in a foreign language Brossard's narrator finds that "the matters of the other language and of non-sense swirl through the air though I strive to put certain worlds in parallel I'm unable to make them touch in the right place, sometimes a vagueness a slight gap sweeps the sentence away all at once and everything needs doing all over again ..." (*Fences* 68). The lack of linguistic equivalence observed by the translator challenges the notion of coherence that is central to traditional philosophy; namely that each language represents a whole, contained system that coheres with all others by virtue of a shared logic. The conflict between languages at the point of contact opens up a space of radical difference. This difference dissolves the logical order maintained by the borders between languages, as well as the borders between the symbolic and the semiotic, which are those that delineate the outer limits of the human and the social.

Gramsci explains, "subjects define their interests and make decisions about what they want, and what they speak and write about within the *structures* of languages," (Ives 96-97 *emphasis mine*); it is, therefore, important to pay attention to the process by which normative grammar is formed. Being Sardinian, Gramsci was acutely aware of the political and politico-cultural dimension that is hidden in any project of linguistic normalisation (Buey 150). Building on Gramsci, Pasolini observed that, in fact, Italian was born a national language at the historical moment when factories and business firms took over from

universities in spreading culture, and as a result "a new, completely different society comes to life" (Marinello 114). This shows that the stakes in linguistic, socio-linguistic or cultural-anthropological polemics are actually, or also, a struggle for (cultural, economic and political) hegemony (Buey 150). Within this revised context, Sardinian and to some degree Friulian[9] are not Italian dialects but, as Gramsci and Pasolini would argue, they are languages in their own right, much like Catalan and Galician, which likewise tend to be overlooked or taken for derivatives of Spanish. Gramsci's study of Sardinian language use within the Italian linguistic field reveals that acquiring the minor language is a process of mental and cultural expansion, while learning the major language tends to have a reductive effect. Catalan poet Anna Aguilar-Amat explains the relationship between less-translated and dominant languages as analogous with the relationship between the city and the suburbs. She argues that the periphery encompasses a broader perspective; "for example the suburbs of any metropolis always know what is happening at the city centre but the same is not true vice versa" (IFOA). This imbalance occurs largely because of the ethnocentric tendency to consider everything not expressed in one's own linguistic register to be delirium, prejudice or superstition (Buey 158). This explains why journalists had such a hard time believing that the Galician interspersed throughout Moure's

[9] In an objective sense Sardinian is more independent than Friulian since Sardinian developed separately from the vulgar Latin and so Friulian may be easier for Italian speakers to understand. Pasolini, however, would hold that the variations in Friulian are not derivative but substantial.

later poetry is a real language. She muses that "most people don't even know where Galicia is" and, so, the reasoning seemed to be that if something is "not known, it must be invented" (IFOA). Neigh calls for further discussion about how the languages we speak relate to gender, class and racial discrimination, as well as to the prejudice that connects competence in English with intellect (80). Here, Gayatri Spivak's foundational question to the field of feminist postcolonial studies, "Can the subaltern speak?", can be significantly revised. Neigh moves the question beyond that of the subaltern's ability to speak toward interrogating how dominant groups can attune their ears to better hear subaltern voices (77). In other words, "the subaltern may be speaking, however, western ears cannot hear their voices because systems of representation only make differences visible in hierarchical terms" (77). In this way, Spivak's question draws attention to the global politics surrounding the status ascribed to various languages and especially the ways in which people are positioned differently in relation to English as the modern world's lingua franca.

Jacques Derrida argues that in addition to limiting modes of expression the dominance of English conceals a white mythology, by which they mean the ways that western philosophy constitutes the mystification of Indo-European history. According to the priority given to this history in Western discourse, the fact of Greco-Roman history as a material history tends to be obscured, as its principle agents--Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the like--are imbued with a quasi-

mythological status. As a result, their ideas are treated and circulated as if they are ahistorical and transcendental. Platonic thought, however, does not exist outside of time and space; it has a history, the implications of which have been overshadowed by the veneration of Classical and neo-Classical ideas within the Renaissance and Enlightenment respectively and by the uptake of rational humanism that justified and propelled both colonialism and industrialization. In actuality, Classical Antiquity flowered at the same time that civilization was blooming all over the globe. In the period referred to as Classical Antiquity (1200-300 BCE) Greek and Latin were spreading throughout the Mediterranean but, at the same time, Zoroaster composed the Gathas, the founding text of the Persian religion, the Achaemenid Empire arose, replacing the Elamites and Babylonia, Siddhartha Gautama preached Buddhism, Celtic languages spread over Central and Western Europe, the genesis of Greek and Old Italic alphabets occurred, as well as the birth of a variety of Baltic languages spoken in Southern Europe and the areas encompassing modern day Poland.[10] Thus, while the Classical period is associated with the birth of modern civilization and for most in the West this refers to the Greco-Roman tradition it was, in fact, a time of widespread linguistic as well as cultural diversity. The degree of linguistic diversity that began in the Classical Period lasts up to the Early Modern Period at

[10] For full details see *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entries "Zarathustra," "Achaeminian Dynasty," "Buddhism," "Celtic Languages," "Greek Alphabet," "Baltic Languages."

which point colonialism results in the spread of Indo-European languages to every continent, especially Romance, West Germanic and Russian languages (Cowgill and Jasanoff). Of the earliest Pre-Indo-European languages (PIE) Greek is not even the oldest branch, as popular sentiment might lead one to believe, but comes later than, for example, Pre-Anatolian, Pre-Tochian, Pre-Italic, Pre-Celtic, some say even after Pre-Germanic and Pre-Balto-Slavic, and by all accounts Greek emerges around the same time -- within five hundred years -- of Proto-Indo-Iranian. [11] Put in perspective, western philosophy, like the Greek language from which it originates, is one branch of a larger world and broader linguistic history.

The timeline of global linguistic and cultural development evidences Gramsci's premise that

> even if one admits that other cultures have had an importance and a significance in the process of "hierarchical" unification of world civilisation (and this should certainly be admitted without question), they have had a universal value only in so far as they have become constituent elements of European culture -- in so far, that is, as they have contributed to the process of European thought and been assimilated by it. (*Selections* 416-7)

The end of linguistic diversity often goes hand in hand with cultural appropriation, assimilation and invasion. In *The Unmemntioable*, Moure's narrator explains that "there are persons who speak no more/(cauterized)" (20), connecting the end of language to mortification of the body. (To cauterize is to burn tissue,

[11] For a good overview of the history of IE languages see Benjamin Fortson's *Indo-European Language and Culture: An Introduction,* Blackwell Publishing, Victoria, AU, 2004.

flesh or blood in order to stop the flow of bodily fluid from a wound or to prevent a tear from opening further.) In *The Unmemntioable*, the narrator wanders through the Eastern European countryside recalling people and languages that were persecuted and obliterated during wars between Russia, Germany and Poland. Her only access to these histories is through untranslatable words spoken when her mother is on her deathbed or found in journals by her grandmother. In a similar fashion, Acker recalls Iranian history through her use of the Persian language. Through invoking the language Acker reveals a culture almost cauterized by invasion and whose specificities are often obscured by the broad strokes with which the entire Middle East is painted when viewed from a western perspective. Instead, Persian stories, culture and history flowed like lifeblood despite invasion, even seeping into western mythology through the persistence of its literary culture, poetry and language. Conversely, Brossard reveals bodies that are released through moving in and out of languages they do not naturally or habitually speak: "a language other than the one given them in childhood" (*Fences* 8). Doing so opens in her characters "a fertile void" that is "unappeased by languor and by reason" (8). In addition, coexisting "with words unknown" connects the narrator to "the vast kingdom of time past" and uttering them leads to "speaking what one harbours," thereby making "a cold meal of the story of our very sincere lives" (8). On the one hand, in these stories the decimation of unique languages is variously associated with the sealing of the body, with this silencing

of the flesh resulting in muted histories, cultures and desires. On the other hand, obscure, threatened or minority languages and the linguistic creation that occurs in multilingual texts are posited as gateways to greater levels of social and cultural freedom.

Multilingualism and Masculine Metaphorics

Derrida notes that "every language includes within its own compass a host of metaphors" ("White" 24). Just as Derrida notices white mythology concealed in the metaphorics upholding philosophical language, feminists reveal patriarchal metaphors as the grounding for symbols taken to represent 'common sense.' According to Gramsci, the metaphorical quality of language is "doubly so; it is a metaphor for the 'thing' or 'material and sensible object' indicated and it is a metaphor for the ideological meanings given to words during previous periods of civilization" (Gramsci, *Further* lxiii). Though he might purport to do so, the philosopher cannot extricate himself from language and, so, history. He must, therefore, recognize what are, for Derrida, two strict laws: first, "since [philosophy's] instruments belong to its field of study, it is powerless to exercise control over its general tropology [tropes] and metaphorics" (28); therefore "the philosopher will only discover what he has put in or, at least, what as a philosopher he thinks he has put in" (28). Second, "the setting up of the fundamental oppositions of 'metaphorology' (physis/teknè, physis/nomos, sensible/intelligible, space/time, signifier/signified, etc.) took place through the

history of metaphorical language or rather through the movements of tropes," which does not constitute a "proper language" (28). Heidegger similarly points out that even "the concept of concept cannot fail to retain, though indeed it would not be reducible to, the pattern of that gesture of power, the taking-now, the grasping and taking hold of the thing as an object" (qtd. in Derrida, "White" 23), a quality of thought he noted in both Romance and Germanic languages. Other examples where metaphorical language is confused with proper language include the philosopher's use of foundational concepts such as the notion of "ground." In philosophy the word *ground* actually stands in for the idea of *support* or basis for one's claims but the concept is enabled by a *hypotyposis*: the lifelike description of the idea is enabled by the visualization of the ground we stand on. The image of the ground provides the meaning for the concept. In other words, the meaning is provided indirectly through the image or metaphor not directly or *truthfully*, to use the philosopher's terms. Add to this Locke's concept of substance, the notion of reflection (upon an object of intuition) and many others that "are not schematic but rather symbolic" (23). Rather than being a direct presentation of an intuition these terms express concepts by drawing upon an analogy with another concept. Thus, language -- including philosophical language -- is ultimately metaphorical and so represents the effacement of the sensual and the material, or the real. As a case in point, consider that when a person purports to grasp an idea they are referring to the physical act of a hand gripping an object. This sensuous

experience is effaced, worn away as the idea replaces the physical act to which it refers. To illustrate the perpetual effacement constituting language Gramsci examines the use of the word disgrace ("dis-grace"), which he notes has been transformed so far from its origins that "even an atheist can speak of dis-grace without being thought a believer in predestination" (*Selections* 452). Similarly, "nobody thinks today that the word dis-aster is connected with astrology" (452), though etymologically it refers to an unfavourable position in relation to the solar system. In fact, though the sun would seem to be an object "most natural, most universal, the most real, the most clear, a referent which is apparently the most external," Saussure pointed out that even this object does not escape the general law of metaphorical value, which is assigned "as soon as it plays a role in the process of axiological and semantic exchange (and it always does)" (qtd. in Derrida, "White" 17). To further his point, Saussure argues that the value of any term is "accordingly determined by its environment; it is impossible to fix even the value of the signifier 'sun' without considering its surroundings: in some languages it is not possible to say 'sit in the sun'" (17). It follows that all metaphors have their own histories and this "problematic of signatures" (30) marks the limits of each corpus.

To address the persistence of particular signatures in language, Daphne Marlatt likens language to "a family tree, if you will that has preceded us and has given us the world we live in" (172); in etymology we discover a history of verbal

relations. Irigaray reveals that those relations are historically "hom(m)o-sexual"[12] (*The Sex* 171-172): replicating man's relation to other men. The historical resonances within language's metaphorical dimensions are made even more significant in light of Freud's apparent "inkling that women's sexuality was indeed foreign to all that history ... that it remained covered up -- repressed? -- by the shape of Greek civilization and that it would take an archaeologist .... to excavate deeper ... to where the cultural vestiges lie concealed, and to rediscover there a more archaic arche behind the beginning represented by Greece and the concept of origin which Greece set in place" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 64). The notion of logos is itself derived from the philosopher's search to confirm his own existence in the structure of the cosmos. The idea of the logos in Greek thought can be traced at least as far back as the 6th century BCE, to the philosopher Heraclitus who discerned in the cosmos a rational principle analogous to the reasoning power in man (Lindberg 26-27). A few centuries later, the Stoics would develop the idea to give the rational principle, logos, power to act in the form of providence, nature and god (81-83). It bears remarking that the Hellenistic world, from which the concept of Logos is derived, is the same society in which its most profound thinkers and advanced intelligentsia could find no explanation for women's anatomy other than as inversions of their own.[13] Thus, it should be no surprise

[12] Irigaray means this "not in an 'immediate' practice, but in its 'social' mediation" (*This Sex* 171).
[13] This trend begins with Plato's assertion that woman is "a misbegotten man" (Tuana 82) and continues in Aristotle's belief that men's semen contributes the form of humanity delivered to

that descriptions of res extensa (matter) and res cogitans (mind) that would come to stand in for a universal logic -- meaning literally the governing principle of the universe and all matter within it -- would also mirror the mechanics of men's bodies and working of men's minds. If women's specificity has been buried within historical memory to the extent that Freud sees it, then it follows that no trace of women's experiences is likely to be found in the languages used to construct and transmit reality. Instead, we find, in the words of Virginia Woolf, a "purely masculine orgy" (97) in the philosophical, juridical, scientific and literary texts used for centuries to teach what it means to be human.[14]

Voicing stances taken by a range of women poets, writers and speakers, Marlatt calls attention to "the discrepancy between what our patriarchally-loaded language bears (can bear) of our experience and the difference from it our experience bears out -- how it misrepresents, even miscarries and so leaves unsaid what [women] actually experience" (172). Like Woolf before her, Marlatt recognizes an overabundance of terms for dominance in English. Elaborating the

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women's brute matter. Anatomical drawings produced by Galen, Hippocrates and later by Ambroise Paré depict a "phallic vagina" (89), conveying women's anatomy as like men's though deformed to turn inward. For a full overview of sexist reproductive theories see Nancy Tuana's "The Weaker Seed: The Sexist Bias of Reproductive Theory" in *The Western World,* Ed. Mark Kishlansky, Pearson, 2002 (originally published in *Hypatia*, 13.1, 1988).

[14] Religious texts form a subversive subset in that this body of literature was one of the few places where women did write and their physicality could not help but be transmitted on the page as in the works of visionaries such as Julian of Norwich, Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz, and others though the excesses of their writing were contained within the discourse as expressions of sublime and so transcendental communication with god or as the product of ascetic visions, which are likewise produced by denying the body.

conflict this produces she asks, "can a pregnant woman be said to be 'master' of the gestation process she finds herself within -- is that her relationship to it? Are women included in the statement 'God appearing as man'? ... can a woman say she is 'lady of all she surveys' or could others even say of her she 'ladies' it over them?" (172-173). Marlatt's observations are shared by fellow poet Bronwen Wallace in conversation with Moure. Wallace expresses her frustration especially after confronting the ways patriarchal metaphorology had embedded itself in what should otherwise have been a language of self care in reference to maternity and illness. Witnessing backlash from the medical establishment about community child birth preparation classes and the combative narrative offered as response to her friend's terminal illness, Wallace is discouraged by

> ... a medical profession which sees the body as something you control rather than work with, which is afraid of pain and limitation and therefore cannot see the power that comes from working with these ... and on to my friend Pat, the last years of her life and how much I learned of the power of the female understanding of the body as a limit we can love ... how doctors inevitably talk of healing in terms of military victories (cancer can be beaten, etc.) and how our only hero is Terry Fox, the guy who tries to outrun death by denying it. What about the other side, the woman who accepts her death and in doing so enriches her life? The whole idea that the body must be transcended -- both the human body and the planet's -- and where has that got us? (Moure and Wallace 22)

The dichotomies observed by Woolf, Marlatt and Wallace are deeply engrained in the metaphorics of language to the extent that, according to Brossard, "digging in that field can be (for creative women) a mental health hazard" (*Fluid* 29). This is because, as Brossard goes on to say, "male sexual and psychic energies [have

been] transformed through centuries of written fiction into standards for imagination, frames of reference, patterns of analysis, networks of meaning, [and] rhetorics of body and soul" (29). Acker, too, refers to the tropes constituting English with her characteristic brash disdain: "... English novels: Smollett, Fielding, Sterne:, novels based on jokes or just that are. Masculinity" (*My Death* 352). Thus, while Derrida's criticism revealed a white mythology within the philosopher's language, feminist critics have also uncovered the patriarchal myth of the universality of the masculine subject acting within the same language.

By extension, "metaphorics of uncontrollability" (Grosz 203) are related to women's bodies while the masculine ideal produces the notion that "an object is superior to ideas of relations" (Derrida, "White" 36). There is, subsequently, a telling overlay in the attitudes toward women's bodies and toward linguistic diversity. The anxiety produced by metaphorics of uncontrollability related to women's bodies is similar to that which has produced the recent English-only movement in the United States and the movement to make English the official language of the country in the 1990s, as well as the passing of bills such as Proposition 227: "English Language in Public Schools Statute" in California. The rhetoric of contamination undergirding actions to stop the spread of non-English languages, like that which seeks to restrict forms of general expression to patriarchal models, masks fears over the dissolution of power concentrated at the centre of society. In the words of one of *Yesterday*'s protagonists, writer Carla

Carlson, "the future is always composed of what we're given to toy with as children" (191). Since language is the first structure we encounter it is, in turn, the first childhood puzzle to unravel or "toy with." This interest in excavating language is represented through the motif of digging found in a number of Brossard's texts. The writer-narrator of *Fences* becomes lost as she toys with language, admitting "I forgot who I am from too much digging in between words, too much diving into the pink and ancient shapes of my love for everything that swirls and sparkles ... " (83). In *Yesterday*, the curator-narrator collects "images of ruins, blind spots of civilization .... every day, I have to deal with remnants of desire, irrefutable evidence of violence, of destruction or of wear" (173). She proclaims being "fascinated by which part of a dream, of a civilization, collapses, just like an architect surely wonders what will collapse first in a church, a library, a hospital or a stadium. What are the first signs of the decay of setting?" (173). The motif of digging continues in *Mauve Desert* when Brossard's teen protagonist and her translator are both separately found "digging into words without defiling graves" (46; 202). The archaeologist in *Yesterday*, Simone Lambert, explains that the purpose of digging is "each in her own way, [to] expose the remains, debris and fragments of a great whole that once existed, which may be nothing more and nothing less than a huge burst of laughter, a nameless euphoria, a pain so raw that we have to make sense of it" (199). In notes found after the climactic meeting of all four main characters at the Hotel Clarendon from which the text

gets its name, the narrator propounds that "what happens will become real only once it's transcribed in the language we will have chosen" (224). The goal is to "make an effort of imagination. Use her desire as a lever for the future while also questioning the autonomy of desire in relation to trends, cultures and the language spoken" (225). Language is further described as a knot that, though "complex" and "mysterious," also holds "a kind of softness and then, at the most unexpected moment, [loosens] in spectacular fashion by installing characters, actors and witnesses around this soft part, all of them willing to startle anything that moves in cities and in dictionaries of proper names" (217-218). This ability to startle proper names is key to the poetic politics of multilingualism, which opens the "radical particularity of language" (Kunin 178) that Aaron Kunin associates with Moure's work but that captures the intentions of all three writers examined here.

Moure, Acker and Brossard's collective approach to poetic politics is different from other language games such as those proposed by the French feminists and poststructuralists more broadly. Spivak has shown that politically radical theories of oppression such as those produced by Western European and American intellectuals unconsciously rely on the construction of a monolithic third world subject and the impossibility of a subaltern consciousness.[15] In the move to create alliance politics the First World appropriates and reinscribes the

[15] Spivak's groundbreaking text on this topic, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", is a close analysis of the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.

Third World as Other. Spivak is particularly critical of "masculine radicalism" ("Subaltern" 295) and western feminisms that enable this erasure by failing to take their own imperial and colonizing positions into account. Moure, Acker and Brossard put imperialism front and centre in their critiques, as the umbrella under which sexism, homophobia and racism proliferate. Their collective intention is to make space within language for multiple bodies to proliferate, in the space created through writing in multiple languages. The difference in their texts is a matter of nuance but a significant one. Their work does not reflect an appropriation of multilingual poetry but multilingualism *as* poetry. As Moure explains in her introduction to the work of Chilean poet Andrés Ajens: "western and white northern ideas of the poem marginalize or ethnicize (euthanize!) all others" (Preface xiv). By this Moure is referring to the ways that the western literary establishment treats non-English and particularly non-western poetry not as poetics but "as disruptions or disjunctive possibilities that help reinvigorate us in a novelty that never really opens the boundaries" (xiv). The effect of this exploitation is not only to appropriate the value of the non-western work but also to silence the subjectivities therein. For Moure "translation is vital but only in so far as it can oblige us to listen, not to absorb" (xvi). Moure's caution corresponds to Spivak's critique of "third-worldism in the US human sciences" ("Subaltern" 289). On this note, Spivak distinguishes Derrida from other deconstruction theorists in that he confronts the issue and questions "how to keep the ethnocentric

Subject from establishing itself by selectively defining an Other" (292). Spivak points out that Derrida "does not invoke 'letting the other(s) speak for himself' but rather invokes an 'appeal' to or 'call' to the 'quite other' (*tout-autre* as opposed to a self-consolidating other), of 'rendering *delirious* that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us'" (294). Moure, Acker and Brossard's multilingual strategies share much in common with Derrida's tactics. The narrator of *Little Theatres* makes the challenge posed by all three writers clear when she admits, "it was hard at first seeing these languages take charge, even frightening a bit. Later we stepped into them like water" (37). For all three authors, the intention is to let the materiality of language -- its sensual presence and effects in the body -- open the borders between self and other, as translating subjects that become manifest in the activity of reading and writing in a language other than one's own.

Daphne Marlatt makes clear that language is "a living body we enter at birth;" it "sustains and contains us" (171):

> language is first of all for us a body of sound. leaving the water of the mother's womb with its one dominant sound, we are born into this other body whose multiple sounds bathe our ears from the moment of our arrival. we learn the sounds before we learn what they say ... gradually we learn how the sounds of our language are active as meaning and then we go on learning for the rest of our lives what the words are actually saying. (171)

The problem with the linguistic systems into which we step in the West is that they are built upon a metaphorology in which is implied "not just a philosophical position but a conceptual network with which philosophy as such is constituted"

(Derrida, "White" 30). What is subsequently obscured in the mystification of western philosophy are the ways in which Plato's own logic is based in metaphorical language. Nowhere in his treatise does Plato admit that his ideas are found within and use his own philosophical metaphors, or that his metaphors are derivatives of his own thinking. As Pierre Louis explains, Plato "gives metaphor the role of expressing an idea, of bringing out or representing the content of a thought, which would naturally be called an 'idea,' as though every one of these words or concepts did not have a whole history of its own (and one with which Plato himself was familiar), and as though that history did not itself carry some imprint of a whole system of metaphor, or, more generally, of tropes" (in Derrida, "White" 22). Said another way by Gramsci, "logic and general methodology are conceived as existing in and for themselves, like mathematical formulae" (*Selections* 307). This is significant because Plato is the source of all meaning to be found in all philosophical metaphors in this tradition so that the classification of philosophical metaphors (i.e. Nature, Man, Society, Reminiscences of myth, history, literature) are a derivative of philosophical discourse and not of truth (Derrida, "White" 23).[16] This would be fine if the task were to describe a form of

[16] Derrida goes one step further to point out that these difficulties become worse when considering 'archaic' tropes, which have given the character of a 'natural' language to 'founding' concepts such as theoria, eidos, logos, etc. He argues that "even the signs (words or concepts) which make up this proposition, starting with trope and arche, have their metaphorical charge. Concept is a metaphor, foundation is a metaphor, theory is a metaphor; and there is no meta-metaphor for them!" (23).

philosophical rhetoric and, indeed, Derrida points out that this is a philosophical ideal and a Platonic one at that, "generated by Plato's ordering and distinguishing between philosophy or dialectic on the one hand, and rhetoric or sophistry on the other" (23); it is this distinction and this hierarchy that must be questioned in Platonic thought itself.

Derrida explains that the primitive meaning of any abstract idea is based on the supposed transparency of the original figure (9). The original figure is the thing in itself and so embodies the thing's "proper meaning" (9). According to Derrida, this meaning becomes metaphor when put in circulation by philosophical discourse (9). At this point a displacement takes place and, importantly, "the first meaning and the first displacement are simultaneously forgotten. The metaphor is no longer noticed, and it is taken for the proper meaning" (9). In this move, the metaphysician grants himself the status of self-effacement. This produces a two-fold effacement, first in the metaphor itself as it effaces the object but also "philosophy would be a self-eliminating process of generating metaphor" (9). However, as Polyphils says to Aristos in Anatole France's "The Garden of Epicurus" (1984), which Derrida uses as a parable for his explication of philosophy, "any expression of an abstract idea can only be an analogy" (11). Therefore, "by an odd fate, the very metaphysicians who think to escape the world of appearances are constrained to live perpetually in allegory. A sorry lot of poets, they dim the colours of the ancient fables, and are themselves but gatherers of

fables. They produce white mythology" (11). It would seem, then, that despite his disparaging of them, Plato was a poet after all.

Metaphysics is, then, a mythology that assembles and reflects western culture; however, "the white man takes his own mythology (that is, Indo-European mythology), his logos (that is, the mythos of his idiom), for the universal form of that which it is still his inescapable desire to call Reason" (11). The metaphysician elevates what is, in fact, a series of allegories produced in the Greco-Roman tradition, which in actuality constitutes merely one of the world's ancient tribes and its leaders (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, etc.), taking these stories produced by the ancestors of western society as representative of the universal forms of human life. As a result, metaphysics "has effaced in itself that fabulous scene which brought it into being" (11). Nietzsche, too, recognized the scene on which truth has been constructed as "a mobile army of metaphors, metonymics, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage, seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses ... coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal" (Nietzsche qtd. in Derrida, "White" 15). Though Metaphysics has attempted to erase its own scene the object

remains, like the found coin from a lost realm that has been worn smooth of its markings.

If we accept Derrida's and Nietzsche's critique then Plato's Ideal Forms might be better understood as "proper objects" in the Foucaudian sense, as figures formed by discourse or, using Lyotard's concept of "the form-figure," which he defines as "the Gestalt of a configuration, the architecture of a painting, in short, the schema" ("Connivances" 293). Derrida draws on an allegory of effaced coins to show the problem with the language of metaphysics. In this allegory knife-grinders grind crownpieces down until no markings are visible, "neither King Edward, the Emperor William, nor the Republic" ("White" 7). As a result, they might say that "[t]hese pieces have nothing either English, German or French about them; we have freed them from all limits of time and space; they are not worth five shillings anymore; they are of an inestimable value" (7). The word "inestimable" is a telling choice here because it does not necessarily mean surplus, as in priceless works of art, but inestimable as in the immeasurability of its value because no comparison is possible; hence the coin appears to exist outside the monetary system. As a result, degradation is interpreted as "the passage from the physical to the metaphysical" (8) -- a distinction that is entirely philosophical. In fact, when the markings are scratched or worn away, the coin is not revealed as a pure figure but an object that is still recognizable as such because of discourses of exchange. There is no such thing as an effaced coin where effaced means

valueless because the coin did not exist as an object until it was put to use within some monetary system. The coin was formed within an economy of exchange that makes it what it is regardless of the specific values and functions that it is assigned in different contexts. But this is not the same as an a priori meaning or original meaning. This is simply the first metaphorical act.[17] Moure, Acker and Brossard engage in a similar experiment to degrade language but instead of seeking the philosopher's Idea or Pure Form underneath the etchings, they expose the Real -- a space of pure alterity. Their collective goal differs from that of the metaphysician in that through multilingualism they access forms of alterity for which there are no signs. Their intention, if one can be isolated, is to free up writing to make new markings so that language might be free to signify unrepresentable qualities of being. When Moure, Acker and Brossard's readers ask, "what does this mean?" they are opening up the space in the signifier that points back to nothing, that cannot be used to signpost or provide ground for self-consolidation; they are reading the signifier in its own terms. This is because there is no general system of metaphorics in a multilingual text, no grammar to rely upon or to use as a point of orientation in the text.

[17] Derrida's discussion of the impossibility of an effaced object is similar to the argument Irigaray makes in "Women on the Market" in *The Sex Which Is Not One* about the function of women as objects of exchange and also overlaps with Witting's "The Mark of Gender," explaining also why Butler argues "Against Proper Objects" in *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* 6.2/3, pp. 1-26.

There are, in reality, multiple sides to any given object that are imperceptible though real.[18] We might say that signs are objects that afford one of their sides while masking others. Herein lies one of the *oversights* in the language of metaphysics. The signs the philosopher seeks are located distinctly in the realm of the empirical -- the provable, verifiable product of observation -- and are, therefore, most distinctly aligned with the visual in that sight is the sense relied upon to integrate the philosopher's premises, transferring them into the language of metaphysics through the trifecta of eye, intellect, word. Thus, the truth the philosopher finds is governed by the rules of connaturality, by the directions of perceptual space and by the constitution of depth (Lyotard, "Connivances" 297). The philosopher's language, then, orders the reality produced by vision -- the realm of "worldly figures' (297) subject to the constraints of designation, which includes the variability of the point of view and the unilaterality of the visible. His language can, therefore, only convey a "referential or worldly dimension" (297), which locates all concepts produced through this language in the space of discourse. Conversely, desire operates as a transgression of the space of discourse: "that of the system and that of reference" (296). Only the mobility of uncathected desire can short-circuit sense and introduce non-sense into the systematic field of language and the order of discourse. This occurs most notably

[18] The Cubists conveyed this aspect of visuality most vividly.

in the dream state when there is a violation "of the negativity that separates terms in the system and that which keeps the object of discourse at a variable distance" (296). Lyotard goes as far as to say that "any displacement of energy towards the perceptual end instead of the verbal-motor end is regressive" (295). The space of desire, then, is not merely an aesthetic space that comes to superimpose itself on the linguistic space but "the body reach itself is, so to speak, enlarged beyond its worldly limits" (297). Moure, Acker and Brossard's multilingual aesthetic enlarges the body's reach because of the visceral experience and code-switching that occur when reading in and out of multiple languages, particularly ones that are foreign to the individual. Brossard explains: "we cannot speak of the language of the other without stunning the body and mind for an instant, without the mind having to proceed with a few adjustments, without the body being surprised by a different way of breathing, without the vocal chords striking a chord, without *la menteuse* ("liar" and also slang for tongue in French) being put to the test" (*Fluid* 200). Multilingual texts expand bodily limits by not being locked to any obvious referential system. Instead, the criterion of truth is called into question as knowledge systems, histories, culture and discourse mix and mingle in the space between languages.

One of Acker's protagonists proclaims, "We teach each other language. We don't teach each other to cry out" (*My Death* 356). The difference between language and a cry is most apparent in the expression of pain. The character

continues, "I know I am in pain cause I feel it. Knowing (the cry, pain) isn't describing or analyzing or understanding" (349). She continues, "The statement 'I know that ... ' doesn't have to do with knowing. Compare 'I know I'm scared' to 'Help!'" (359). Wittgenstein (fictionalized) enters the conversation also asking, "Can I describe (know) anything truthfully? No" (354). Acker reiterates, "Any statement beginning 'I know that ... ' characterizes a certain game. Once I understand the game, I also understand what's being said" (359). But is there a language that knows? Acker argues that there is: "What's the language which knows? 'Help!'" (349). This is because "A cry is language turning in on its own identity, its signifier-signified relationship" (349). She adds, "Language describes reality," asking rhetorically "do I mean to describe when I cry out?" (349). According to Kristeva, language involves a sacrifice; it is the murder of the soma (body) in order to make it signify (*Revolution* 73). Poetic form, however, connects back to the living. In *Fences*, the narrator observes that through prose "the world is driven to creating assets; through poetry it changes and reconnects with the living" (22). Echoing sentiments shared by Kristeva and Brossard, Acker proclaims: "Language knows only when it cries" (355). Multilingualism as a poetic strategy connects to the body and the cry directly. Each body will make sense of the text differently according to its own associations, inflections and experiences. Brossard's narrator reflects this process when she reveals that "the foreign tongue is now in my head daily it crowds me with its words and burns me

pressures me with verb tenses that wrap around me searing ribbons sticky tape then it erases me regardless I listen with my muscles" (*Fences* 57). Against the rationalist impulse to dissect and interpret, the narrator must face the ineptitude of these strategies when confronting the foreign language; she cannot make sense of the language in the ways she expects. She finds the language dizzying and confounding. There is a semiosis that cannot be penetrated by intellect. Instead, this other language will require other senses and she turns the task of translating over to her body's acumen. She perceives that, "in the foreign language there are cries I cannot get used to. Cries issuing from as far away as history, slow, funereal, that leave dark traces even inside the mouth of whoever in the distance hears them" (80). Just as poetry teaches the reader to cry out, multilingualism similarly forces the reader to open her mouth, lungs and belly. Both poetry and multilingualism create a somatic relationship to language that disrupts the language games through which discourse circulates. The unique signature of every person is exhaled in the vowels and shut up in the consonants as the body is subjected to or rather by the foreign language. The narrator of *Fences* describes this experience as tiring due to her lack of control over the unknown language. She says, "I tire quickly when writing in another language. I still don't know where to properly put the silences" (22). In the chapter entitled "Fences," there are ironically no fences in the breath required to read the text. The chapter is a flurry of words without any punctuation or order to distinguish the voices or ideas from

one another. This breathless lack of control characterizes her experience writing in the language she does not know: "In this foreign tongue, I'm not quite able to modulate my voice properly, to sort through the tides of desire and the dregs of the essential. I choke on the tongue that nonetheless intrigues me and keeps me alert" (30). As Foucault makes clear, discourse functions by way of a series of rules that limit what can be said and where one can speak. Decorum is one of the main ways that privilege is maintained: decorum in language, etiquette, codes of conduct, in short, the grammar of everyday life. These limits regulate and restrict the kinds of conversations and topics that will be tolerated, indirectly authorizing certain ideas while excluding others from entering into the network of ideas being circulated at any given time. Acker explains that a truly knowing language is one that is "recognizably destroying itself" (350). By contrast, "'To of for by' isn't a cry or language destroying itself" (350). Here, Acker is signalling the artifice of grammar, which expresses an orientation within language by relaying spatial, temporal or other relationships between constituent parts of the sentence or acting to mediate the activity within the statement by modifying the verb. Grammar functions to organize language according to universal rules that facilitate the functionality of language.

As the narrator begins to write in the language she does not know, she senses the other language "altering my thoughts" (10). The poetic aesthetic of translation that characterizes the multilingual work acts like the process of writing

in a foreign language, becoming, in the words of Moure, "an opportunity for unravelling" (Preface xiv), producing an instability that "might be likened to finding the faces of others in your mirror" (xii). As Moure explains, "the poetic isn't a rational supplement ... but an inherently and sometimes incommensurable form of insight" (xii). In the figure of speech that cannot be translated from one language to another -- as when someone says, 'in my language we say ...' and there is no way to say it in English -- we are getting to something outside language and a realm of possibility representing states of being that have yet to be conceived of.

According to Gramsci, one can only express the ideas that one's language grasps. Gramsci's assertion was proven recently in the experiences of editors tasked with translating *The Encyclopaedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* (EWIC) from English into Arabic. In this translation project, new ideas acted upon and changed the language into which the text was being translated, reversing the usual terms of the relationship between languages in translation. Rather than searching for and finding equivalent words to those in English, the project led to the creation of new terms in Arabic in order to express *ideas* that had no equivalent in the culture. The most striking examples were the need to find a way of expressing the notion of gender apart from biological sex and the notion of queer as opposed to lesbian or gay. In the translation project, the editors discovered an ongoing conversation among users of the Arabic language to find

an alternative to translating gender as "aj-jiins" which is the equivalent of biological sex. Explanatory phrases such "al-naw [gender]" -- shortened from "al-naw' al-jitim [social gender] -- had recently emerged in the field of cultural anthropology but were problematically also commonly used in development documents emanating from the west and circulated under the auspices of international development organizations. Arabic feminists had also been experimenting with new terms such as "Al-jun sa" based on a combination of the terms for masculinity and femininity that was meant to refer to "the sociocultural construction of the sexes" but it was considered cumbersome, and so the word "al jender [gender]" was increasingly being used. This last term signals an association with a western feminist tradition but the Arabic inflection makes visible the work of Arabic feminists to make the new term common knowledge (262-263). As a result, al-jender maintains its connection to the work of feminists and keeps its distance from terms deriving explicitly from development interventions into Arabic life. Using this term, then, reflects the process of producing the term within and across feminist researchers and translators working in English and in Arabic. Hala Kamal notes that the word 'gender' is among the most challenging terms in Arabic translation because of its complexity: "it is often understood in the Arabic sociocultural context as a foreign concept; and since it implies the empowerment of women, it is looked upon with scepticism, if not rejected altogether" (263). Kamal explains that the Arabic equivalent to gender is still

being experimented with and is not yet well defined. The purpose of using the experimental term is to promote the use of the new word al-jender as an Arabic translation of the English word (and notion of) 'gender', instead of looking for static terms that meet the conditions for equivalency or explanatory translations, both of which might imply that a transposition of the concept from the English-speaking world is ideal too. The same is true of the use of the word "kw r" (264) -- a transliteration of the English word queer. Though the term has started appearing in Arabic on some Web sites, it remains unknown to the vast majority of the public and is still most commonly "mistranslated in terms of either the judgemental notion of deviance (shudhudh) or through the oversimplification in 'gays and lesbians' (mithliyyun wa mithliyyat)" (265). The process of coming up with the closest possible translation that would communicate a value-free explanatory equivalent resulted in "al-hawiy t al-jinsiy al-l namatiya," which more or less means "atypical sexual identities" (265). The translation has shortcomings but nevertheless it places emphasis on sexual identity and a specific atypical identity. With the current absence of an equivalent of 'queer' in Arabic, the hope is that an increasing interest in tackling and writing about the issue in Arabic will produce translation alternatives "either turning the word 'queer' into a familiar term in Arabic, or using shorter derivative forms" (265). Where there was a philosophical conflict, grammar was altered to make the language more responsive to the ideas: e.g. the predominant translation of 'researcher' into Arabic

is *b hith*, which excludes the feminine so an addition was made in Arabic of the noun in the feminine form "to express an ideological stance, stressing equality between men and women and reflecting EWIC's feminist discourse" (265). The challenge for the editors is to account for all of this activity when deciding what terms to use in the production of EWIC. Likewise titling the volumes an encyclopaedia of *women* and gender is a departure from the normal use of the habitually used singular term "Mar'a [woman]" in Arabic as in "Yawm al-Mar'a al-'lam [International Woman's Day]," "Huq q al'Mar'a [Woman's Rights]", "Al-Mar'a al-Arabiyya [Arab Woman (meaning Woman of Arabia)]." Using the plural term translates the distinction from within feminist theory between "woman" as a monolithic term and "women," which emphasizes cultural diversity and plurality among women (261). The use of the word "women" "is not a literal translation of the English word, but is a linguistic and cultural translation and is in itself a contribution to the production of knowledge in Arabic through a stress on the significance of differentiating between 'woman' and 'women' in reference to a plural concept" (261). The repetition of Arabic phrases that include both feminine and masculine forms is another way that the editors attempted to establish linguistic balance that reflects a feminist position in form and content (266). In these cases, language is producing ideas, proving that "translation is not merely an act of transferring information, but a process of knowledge production" (Kamal

254) and a political act.[19] This work on EWIC shows the political role of translation to resist hegemony and "create a discourse in its own right" (266), in this case through the production of knowledge in Arabic on the basis of a feminist consciousness.

Proponents of cosmopolitan multilingualism emphasize how relevant experimenting with multiple languages can be for this project and "for the enquiring mind" more broadly (Camboni 39). Ch'ien suggests that multilingualism has the potential to destabilize the "monoglot" that Benedict Anderson describes emerging from within capitalism and mass print, specifically serial culture (43). According to Ch'ien, multilingualism retains in culture the fact of an always present "mutual incomprehensibility" (286) that is most important in relation to monoglot mass reading publics, which most often operate to institutionalize dominant discourse. In setting up the central task of lesbian and gay international rights Judith Butler determines that the goal is "to assert in clear and public terms the reality of homosexuality, not as an inner truth, not as a sexual practice, but as one of the defining features of the social world in its very intelligibility" ("Beside"

[19] It is important to note that this translation project was a product of The Women and Memory Forum (WMF), an Egyptian research centre founded by a group of Egyptian women academics concerned with the study of women in Egyptian and Arab history. The group of women academics, researchers and activists takes the position that dominant cultural views and images of Arab women constitute a major stumbling block in the course of women's development and attainment of their rights. They decided to attain formal status in order to advocate and promote the integration of gender in the study and interpretation of Arab history and the social sciences in general. (http://www.wmf.org.eg/en/)

29). Jack Halberstam uses similar language to celebrate "transgenderism as part of a natural order of species diversity" (107) that must be represented as such in language and elsewhere. Both imagine new forms of human community though Butler is hesitant to use the term "new" since the gender identities that she associates with this evolved community have existed for some time, though there has been no adequate lexicon to express them. Hence, multilingual poetic aesthetics take on this deeper political meaning since Butler contends that "...my persistence: the sense of possibility pertaining to me must first be imagined from somewhere else before I can begin to imagine myself. My reflexivity is not only socially mediated, but socially constituted" ("Beside" 32). Butler asks, "what might it mean to learn to live in the anxiety of that challenge, to feel the surety of one's epistemological and ontological anchor go, but be willing, in the name of the human, to allow the human to become something other than what it is traditionally assumed to be?" (35). In service to this goal, Butler sets up the imperative to articulate and find institutional support for universal conditions of liveability that are not based on any protected status but on the intrinsic right for all human experiences to be rendered recognizable. Neigh argues that engaging with multilingual texts can help readers to develop "nonimperializing interpretive skills, which recognize linguistic differences, as well as social and cultural differences" (79). This is due in large part to the code-switching and delving into foreign words that take readers out of their comfort zone and destabilize

comprehension, leading to "an admittedly bewildering experience" (80). Reading multilingual texts requires readers to become comfortable with the gaps in knowing created by translation and suspends the goal of knowing in a way that is contrary to the masculine project of containing, conquering and understanding subjects. Faced with a foreign text, the native English speaker must at some point realize that because they do not possess the language skills, they may not be the implied reader (82). Any resistance to such texts can, however, act as a compelling starting place from which to recognize the hierarchies between different languages, ways of speaking and the exclusionary politics of language in general, even helping the reader to cultivate a self-reflexivity toward her own relationship to language, particularly in relation to the global politics of English (74; 80). Neigh suggests that multilingual texts might even allow speakers of English insight into what it feels like to learn a second language and to think about how the language one speaks determines how and if one's voice is heard (84; 86). Ultimately, multilingual texts encourage readers to see that our ability to understand one another has limits -- a fact that is masked by English as a lingua franca through which the native English speaker is led to believe that she understands what is transmitted in English regardless of its origin or influences.

The translations that constitute both the acts of reading and writing multilingual works require listening to another's body, recognizing it as an unknowable site. This is what makes translation a political act. Oana

Avasilichioaei and Moure explain that multilingual texts require listening "with the whole body, not just the ears" ("Translation" 212) to rhythms, intonations, to other languages emanating from within our knowledges, shaping and informing, making words and sounds appear. They further remind us that "language exists because of the necessity of dialogue between two beings. Language *is* only because it *moves* from me to you to her to me, etc." (212). In this instance, reading is listening; it is a conversation and a collaboration between the reader, writer(s) and text. Reading multilingual texts relies especially on dialogue and co-creation while accepting that these are contingent, unstable practices so that there is no identifiable authority to which to defer. Avasilichioaei and Moure further contend that "there is no one way to read that is determined solely by the text; the body of the reader is necessary" ("Translation" 209). This conception of texts overlaps with Butler's depiction of bodies as "always something more than and other than ourselves" ("Beside" 25), and furthermore "formed within the crucible of social life" (21). In terms similar to those of Butler, Avasilichioaei and Moure refer to "the citizen formed in literature" as "one who enables passages across borders, where bodies act or enact, and do no enclose but open, in order to *be*" ("Translation" 208).[20] The paradox for Avasilichioaei and Moure, like the one

[20] Ryan Fitzpatrick and Susan Rudy explain that reading is overtly political in that textual borders stand as a model for the borders surrounding citizenship. The questions we ask of books are the same ones we ask of citizenship: "do we stay put? move across borders? force others into or out of (our?) space(s)? facilitate free movements? do we see the world as given and unchangeable or as something, in Clarice Lispector's words, 'tortuously in the making'?;" "how we act as readers

identified by Butler, is that "to enact the civic" according to its etymology "means to be accountable to another, to another body" (207) rather than referring to self-protective autonomy.

As an aesthetic strategy, then, multilingualism has much in common with coalitional politics. Through the lens of coalitional politics identity is viewed as "situationally constructed and defined and at the crossroads of different systems of alterity and stratification" (Friedman 47). The associated script is one of "relational positionality" (40). Within a relational framework identities shift with a changing context. In discussing the politics of translation Avasilichioaei and Moure explain that "the intersections and not the 'flux' in isolation" is what is most interesting ("Translation" 215-216); they argue that it is most productive to recognize that the subject is "subject to alteration" and exists within "striations" (215).[21] Weird English writers demonstrate this point. According to Ch'ien "[w]hen weird English writers transgress the world of the first language by becoming emotionally oriented toward a new linguistic world, their relationship to language becomes epistemological, not simply pragmatic" (33). The politics of translation are such that the act, when attended to conscientiously, forces us to recognize women imitating patriarchal accents in everyday speech, translators

affects how we act as citizens" (60). For more on the civic in Moure's work see also Johanna Skibsrud's "'If We Dare To': Border Crossings in Erin Moure's *O Cidadán*," *The Brock Review*, 2010, Vol.11.1.

[21] Avasilichioaei and Moure argue that to say that the subject is in flux is "to belabour the point" (215).

tentatively adopting different accents, and the status of various languages in the world.

For Brossard, creative writing is the privileged place where sexual, libidinal, mental and spiritual energies are transformed into social meaning. She explains: "filtered by language this energy finds a rhythm becomes a voice, transforms itself into images and metaphors" (*Fluid* 28). The total body is central to the aesthetic of all three writers because in Brossard's words "the body circulates energy and provides, through our senses, a network of associations out of which we imagine far beyond what we in fact see, hear, feel or taste ...through this network of associations we claim new sensations … we discover unexpected angles of thought" (27). Multilingualism creates a synchronous language more akin to the way the body experiences life, and so, more ready to translate its pulses and desires. In the next three chapters I will examine the ways in which each writer uses multilingualism as a strategy in their personal politics, both for articulating the needs of the body politics with which they each identify and for processing the particular conflicts occurring within their respective physical bodies. As queer women, they are seeking a language that more adequately allows for the expression of their desires and relationships. Each woman's writing is also distinctly historically located in or against specific politics of the time. In particular, Moure uses multilingualism as a means to express the loss of her mother, and also as a mechanism to distance herself from the conglomeration of

military and capitalist power that dominated the 1990s with the two Bush presidencies and Tony Blair's 'New Labour'. Meanwhile, Acker uses multilingualism as a way to articulate her dislocation as gender-queer and bisexual within dominant LGBT politics of the time, also directing much of her criticism at the exploitations created by 1980s' Reaganomics. Finally, Brossard creates a lesbian plane of existence within her multilingual texts, also a response to the matrices of imperial power shaping her life in Québec during and following the Quiet Revolution.

Echoing the sentiments expressed in the works of Moure, Acker and Brossard, Lyotard claims that "to speak is to fight" (10) and, furthermore, there is pleasure in playing the game, in the invention of new moves, turns of phrases, of words, of meanings, in "the process of the evolution of parole" (10). The weird English writer goes one step further by challenging "the possibility of saying anything according to the rules that dominate conventional English" (Ch'ien 14). This challenge is present in the works of Moure and Acker, as well as in that of Brossard, who claims, "words are exciting because they echo in us the realm of the possible" (*Fluid* 25). This realm of imagined possibility is not to be underestimated. For, as Butler proclaims, "possibility is as crucial as bread" ("Beside" 29). By this she is referring to the crucial place of fantasy, or imagining possible futures beyond what is "merely actual and present" (28) in society. In fact, Butler says, "we should not underestimate what the thought of the possible

does for those for whom the very issue of survival is most urgent" (29). Through "the simultaneous apprehension of what is mysterious as nevertheless a coherent and conceivable mode of existence," multilingual texts open a space for meaningful difference; "more significantly it is in the very disruption of the effort to comprehend that meaning resides" (Reynolds 74). The multilingual texts of Moure, Acker and Brossard open the possibility of meaningful difference by allowing readers to alternately revel in and grapple with translating the texts' ultimate incomprehensibility. In so doing these texts encourage listening and co-creation as the basis for a new social and political connection.

Chapter Two: Multilingualism as Erín Moure's Queer Feminist Sense-Making Apparatus

As it turns out, that mysterious character Elisa Sampedrín, that elusive other whom readers first meet as a playwright in *Little Theatres*, the heteronym who then interrupts Erín Moure's *O Resplandor*, acting as the protagonist's double and doppelganger, trace and shadow in *The Unmemntioable*, is a trout. Moure's work has been referred to in *The Harvard Review* as "no less than epistemology" (Rossell) and in the remaking -- or unmaking -- of knowledge systems, what better avatar is there for the possibilities of sensory cognition than the "dearest trout" (17) to whom the narrator appeals throughout the final book in the Elisa Sampedrín series?[22] Without a developed cerebrum and the corresponding reason (*cogito*) to guide its way, the trout finds its original spawning grounds using taste and smell, interpreting the world -- as Moure points out by way of a footnote -- using sensory input "estimated to be 500-800 times more accurate than those received by a human" (116) so that "when a woman stops writing and sets down her pen, the sound is easily audible to any trout across the lake" (116). Thus, sounds that would otherwise go unnoticed and particularly those produced by women writing are picked up by "dear t" (99), tasted along its back and smelled through its sides, having receptors for both taste and smell in

[22] Direct addresses to "Dearest Trout" or "My Dearest Trout" (29; 31; 43; 55; 69; 86; 109; 114; 116; 117), also the shortened "dear t" (99) and in Ukrainian [Dearest trout] (98).

body parts other than nostrils and mouth. Moure's multilingualism works in a similar fashion by invoking the reader's "libidinal skin" (Lyotard, "The Great" 17), a reconfigured bodily topology to which must be added "the tongue and all the pieces of the vocal apparatus, all the sounds of which they are capable, and moreover, the whole selective network of sounds, that is the phonological system" (2). In Lyotard's configuration, rather than separating the vocal apparatus as part of some imagined inside set apart from the body's outside, the body's surface is like a Möbius strip twisting to paradoxically reveal its inside and outside to be one continuous material. By likewise including the phonological system as part of her fish-like bodily sense-making apparatus, Moure is setting her work up as a challenge to the occularcentrism around which western metaphysics revolves.[23] Through the motif of the trout and its sensory cognition Moure subverts the guarantee on which western *photo*logical systematics are premised, namely a belief in *alètheia* -- the idea that truth will be revealed by denying the validity of information received through parts of the body other than reason's primary tool: the eyes. Moure uses multilingualism as a way to access bodily knowledge by moving away from the primacy of sight on which the written word relies and encouraging the use of tongue, ears, glottis, throat, lips, breath and body. As the

[23] Occularcentrism refers to the privileging of photological systematics in Western metaphysics and the priority status given to sight as the sense most closely associated with reason and, therefore, truth in this tradition. See Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*, the text from which this term derives.

reader wraps her mouth around unfamiliar sounds for which Moure provides a glossary only in the first book of the three-part series, she is encouraged to participate in reading and translation as embodied experiences and to resist hegemonic masculine structures of thought and language premised on the separation of mind and body .

In *The Unmemntioable* Galician, Romanian and Ukrainian are used most frequently alongside English and French as the dominant languages; as well Moure includes some Latin, snippets of Polish and traces of Russian, in recognition of the embattled history of her mother's homeland of Ukraine. Galician, Romanian and Ukrainian stand as "small theatres" (Moure, "Poetics" 170), of the kind established in her previous book, *Little Theatres*. The languages "one does not yet recognize" are posited as alternatives to "the big theatres of war and discourse (the clash of civilizations, for example) concocted for us in English" (170) through which "the world from end to end is organized as mimesis [and] resemblance is the law" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 149-50). As a result, the narrator of *The Unmemntioable* wishes she could write with her left hand, unable to answer the question "are you right- or left-handed?" (Moure 101). This question triggers for her "representations of togas" (101). She continues: "so much of history is language here/even the telling tells of language/my right hand aching/syllables seen with my own eyes in a plaster frieze of war" (101). Her aching right hand like the motif of aching mouths that recurs in her texts refers to the pain caused by

forcing the body to make itself legible and decipherable within normalized forms of language that are also associated by virtue of the togas with Greek history and the origin of western society.

In *Little Theatres* Moure's poetic Galician homages to water, cabbage, onion, potato and garlic take the reader deep into territories of soil, language, and corporeality. In *O Resplandor* Moure's heteronym, Elisa Sampedrín (ES), is inexplicably compelled to translate the poems of Stănescu though she admits she knows no Romanian. In *The Unmemntioable* EM and ES come dangerously close to colliding when ES follows EM on a pilgrimage to the village where "her maternal family was erased by war and time." The level of difficulty progresses as the texts move from trilingual with glossary in the first book, *Little Theatres*, to multilingual in *O Resplandor* and *The Unmemntioable* with no aids in either of these two final books. Williams and Marinkova observe that within Moure's *transelations*, "languages interact with one another, passing through a sentient body, urgently and synaptically" in a "Möbius strip operation" (76).[24] As a result readers are encouraged to recognize their own "corporeal position in the world"

[24] *Transelation* is a term coined by Moure herself to refer to translating that foregrounds the translator's presence as opposed to translations that attempt to efface the translator's presence. For criticism on the latter see Lawrence Venuti's *Translation Studies Reader,* particularly Antoine Berman's chapter, "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign" (240-253). According to Williams et al. writing *transelations* requires acknowledging "the ideological and cultural embeddedness of the translator's feeling body [and an] affective relationality between translator and text, a relationality that escapes cognitive, social and cultural scripts, but which demands an embodied and embedded expression" (75).

(75). Moure's multilingual texts, then, introduce sense-making apparatuses that revalue the body -- admonished in Platonic and then humanistic privileging of intellect over the senses – to produce a non-assimilable language that defies the western rationalist impulse to mastery. Moure's multilingualism thereby avoids closing off ways of *knowing* the world within gendered frameworks that produce limited ways of *being* in the world. Nearsighted and having receptors dispersed across its whole body, Moure's irreverent fish glides through all three texts, a living emblem of Jean Francois Lyotard's "ephemeral skin" unperturbed by any search for *alètheia* and the occulocentrism organizing the world above it.[25]

This chapter examines the emergence of multilingualism in Moure's work with particular attention to the effects of these texts on the reader, who alternately revels in and grapples with translating the texts' ultimate incomprehensibility, having no choice but to become submerged in their deep waters. Moure's multilingual practice builds on the work of Luce Irigaray whose feminist revision of classical philosophy challenged the western empirical emphasis on sight and the corresponding distrust of other senses. Moure's multilingual texts encourage the reader to trust her body, emphasizing the tactile possibilities inherent in language. Drawing on the principles embedded in poetic language, Moure illustrates how multilingualism has the potential to generate a reading experience

[25] See "The Great Ephemeral Skin" in Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy.*

more akin to touching than seeing by requiring the reader to open to a field of attractions and associations that puts words in contact with one another, an effect which proliferates both meanings and subjectivities. In this way, the reader becomes an informal translator and co-creator within the text, interpreting the work through the matrix of her own sound-body-voice. The reader's active co-creation of the text also allows space for the formation and reformation of linguistic identities. As a result, Moure's multilingual practice opens up forbidden surfaces both in language and history. In *O Resplandor* and *The Unmemntioable* Moure archives and mourns both the loss of her mother and the lost voices of her mother's Polish ancestors as she traverses the Ukrainian countryside in search of a place to bury her mother's ashes. Treading into the author's experience of mourning, the texts open up the materiality of language, that of her mother's ailing body, and the relation of these to accessing foreclosed subjectivities. Moure's representation of mourning makes clear the connections between mourning and multilingualism in that both are characterized by unknowability, gaps and (re)iteration. As such, Moure's texts elaborate the ways that the linguistic encounter is like the encounter with death in that it is a confrontation with the limits of intelligibility; consequently, the reader experiences multilingualism much like she experiences mourning. Ultimately, Moure's work suggests a philosophical connection between multilingualism as a way of knowing-being and

mourning also as a way of knowing-being that fundamentally opposes the will to mastery at the core of the western humanist tradition.

The Embodied Challenge to Western Rationalism

As I have explored in the previous chapter, from Plato to Kant to Descartes male philosophers have determined that what is in the world is less important than what is in the mind. When the protagonist of *The Unmemntioable* declares, "Je n'ai pas de vie intérieure, c'est le monde qui m'intéresse [I don't have an interior life, it is the world that interests me]" (23) she is aligning herself with feminist rereadings of this philosophical history.[26] Within Enlightenment discourse, the world is associated with distractions and sensorial deceptions that cloud reasoning. The split between an inner trustworthy self and the unruly world experienced through the body has its origin in the "profound somatophobia" (Grosz 5) that can be traced back to Platonic thought best illustrated in his Parable of the Cave. According to Irigaray, the parable works to conceal the truth of a purely corporeal existence -- an existence that is oriented to the mother's body in ways that are not accounted for in western knowledge systems. Though the child cannot see the mother when it is in utero, it has the ability to know her and

[26] Even of those modern philosophers associated with studies of sexuality, none has explicitly devoted himself to developing a theory of the body (Grosz ix) i.e. Freud, Lacan, Schilder, Goldsten, Luria, Merleau-Ponty, Nietzsche, Foucault, Lingis, and Deleuze and Guattari

interpret its world. The womb is in fact where the infant experiences its first sensations. These then become the ground for knowing all other things that will occur outside the womb. Language itself is necessary only to recall and satiate the urges first experienced in the womb and early infancy. This infantile world is, furthermore, organized by a dyadic reality versus the singularity that will be imposed and idealized later with the introduction of language. Irigaray explains, "here is a vicious circle in which cause and effect are confused in a collapse of all foundations, an erasure of all beginnings, a distrust of all memories, of all stories. Of all imaginations, all sensation" (*Speculum* 183-84). Irigaray questions the founding myths embedded in Plato's "Parable of the Cave," through which the hierarchies that govern modern philosophy -- those of inside/outside, darkness/light, image/truth, sensation/rationality -- are set based on the motif of a prisoner who is barred from perceiving reality by his fascination with puppet-like projections orchestrated by illusionists that dupe his senses and keep him ignorantly chained in the darkness of a cave. Irigaray asks, "how to tame these unchartered territories, these dark continents, these worlds through the looking glass? ... when a long history has taught you to seek out and desire only clarity, the clear perception of (fixed) ideas?" (136). Here Irigaray is referring to the dominance of *alètheia* in the history of philosophy, meaning the goal to disclose or reveal The Truth. "A-lètheia is not only the game's main stake but determines its layout and principles and modus operandi" (262). As a result, an "age-old

occulocentrism" (148) enters into the discourse, as truth is determined to be all that is outside the cave, all that can be seen and verified to which theories can point unequivocally.

In *The Unmemntioable* Moure asks, "[w]hat is inside. What bears worth. What is a noise in the mouth?" (105). According to Irigaray, sound is the solidifying quality in the assertion of western metaphysics. The projections of men's bodies on the screen of the cave are designated true only if they can be lent voices. The "echoes of the words produced by the magician-imagemakers" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 264) lend the statue-emblems the quality of realness. Here, sound is used to verify the truth of what is seen, not as a way of accessing knowledge on its own, though sound is the second sense developed in utero and sight is the last. In this situation, "sound (phōnē) gives fantasies a character of pure and immediate presence that masks the artificial mechanisms ... [and] the obliterations that contrive their elaboration ..." (264). Truth and phōnē sustain and determine their mutual domination in the matter of ensuring the presence of the existence of the *alètheia* (264). As a result, "... air trans-formed into sounds which, once elaborated into language -- whether in lexicon or syntax -- will immediately be enslaved to the idea of verisimilitude" (265) but "in that cave we cannot forget that this Parousia (arrival of truth) rests on the indirect authority of men's words, heard by men and lent to fantasies which men produce and see ..." (265), showing once again the way the ideal of truth functions "to sanction,

organize, regulate and arbitrate the relationship between men, particularly by means of theorization" (265). Showing her affinity with Irigaray, Moure observes that

> the way we conceptualize (i.e. the categories and connections in our thinking by which we organize the world) affects the way we perceive. We don't 'perceive' then 'interpret.' Interpretation is an instantaneous flutter. The world is simultaneously perceived and framed ... And the way we conceptualize is affected by language, its habits, norms and structures, which then affects the way we see and hear ... ("Breaking" 1)

Within a masculine paradigm, theories are confirmed based on their sameness with the idea. This self-referentiality is the paradox on which western metaphysics is based, also creating the conditions for a patriarchal grammar in which "I think" sets the terms for all subjects and predicates, with this particular grammatical unit determining the subject's conditions for being (the "I" is one who thinks and thinking is the quality that proves the existence of the "I"). Julia Kristeva, too, would agree, adding "[e]very ideological form finds its specific form, its language, its rhetoric" (*Language* 202). However, as Irigaray points out, "...truth will be unequivocally obvious only if the emission of sounds is made an attribute of the fantasies" (*Speculum* 264). Moure's strategy is to emphasize sound over sight to disrupt the ways in which language is used in the service of the "law-giving father, with his proper names, his desires for making capital in every sense of the word, desires that prefer the possession of territory, which includes language to the exercise of his pleasures" (Irigary 140) and the theatres of war,

power, corruption that are perpetuated by his rule.[27] Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska explains that "exclusion, madness and violence form part of a metaphysical system where duality is the theoretical basis for social and psychological organization" (29). In other words, the logic of separation, designation and difference that governs language in a patriarchal semantic economy creates the conditions for exclusion and violence by drawing dividing lines through the centre of societies and individuals.

Moure's earliest epistemological endeavours are marked by a desire to challenge knowledge systems and their forms, evidenced by the exasperated comments of her high school teachers who found themselves marking Moure's long form poems on English Literature rather than the formal essay structures that they had assigned.[28] In a note from her "Absolutely Private and Interior Meditations on *Domestic Fuel* Toronto London Greece September 1983" Moure reflects on her need "to forge the word ... to change our world, our relationships to one another, we have to change the way words operate. It's our syntax does this to

[27] Shannon Maquire analyzes Moure's emphasis on sound in *O Cidadán*, noting the ways that "noise" is used in this text to disrupt notions of western hospitality. See "Parasite Poetics: Noise and Queer Hospitality in Erín Moure's *O'Cidadán*" in *Canadian Literature*, 2015, Vol. 224, 27-63, 169.

[28] Among Moure's report cards and old school papers are two long form poems: "Crabbed Age and Youth Cannot Live Together Geoffrey Chaucer's Miller's Tale" and "Spencer's Warfare" that were evidently both submitted as final papers to the chagrin of her high school teachers, one of whom indicates that he appreciates the poem but that the assignment was "meant to be an essay" and the other who more adamantly requests that she submit an essay and not a poem next time ("Chaucers" np; "Spencer's" np).

us. Our ways of describing" ("Absolutely" np). This explains her interest in non-English and especially minority languages, leading her to acquire a trove of languages including Castilian, Portuguese, Galician and Romanian in order to read the poetries of Andrés Ajens, Alberto Caiero, Chus Pato, Nichita Stănescu and Paul Celan. She refers to English as integral to those "Big Theatres" of war and destruction created by the likes of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his American ideological counterpart, President George W. Bush, rebelling with her "Little Theatres" against the pressure to participate in English linguistic dominance and in so doing to share language with these figures and their political agendas.

Making Sense: Embodied Learning as Feminist Epistemology

In *Sheep's Vigil* Moure is taken aback when she realizes while reading Alberto Caiero "I can read Portuguese, whoosh!" and concludes "it was as if studying Galician had created neurons in my head" (*Sheep's Vigil* vii). It is this experience of "whoosh" that Moure wants to pass on to the reader along with the concomitant realization that there are experiences, capacities and potentialities for which there is not yet a language. Galician is particularly indicative of silences and the unknowable due to its obscurity; so much so that according to Moure upon publishing her first Galician language text she was accused by journalists of having invented the language (IFOA). In a roundtable discussion with her

frequent collaborator and sometimes editor, Oana Avasilichioaei, Moure reveals that she no longer feels the need "to row the boat" between languages, and that as a result her texts "make the unilingual reader bilingual" (IFOA). The stimulating effect of this refusal to always translate for the reader is evident in the comments of a Belladonna Collective member who, when introducing Moure's *O Resplandor* at a New York reading, proclaimed that in reading the work she discovered, "Cool, I didn't know I was bilingual" despite being "pretty sure I only speak English but now [being] not so sure" (Skillings). In email correspondence reviewing Moure's *Little Theatres*, fellow poet and friend Robert Majzels echoes the Belladonna experience, remarking to Moure with pleasure regarding the opening poem "aturuxos caLados," that "using the dico [dictionary] I can work out something and make up my own poem. Being ignorant of even 'na' and 'do' and 'as,' I have to invent" (*LT* First Comments). One of the pleasures of Moure's texts is this inventing, the forming of words in the mouth and imagining possibilities in language.

In the first of her multilingual works, *Little Theatres*, the reader is offered a glossary of terms that supports the text while not closing off the generative aspects of the multilingual reading process. Recalling her own experience reading the poetry of Stănescu for the first time, Moure remembers being drawn to "the sound of the poems, the rhythms" (Eichhorn 215). She fell in love with "the look of Romanian" (215) though she did not understand a word. The language

resounded in some inexplicable ways with her "Galician self" (215), allowing her to capture "something visceral and vital in Stănescu's poems, even though none of the words were the same" (215). Though she thought, at first, that the results must have been "ridiculous" (215), she was assured by Avasilichioaei, who is also a translator of Stănescu, that "this is a true translation too, this is a proper translation" (215). Moure explains that it is "the gesturality of words that is at stake, their capacity always to start indicating meaning" (219). Moure's texts invite the reader to participate in this process of translating, so that "even if someone doesn't speak a language or understand the words, they can see how beautiful they are, and you can make out sounds in words and you can make your own sounds for words" (218). To facilitate this activity, Moure provides a partial glossary that the reader can use to decipher some of the Galician terms but most of the connecting words and much of the vocabulary are left to be interpreted and sensed without a dictionary. Thus, her texts emphasize the materiality of language and the pleasures that reading triggers in the body when the conventional logic of reading is displaced.

This reading experience is a consequence of Avasilichioaei and Moure's approach to translation, which recognizes that "there's an ethos of space and body, sound, reaction to sound, to the way a word looks ... a polyphonicity" ("Translation" 210). It is because of this ethos that Moure is able to read and eventually translate a language she does not know, "Romanian for example"

(210). For Moure this reading process is informed by "other aspects of poetic art" that she is familiar with i.e. an attention to "where the language repeats, what syllables it takes up again, how one syllable leads to another because of a look or a sound; [she] intuit[s] rhythms and structures [and] make[s] connections using the language [she] does know" (210). Moure proclaims that in this process, "I literally witness my own mind concatenating 'sense'" (210). It is this same experience she and Avasilichioaei pass on to readers, turning readers into translators.

In effect, *Little Theatres* acts as a virtual lesson in Galician due not only to the glossary but also to the structure of the text. By the end of the book the reader will have learned to recognize particular words: leiras (field), canto (song), auga (water), pataca (potato), paxaro (bird), arao (rare bird), as well as figured out that "os" means "or," "a" means "the," "ao" means "to," "e" means "and," and "coa" means "with." So that by the end of the book using the glossary is hardly necessary except for the few highly idiomatic words that appear in the last pages: ollomol (seafoam), chapapote (oil spill), apagón (blackout). The reader learns through seeing various words and themes repeated throughout but also through the structure of poems such as "Homenaxe ao mineral do repolo" and "Homage to the Mineral of Cabbage" that are placed side by side with Galician on one page and English on the adjacent page. The reader may flitter her eyes back and forth learning each phrase line by line or can choose to read one and then the other in

its entirely, hunting for anomalies among all the corollaries, enjoying as well the act of translation and its mysterious transformation of words that are not always exactly the same, as when ceo (sky) becomes "heaven" and "on high" (13). In this way, the eye is demoted to being placed on par with other senses as the eyes must search without the conceit of knowing. As the eyes move back and forth between the Galician text and the English language, the hand flips to and from the glossary, the self-assured complacency of seeing and knowing is disrupted. Sight is shaken loose from the presumption of transparency, of its direct line to truth or *alètheia* -- of the belief that the eye transmits the thing in its essence to the mind on which sight's privilege is historically based. Instead sound and touch -- touch of lips and tongue and teeth -- take precedence in creating meaning.

Moure's multilingualism opens to the flesh by providing "aturuxos caLados," the subtitle to *Little Theatres*, which in Galician translates as silent, deep and spontaneous whoops in a song. The reading of these aturuxos calados calls upon the ear, tongue, throat, glottis and bodily reverberations in order to contend with their seeming contradictoriness. *Little Theatres* establishes an interpretive framework of sound-body-voice beginning from the epigraph of the text, in which Jean-Luc Nancy denounces, "vox significativa [meaningful voice]" in favour of that voice that is "ce timbre du lieu où un corps s'expose et se profère [this stamp of place where the body is exposed and uttered]." The association of multilingualism with the place of the body is continued in the first vignette, also

named "Aturuxos CaLados" (3), which uses an amalgamation of Galician, English and French in the line "anos annals années a-néantes espidas pido pidas [years (Gal.) yearly (Eng.) years (Fr.) to nothingness naked I ask you ask (Gal.)]" (3) to conjure up both the deep silences of an inaccessible language and non-linguistic sounds like whoops in a song that the reader must make in sounding out the non-English words. In sounding out unfamiliar words, the reader draws on an uncanny epistemology to find the text's logic. For example, in "aturuxos caLados" the Galician word "comprensible" sounds like "comprehensible," and like this word in both French and English means "understandable;" "consecuencia" sounds like and means the same as the similar French and English words for "consequences," "pensamento" sounds like both the French "penser [to think]" and the English "pensive" and translates as "thoughts" (6). In the poem "Exchange of Vows" Moure provides a meditation on "Latin," which she uses as a metonym for an original language that is not one language but many, perhaps all in that Latin in her use refers to a language of desire. She says, "I meant agasallo [gift (Gal.)] you said gift/we said amizade [friendship (Gal.)] I said embarrassed/but that was in my latin ..." (82). Most significantly, Moure notes that

> ... you said see you tomorrow
> until then or until later
> até logo
>
> I knew what you were saying as if
> you too spoke latin

> we both suddenly spoke latin
> !Latin was where we first met our mothers!
>
> I was so glad of my *later*
> with its two verticals and echo of até logo
> yours too has two verticals
> letters like penedos [standing stone (Gal.)]
>
> até logo I said to you too. (82)

In this exchange Moure is grateful for the meaning conveyed in the visual construction and aural similarities of both terms. The two verticals, the letters "t" and "l" of até logo, recall the "t" and "l" in "til later," so that she "knew what you were saying as if/you too spoke Latin." Meaning is made without sensible or rational explanation but through the ways the letters reverberate in the body, creating understanding in the mouth. As the "t"s hit the back of her teeth and the "l"s tap the roof of her mouth, the revelation emerges: "see you later." In this way, Moure's multilingualism creates "obriga cargada [loaded forces (Gal.)]" (*Little* 5) that encourage the reader to trust the body; the ear knows, perhaps the mouth does too as Moure creates poems in which the reader can rely on the way words sound to access the meaning of the text without actually knowing or being provided with a full index to the language.

Avasilichioaei claims that in a multilingual text the reader is forced to "learn language by being in it;" she is "forced to understand differently" relying on "tone, interaction, musicality ... the look of it on the page [and] not just the denotation of the words" (IFOA). In *Little Theatres,* ES -- as the fictional

playwright -- explains "Little theatres doesn't have just one way of dealing with the alphabet.[29] The register, or *rexistro*, of each letter is allowed to move on its own" (*Little* 39). Similarly, in pondering whether to use the initials O or O.A. for her invented translator in *O Resplandor*, which she notes "curiously matches the name of my esteemed editOr!" (*LT* Manuscript Notes, *emphasis in original*), Moure muses "how I love the O, as I have always loved the letter O for its resemblance to the earth itself and for the feeling of pleasure and surprise that saying 'O' gives ... and it is the 'O' of *O Resplandor* too." She considers also "extend[ing] the lie" by changing the "O' to an 'R,' thinking that "R has a nice sound in the mouth and is the R of Resplandor ... R is also plural, Are, and of the verb To Be ..." In these musings it becomes apparent how much work one letter does, reverberating in the body to make associations and meanings in the absence of syntax. This awareness is the basis for understanding how multilingual texts work to generate knowledge differently. When immersed in another language "we are faced with our own discomfort at finding other ways to understand" (Avasilichioae IFOA). Avasilichioaei and Moure contends that this results in an "unbordering" of language, as the reader interacts with "the materiality of language ... the architecture of page and text and how language, which is sound and music, is handled bodily in the throat and the chest and the belly" (Concordia

[29] The recurrent character, Elisa Sampedrín, is sometimes referred to across the texts as ES. This is the same for Oana Avasilichioae and Erin Moure herself. When they appear as fictionalized characters -- as in *O Resplandor* -- they are referred to as OA and EM.

Pres. Notes). Corporeal sites that are usually taken for granted become sites of epistemological production and provide new ways to interact with the text.

According to Moure, "learning another language -- alters the mouth, the body, the body's borders"; "language is a social space, and in social spacings embodiment and speech are both operative ... " ("Poetics" 169). Embodiment demands "body, speech, tongue" (A practice 4) with poetic language especially being "full of teeth and valleys" (1).[30] Moure avoids the teeth, however, instead compelling the mouth and throat to open to spaces and depths represented by vowels. In *The Unmemntioable* Moure opens up "a forbidden surface <unmentionable>" found in "[a vowel in ttrout]" (6 *punctuation as in original*). This doubling of consonants is repeated numerous times in the spelling of the word "ttrout," as well as in the spelling of "soill" (12) and "mysself" (13). The insignificance of consonants compared to vowels is made apparent by the fact that their doubling -- and presumably tripling into infinity -- does not change the sound or meaning of the word though multiplying any vowel in the same way would change the sound and possibly meaning totally. The doubled consonants, thereby, highlight the crucial nature of vowel sounds that are made by opening the body: mouth and throat, as opposed to consonants that make their sounds by closing the breath, stopping sound and flows of air against teeth or by way of

[30] The archived draft version of Moure's poet's statement for *Eleven More American Women Poets* gives deeper insight into Moure's thinking on poetic embodiment.

closing the mouth and firming the lips. Most importantly vowels trigger responses in the glottis, that sensitive fleshy moderator found in "la gorge" or what David Farrell Krell calls "the profound throat" (86). This is the "inward surface" (91) made up of "the anterior/interior part of the neck, home of the larynx and pharynx, that is, the voice box and the place where the nostrils, esophagus, and windpipe converge, the space of the glottis as well as the cleft known as the *rima glottidis*" (86). This bodily lever is invoked in Moure's poetry when in two separate poems she refers to language passing through similar circumstances "of throat and weir." [31] Suggesting that there is a weir in the throat calls to mind the glottis as a fleshy dam. In so doing she reminds us that language is intimately connected with the flesh. William James describes the glottis "like a sensitive valve, intercepting my breath instantaneously at every mental hesitation or felt aversion to the objects of my thought, and as quickly opening, to let the air pass through my throat and nose, the moment the repugnance is overcome" (301); therefore, the movements of this soft palate react to the mental effort required for thinking of the different objects of speech like a dam or weir holding back or releasing a forceful flow. [32]

[31] "Throat and Weir" is the name of a poem in *Little Theatres* written in both English and Galician. The poem switches from English to Galician after passing through "My circumstances/ of throat and weir;" the concept comes up again in the poem "Araos" (84) and in the poem "UIIX" when sorrow is associated with a blockage in language, "Can you feel Latin's sorrow or weir" (75).
[32] To this Merleau-Ponty adds, "above all these strange movements of the throat and mouth are called the voice" (in Krell 97)

Moving into non-English languages moves the reading from the head into the mouth, glottis, throat, breath and belly. This redistribution of language in the body is made most clear in the poem "Araos" when the narrator notices "your linguaxe [language (Gal.)]/opening my throat our entry" (*Little Theatres* 84). As Krell explains, language "is not simply a matter of words. It is also a matter of a particular kind of experience of the voice and throat" (87). Krell writes that "to speak to another is to make him or her repeat immediately in himself or herself the 's'entendrer parler' in the very form in which I produce it and such tacit reproduction gives itself out as the phenomenon of a mastery or a limitless power over the signifier" (92). As a result, one never knows for certain "whether [one] is speaking or listening to language" (94), always repeating inside oneself the words one is hearing. Moure's use of multiple languages forces the reader to repeat in herself words she does not know. The motility of the glottis, tongue, teeth, lips and lungs is forced to respond to the alterity always present in the voice.

In recounting her mother's family history Moure notices words that are disem(v)oweled and voices that have been silenced "by imperial consequence" (9), producing bodies marked by by "s_rr_w too/harvested of v_wels/f_r tr_ut" (9). The harvesting of vowels -- and particularly the big round 'o' sounds here that require the exhalation of breath -- signals the ways that language is "forever outside the body ... And it is in the body," in the most material sense when "with the death of a single body, an entire language, an entire nation and culture can

die" (Moure, A practice 1). *O Resplandor* and *The Unmemntioable* chronicle Moure's mother's convalescence and death with the author finally carrying her mother's ashes to be buried in her ancestral land, the Ukraine. In addition, *The Unmemntioable* archives and mourns for the lost voices of her mother's Polish ancestors by recounting the history of Polish persecution in Ukraine while searching the towns and villages for a place to bury her mother's remains. According to Derrida, "in mourning we find ourselves at a loss, no longer ourselves, as if the singular shock of what we must bear had altered the very medium in which it was to be registered" (*Work* 5). Quoting Derrida, Moure observes that "only mourning can open up this space of absolute dynamis" (*O Resplandor* 33). "Words," Moure contends, "clot the voice" (*The Unmemntioable* 27). On the other hand, as the fictional EM discovers through interpreting found notebooks, postcards and letters to and from OA and ES in *O Resplandor* "[w]e constantly, giddyingly, mangle each other's languages, but in mangling them we enter them, we see each other fully, we acknowledge and thus open the possible, entirely, *as such*" (33).[33] Like this character, the real Avasilichioaei and Moure claim that "translation is always already unstable, and thus *fruitful*" ("Translation" 208 *italics in orig*.) by pointing to the space before the letter. As OA explains to

[33] The narrative of *O Resplandor* circulates around three translators: the fictionalized Erin Moure (EM), her elusive counterpart Elisa Sampedrín (ES) whom EM chases physically and metaphorically throughout the book and a fictionalized Oana Avasilichioaei (OA), who provides the original translation of the book of poetry by Stănescu that EM and ES are each working on in different stages.

EM in a letter, this space is "not a space that is blank, rather, a kind of febrility. The space exactly prior to the letter before the letter enters the field" (*O Resplandor* 96). EM realizes that translation opens a "torsion" that "calls or recalls in advance a sort of living present ... our own living present toward the other fractured present of the one ... having written the book" (Derrida qtd. in Moure, *O Resplandor* 97). It is this space of living that OA is referring to when she writes to EM, "Oh and you're not quite right that the letter is the smallest unit of translation" (34). She adds later by way of a note to herself, "Something in translation precedes the first mark" (96). This something refers to the "bodily interventions" (Avasilichioaei et al., "Translation" 212) that translation imparts to the reader and necessitates from the writer.

In *O Resplandor* Moure is both translating and contending with her mother's illness at the same time, evident in "My Fear" when she recalls "[m]e shaking with words, and my mother so ill" (37) showing her mother's body and language both to be repositories for a connection to the infinite. In one of the lengthier and most visceral of the numerous elegies that constitute the book's form, Moure perceives in the body of her dying mother, as "between the lines" of the text, "something between hearing and seeing/with a feeling of eyes, a feeling of ears/never before invented" (79). The *fulgurations* that recur throughout the text and the "fulminating" (80) that occurs here imply that a totally different sense-making apparatus is needed to read both her mother's dying body and the

text at hand. The "eye-eardrum, of tongue-sightedness" (80) is asserted as the source of a new and recurring *acumen* in the text, a new sight beyond single-sensory perception and monolingualism.

Both *Little Theatres* and *The Unmemntioable* are invested in sensory experiences other than sight, in order to open "a space that makes sensory cognition possible" (*Little* 43), which according to ES is the goal of her "Little Theatres." The interest in sensory cognition that Moure establishes in *Little Theatres* is carried through in the *The Unmemntioable* in the motif of the trout, who though lacking the part of the brain used for reasoning in humans is "quick to learn from experience" (Newman).[34] Much like the fish from which her pet name is derived, in *The Unmemntioable* ES tracks EM back and forth across continents with the express goal of using EM "to research the nature of experience," as stated on the book's back cover; ES determines to "take EM for [her] experiential subject" (57). This endeavour to include lived experience is, arguably, feminism's major contribution to the production and structure of knowledges (Grosz 94). The categories of experience and *feeling* are significant aspects of feminism dating back to its origins in the consciousness-raising projects of the 1960s that would see groups of women gathering to discuss the shared nature of their experiences as women within gender roles that limited most to domestic servitude and maternity.

[34] Fish facts gleaned from Moure's own source on the topic, indicated in acknowledgements and by way of a footnote in *The Unmemntioable*.

It was feminists who first pointed out the ideological production of basic experiences. From this realization it could be concluded that if "experience is not a raw mode of access to some truth then the body provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable, a point from which to rethink the opposition between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the self and the other, and all other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition" (Grosz 20-21). Rethinking the body in this way implies major epistemological upheavals since the history of epistemology is one in which "vision -- like the phallus -- has tended to function as a master or organizing term, a term or process which hierarchically subordinates the other senses (or bodily zones) under its direction and control" (220). Moure signals the poverty of sight in the poem, "Remedia Amoris" wherein the "eyes' indigence" (*The Unmemntioable* 14) is juxtaposed against an "optic/human will" or the "human will/to see," (14) with the phrasings combining in either way to criticize the occulocentrism that dominates how knowledge is formed within the matrix of western metaphysics, whereby "objects rise from/their own properties" leaving "nowhere/memoria amoris et gloriae voluptas [the memory of love, glory and pleasure]" (14).[35] In this poem, touch confounds the dominance of sight when, as ES explains,

35
Her eyes'

> … we know that what the tip of the white cane touches is processed in the visual area of the brain. Touch and sight merge. The brain doesn't care what body or prosthesis act as conduit for sight. The skin too./[Take me in your arms] a way of seeing then. [There is nothing natural.] A sense organ. (15, *punctuation as in original*)

To invoke the sense of touch is to call upon the flesh as a sense-making apparatus. It is to recognize the crisscrossing nature of sensory perception -- "the indeterminacy of the boundaries of each of the senses" (Grosz 96) -- and to return to "a nondualistic, non-binarized ontology" (96). Flesh is "a single 'thing' folded back on itself" (95), allowing for reversals, the simultaneity of two lips or the double sensation of clasped hands, "of being both the object and the subject of the touch" (100).[36] The information provided by the surface of the skin is primary; it is "both endogenous and exogenous, active and passive, receptive and expressive" (35). In contrast, the eye-penis functions to assert an ego-ideal that conceals the fact that "other senses can elicit the double sensation only on the ground already set up by tactility" (36).[37] This contact creates a charged space where "force is

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indigence a ballad frenzy to the core
look back optic
human will
to see and objects rise from
their own properties
nowhere
memoria amoris et gloriae voluptas (*The Unmemntioable* 15)

[36] Grosz is drawing on Merleau-Ponty's "ultimate notion" of the flesh as not the compound of two substances but "thinkable by itself" (140; 139).
[37] Double sensations are those in which the subject utilizes one part of the body to touch another.

amassed" (Lyotard, "The Great" 21); whether hand cupping elbow, lip connecting with nipple or touch of cane with sight these are not junctures nor syntheses of two zones but evidence of the body as an intense libidinal zone. The skin sees, or more accurately, the eyes make sense of what they encounter because of the double sensation that occurs when touch and sight merge; as such, "there is nothing natural" in assigning one organ as the primary tool for cognition.

Mourning, Translation and the Limits of Cultural Intelligibility

Moure's recognition of this "over-cathexis of the eye" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 138) is evident throughout her texts and especially in the quotation from Plato's *Timeus* on the back cover of *The Unmemntioable*, in which Plato refers to philosophy as "the greatest boon of sight." Against this, Moure juxtaposes Giorgio Agamben also on the back cover who claims, "[s]eule est vraie la représentation qui représente aussi l'écart entre elle-même et la vérité [the only true representation is that which represents also the gap between herself and the truth]." Agamben's observation addresses the leap over the female body in western philosophy. This command to account for the gaps in representational schemes recognizes the female body as the unacknowledged source and passage emblematized in the prisoner's journey through the tunnel from the cave that facilitates the movement from a state of original unity or primary narcissism during which the mother's body provides all the subject needs to survive, to the

philosopher's reality, which is overdetermined by reason and its primary tool, sight. In this move, the "eye of the spirit" is revealed at last "to be an organ of sight that has forfeited the body" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 183), resulting in the glorification of the "eye-penis" (47) whereby "...man's eye [is] understood as substitute for the penis..." (145). According to masculine discourse, there cannot *be* a nothing to see (50 emphasis mine).[38] Mother or female subjectivity then emerges as "vorstellung-repräsentaz [representative-representation]" of all "that the eye (of) consciousness refuses to recognize" (55). The nothing to see stands as "a challenge to an imaginary whose functions are often improperly regulated in terms of sight" (48). As Irigaray explains, "[t]he contract, the collusion, between *one* sex/organ and the victory won by visual dominance, therefore, leaves the woman with her sexual void, with an 'actual castration' carried out in actual fact ... Nothing to be seen is equivalent to having no thing. No being and no truth" (48); ultimately, "the paraphragm is also an eyelid" (255). The "idea that this 'nothing to be seen' might yet have some reality is intolerable to man" (50) and the "scoptophiliac drives" (102) that organize man's logic. Irigaray refers to this as the "optical jiggery-pokery" (263) on which western metaphysics is based. As a result, theory becomes "yet another in a series of optical instruments" (138). Instead of accepting this division between darkness and light Moure's protagonist

[38] A nothing to be seen refers to something not subject to the rule of visibility

in *The Unmemntioable* recalls Ovid who wrote "long ago": "my offense was that I had eyes ... Sometimes we are blinded by what we cannot see" (*The Unmemntioable* 104). What is a boon to Plato is a curse for Ovid in that the overreliance on sight -- with its underlying presumptions of clarity, determinacy, validity, verifiability, truth -- actually creates blind spots. This is true physiologically as well. There is in actuality a blind spot in every eye, where the optic nerve connects to the retina. As a result, there is always at least one pinpoint that cannot ever be seen.[39] Though this loss for the most part goes unnoticed by the consciousness it exists as a physiological reality that must be compensated for. Ovid's remark offsets the primacy of sight in order to remind us that we are unaware of what we do not or cannot see, the offense is not to recognize that there is more.

In *O Resplandor* texts like people operate as sites of estrangement, with instruction provided to readers by way of an opening quotation from Maurice Blanchot that "[w]e must give up trying to know those to whom we are linked by something essential: by this I mean we must greet them in the relation with the unknown in which they greet us as well, in our estrangement" (*O Resplandor* 1). The instability of the texts being worked on by all three fictional translators in *O Resplandor* is alternately a source of anxiety and sonority. ES is "terrifi[ed]" that

[39] For full details on the physiology of sight, see "Our Brain: A User's Guide," Spec. Issue of *National Geographic* 2016, p. 69).

the Stănescu "could murmur" to her and "insist" on one vocabulary from her when "it is the opposite of what he had written for O" (111). Realizing inconsistencies between her work and that of the original translation by OA, ES resigns herself anxiously to the fact that she "can't go back. [She'll] just have to use this translation and go on from here" (74). On another occasion, ES stands "before the screen" of her own language, recognizing that to receive the "incredible beauty" of the foreign work to which she has been drawn, "something had to be altered in [her] body" (4). She begins the translation process with an error. She translates the Romanian word *Albă* into the English word *albumin*. Upon reflection and further discovery she realizes that the error was more appropriate than any literal translation. The sense conveyed by the sound of the Romanian word *Albă,* which is in fact the word for the colour white with a feminine ending, was that of the secretions -- like egg whites, milk and blood -- to which the word *albumin* refers so that in the coalescence of both meanings ES is able recognize that it was *albumin* that "Stănescu was urgently saying" (4). The liquidity added by *albumin* fills the static white of *Albă* with the milk and blood that the feminine ending confers on the word; "white ink" (Cixous 881) emerges from within the letters as ES translates this Romanian poetry. This is the lesson that both ES and OA teach EM throughout the course of the story, that "to translate is to harken everything that comes out of the body" (Moure, *O Resplandor* 117). ES claims that after the manifestation of *Albă* as *albumin* in her text "my mouth filled up utterly with this

word. Something the same happened with all the others" (4). Despite not being able to read or speak Romanian, ES opens the book to find herself struck by "*Gando. Gânduri*" or "Cattle [Galician]. Thought [Romanian]." She says, "I gently opened the book" and

> I saw cattle. An eyeful of cattle. Their field was steaming. It was after a rain. A man was hammering on a stone. He wasn't watching me at all, he was so intent. I heard feet then. The book slipped into my coat. One gesture. But my mouth hurt. I raised my eyes then and took the book out, and held it to the waiting woman. She turned to the shelf, then back to me without saying anything. I knew I had to translate it. (5)

In order to read the book she must translate it into English but she struggles and is lost in the confrontation between the languages. She soon realizes that her approach is "not the right one" (15). She must "just read his poems, the way they were. The way [she] was able to receive them. That way the language would be transferred directly inside [her]" (15). Her mouth and that of EM constantly ache as they render the words from the Romanian text into English. EM admits "when my mouth hurts I know I have done it" (32). As EM translates Celan "from his "*limba română*" into "the language of my own emptiness, engleză" (32), she feels herself "all aching mouth everywhere" (32). The motif of aching, bleeding mouths continues and is combined with an aching right-hand -- her writing hand -- in *The Unmemntioable* to further reflect the pain of conformity within the language of "Big Theatres" against which Moure rails. In *The Unmemntioable* EM wakes up "with blood in my mouth from reading" (77) after finding a collection of letters

attributed to though not authored by her grandmother, Pound-Cake Rose. The letters recount the days leading up to her death during the Ukrainian-Russian war. The collection is authorless, with the names of both producers of the text, ES and Grandmother Rose, stricken out. The letters are inflected with words in Polish and Ukrainian that refuse translation or are untranslatable and the broken English her grandmother would have spoken. Later, EM declares that "ache is in our alphabet, it has jewels and jewels" (102), with jewels being a term EM has developed elsewhere in her theorizing to stand for the desire in language that cannot be translated.[40] According to Moure "...the mouth. That mouth [won't] let us forget it ever" (A practice 1). The recurring motif of the translators' aching mouths illustrates the loss that occurs when one attempts to translate a language from elsewhere into *the language of no one* as English is repeatedly referred to throughout *O Resplandor*.

Moure uses multilingualism to render an "impossible mourning" (Derrida, *Work* 12), rooting herself in both the materiality of her mother's dying body and the materiality of language in order to recognize "the infinite? An origin? The

[40] In an early unpublished article called "The Anti-Anaesthetic" Moure explains that there is "'a structure I refer to as 'the jewel'" (1). This structure "relates to our bodies and physical presence, and thus to the social order" (1). In a section of the article called "Jewel" she further explains that "Because the words themselves can't entirely convey, because there is a gap between desire and expression implicit in language (and because language itself carries the baggage of the social and metaphysical order), the poem itself has to be a presence whose structure, outside its words, can resonate (desire) in and through the reader (1).

place where interior and exterior collpse?" (*The Unmemntioable* 40).[41] In manuscript notes for *O Resplandor*, Moure admits that she is "anxious" that the words are not conveying enough "grief and loss" and later notes needing "more grief" (*OR* Manuscript Notes). By emphasizing mourning, Moure opens the body to singularities that are cut off to preserve life where life refers to social existence or the ability *to be* in a way that is intelligible to others. This is the risk inherent in iteration and the source of multilingualism's disruptive potential. The subject is compelled to re-iterate her conditions of subjection in order to have a recognizable social existence and therefore to *be*; however, she is aware that the terms imposed upon her -- the discursive regimes through which she is made intelligible -- are external and foreign to her desire to potentially be otherwise, even if that otherwise is inconceivable.[42] According to Moure's summation, "the linguistic encounter is the encounter with a singularity that cannot be reduced to membership in a universal. And that singularity is the approach of the other person" (*TU* Composition).[43] Similarly, in mourning the subject recognizes the

[41] Standing in a cemetery contemplating where to bury her mother's remains, she again removes the vowel sound. By removing the vowel, Moure signals foreclosed desire by stopping the bodily component of the word and rendering it meaningless without this component. As she reveals, "Create voice with bone/tip voice with steel/die voice with journey/clot voice with word" (*O Resplandor* 27).

[42] See also Tanis MacDonald's *The Daughter's Way* for her analysis of mourning in Moure's *Fury.* MacDonald examines the ways Moure rewrites the male elegy and uses the elegiac form itself to reject the patriarchal rhetoric of mourning, referring to the ways Moure posits despair and melancholia as acts of political and productive trouble-making" (211).

[43] Moure's marginalia in readings by Lacan and Levinas

singularity of the loved one's death and so the unique life of the other person. As Derrida explains, all mournings "are but iterations of the one death that can never be identified -- the first death ... so that what is mourned is a singularity that exceeds any proper name" (*Work* 17). Thus, when Moure proclaims in *O Resplandor*, "No, I'm not depraved/i'm grieving, i'm grieving, i'm grieving" (11) she is responding to the will to mastery that dominates western philosophy against which her mourning would seem perverse.

In order to overcome death or to mourn successfully, Rene Girard explains, men must regard their dead "as beings who have transcended life and death and have, for better or worse, become all powerful" (Girard 83) either ritually digested so that their power is absorbed back into the community or "treated as if they were alive or waiting for another life" (83). In conversation with fellow poet Bronwen Wallace, the two question why there is so much emphasis in patriarchal culture on transcending the body, seeing beauty in a mutual friend's acceptance of her illness, impending death and her convalescence leading up to it (Moure and Wallace 22). Irigaray, too, observes that man will be assured of achieving his mastery by triumphing over the anguish of death (*Speculum* 27). In his proliferating desire for the same, death will be the only representative of an outside, a heterogeneity, an Other. Preserving the "imperishable character" (27) of father/son, therefore, is the goal of philosophy; like procreation, philosophy provides the guarantee of a new generation of self

identity for the male seed. Furthermore, Freud has shown that a man's pleasure rests in the mother's body, as the place where his unruly drives are stabilized. This explains why the "mother's agony and dying body are the ultimate crisis of the philosopher's living, writing, thinking" (Krell 190); all rests on her as assurance of his life. Mourning such as that which is unabashedly displayed in Moure's texts is the opposite of triumph. In fact, all mourning is unsuccessful mourning as it refers to maintaining the lost object, not triumphing over it. It is a recognition of "the aporia of mourning" (Derrida, *Work* 34-35), which dictates that "success fails and failure succeeds" (35) since the only thing that can actually be interiorized is the image of the other, "idol or ideal" (12). Reflecting on the death of his own friend, Louis Althusser, Derrida explains "what Althusser takes with him is the world itself, a certain origin of the world -- his origin, no doubt but also that of the world in which I lived, in which we lived a unique story" (115). In death, the other (outside us) is now nothing. In the dark light of this nothing we learn that the other resists closure in our interiorizing memory. Death constitutes and makes manifest the limits of a me or an us "who are obliged to harbor something that is greater and other" (34) than either or both friends. For this reason, Derrida claims that "mourning provides the first chance and the terrible condition of all reading" (15). Instead of attempting to overcome the loss of her (m)other, Moure expresses Derrida's "impossible mourning" (2), which leaves the other her alterity, respecting thus her infinite remove, either refusing to take or being incapable of

taking her (m)other within herself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism (12). In "The Unseizable Elegy" Moure recognizes "The cloth of the unknown alerts us with this *you*, waning/what we cannot see yet of its weave ... I see myself fallen into this *you/*as it arises in us, in the tenderness of seeds/irrepressible as they are beloved" (*O Resplandor* 85). Earlier in the same elegy she is attuned

> ...to be alert as we can, for what we yet feel inside us. I'll be alert, for what can no longer be/
> named in the uprising
> from the mists of possibility
> yet is no more than what is singular in itself
> and, unsuspecting, knows itself, narrated intimately;
> its future predicates so powerfully arrayed in the coursing that centres us
> ... intense as knowing, as the pyramid
> that unites us triply in every single strand. (83-84)

The flaw of interiorization rests in the false distinction of a space “in us,” where the deceased will remain, and an outside space of visibility (Derrida, *Work* 10). In reality, "the part that is 'in us' comes before and is greater than us" (10-11). While a degree of interiorization is undeniable -- "the other is indeed reduced to images 'in us' that form our memory of the loved one (11) -- the notion of interiorization is limited by the presumption of a topology with limits between inside and outside, or "what is ours and what is the other" (11). The responsibility, according to Derrida, is to articulate what can never be interiorized, "what is always before and beyond us" (*Work* 159). This is possible only through interiorizing a "dissymmetry that exceeds, fractures, wounds, injures, traumatizes the interiority that it inhabits "or that welcomes it through hospitality, love, or friendship (166).

Moure's willful mourning contradicts the impulse to transcendence that dominates approaches to both death and language within the realm of western philosophy.

Moure's sustained confrontation with the materiality and singularity of her mother's death furthermore represents a melancholic longing for a self that is foreclosed and forms of sociality that are barred, as when she declares in "The Unseizable Elegy" that

> ...perhaps bound in parting's parting, the de-parture of parting
> beyond the one,
> in the disturbing rain of lava,
> you, continuing in the great sea of forms, yet
> knowing your own self, yet
> made of enduring material whose mystery seizes me,
> it seizes me that this could die.
> To see this cast, as clear as any being which knows itself
> whose mystery, so dear to us, comes clear
> to seize morning. (*O Resplandor* 83)

As Lyotard explains, "only through the already proper, proprietary body is loss felt as aggression, only for the already organized consciousness is death a horror" (23). Moure's elegies open to the infinite just as the subject who refuses power forms a melancholic attachment to what could be. This longing compels the subject to consider risking "something other than its continued 'social existence'" (Butler, *Psychic Life* 28), as in death by way of its own dissolution. In other words a subject will, at times, risk its social intelligibility in order to be otherwise, regardless of the risk.

Judith Butler finds agency within this framework; the subject assumes "a purpose *unintended* by power" (15). She notes that activating agency within this schema is tricky due to the subtle operation of power in the individual's psyche in that "power is both external to the subject and the very venue of the subject" (15). The fact of power as the origin of the subject is concealed, however, since "power ... dissimulates as a self-inaugurating agency" (16). Said another way, "the subject produced by power becomes heralded as the subject who *founds* power" (16). The subject is bound by a misrecognition of herself as the subject of power -- as in one who wields power -- without recognizing that power relies on its own reversal (14-16). In other words, power must revert to the subject in order to have effects in the future. If the only palpable sense was of being subjected by power we would not act and power could not be reiterated. The "futural expanse" of the effects of power relies on this risky repetition (16). Without the reiteration of power it would cease to exist as such. The reversal is both the condition of the subject's possibility as an *effect* of the subject but also the guarantee of its own rearticulation in the present and future where it has a sustained valence by existing not just as a prior and external condition. Ultimately, Butler locates agency within repetition, which is made risky because repetition is not mechanical. The possibility of iteration exists within the act of repetition with a difference. The need for power to be reiterated in and by the subject at times exposes failings in the terms available to a desire that always overflows these iterations. Butler

describes a subject that is able to reflect on herself as an object, knowing that this object status is something external to herself and notes that there is immense potential in the failings of identity as a consequence of misrecognition, as this can necessitate new terms for articulating social being.

In Moure's texts, multilingualism operates as an act of risky repetition of the type discussed above. Moure is resolute in ensuring that *O Resplandor* is described as a collection that "explores the act of reading as if it contains all the experiences of the body: love, splendor, travel, doubling, loss" (*OR* Manuscript Notes). She depicts translation as an act, an embodied act that is a process not an end result. An archived catalogue copy of *O Resplandor* explains the title as referring to "the radiance of the body when the language of the book flows into ears and eyes" (*OR* Manuscript Notes). The book is conceived not as a static object but as a medium that activates the reader and that is activated by the reader. Multilingualism operates as an act of risky repetition by thwarting varying forms of arrangement that Irigaray warns "bear the paradox forcing into the same representation -- the representation of the self-same -- that which insists upon its heterogeneity or otherness" (*Speculum* 148). On the contrary, reading multilingual work enables a proliferating of difference. As Avasilichioaei and Moure explain, when faced with a language one does not know, one is "obliged to read it as absolute material, as material marks and shapes on the page ... you still see things you know but they are differently exposed" (Concordia Pres.). By creating fields

of sounds and corporeal sensibilities multilingualism opens "the very letter" so that the reader "can't but feel it. The other language enters their own mouth as source, for an instant" (*O Resplandor* 117). ES explains:

> ... I could not shake the cattle, his cattle, out of my mind. The herd bunched up, their warm backs and shoulders, a material and organic *existenza* in the world that the poem co-enacted, undressed, unfaced. These cattle were as urgent to me as thought itself. I had to keep returning there. *Gando. Gânduri*. (Moure 16)

The thoughts of cattle that overcame her in the bookstore must become *Cattle.Thought*, or Galician-Romanian thoughts from elsewhere in the language of no one. They must become language itself in order for her to enter the text on its own terms. The book becomes an invitation to "read in language" (Avasilichioaei et al., "Translation" 210). Perhaps more so, the book is an invitation to do away with "the language-killing potential" (Edwards 1) that John Edwards considers to be the effect of English as a lingua franca and instead to think in language, to agree to "constantly risk the unknown, to feel destabilized and out of this instability be willing to create new connections to build a rhizome, to be rhizomatic" (Avasilichioaei et al., "Translation" 212). In this way, multilingualism effects no less than "a remaking of reality" (Butler, "Beside" 30) by working at the limits of reproducibility and illuminating the "complex interplay between what replicates and what transforms" (27).[44] For Avasilichioaei and Moure translation

[44] Butler is using this term to refer to the impact of cultural translations but it is a useful way to think about the literal act of translation here

"involves the formation and reformation of identities" ("Translation" 208). ES's compulsion to translate this book of Romanian poetry positions her at the opening where readers and writers meet in the text as "poet-beings" (*O Resplandor* 143). Poet-beings, much like the *translating subject* -- a trope that will appear in later chapters on Kathy Acker and Nicole Brossard -- exist at the interstice between language and forms of thought, and represent an evolution in notions of linguistic identity popularized by French feminist theory.[45] In the words of Kathy Acker, "poetry destroys social bonds (meaning oppressive contracts)" ("Birth" 87). On this point she has much in common with the tradition of French feminism. But her *multilingual* poetic practice, like that of Moure and Brossard, allows for subversive recombinations that revalue and redefine cultural, social, political and global relations, as well as the sexual relations at the core of French feminist linguistics. By insisting on multilingualism as part of their poetic strategies Moure and her contemporaries are able to avoid criticisms levied against French feminists who were perceived by some to gloss over the importance of "historical change, ethnic difference, or the shaping force of generic and economic factors" (Showalter 27) that are most intrinsic to the experiences of women whose subjectivities are formed by class and racialized distinctions.[46]

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[45] Here I am referring to Kristeva's *speaking subject*, Irigaray's *parler femme* and Helen Cixous*'s écriture feminine*.

[46] Rita Felski raises similar criticisms in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics,* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985

These innovative texts do, however, present challenges to readers and critics, especially those who, in Avasilichioaei and Moure's views would rather see translation "as an administrative action alien to poetry and politics" ("Translation" 208). Instead, Avasilichioaei and Moure enter into translation "as citizen, joyously accountable to the other voices met and created within [the text's] frontiers" (207). In response to criticisms regarding the supposed inaccessibility of her material, Moure explains that "accessible reading prepares us for reading the newspaper and going to vote" (Stannard 17). This kind of reading "makes us feel comfortable with where we are. We can read about anything in a newspaper and look up from the page and it doesn't help us to interrogate or look at our own experience in any different way" (17). She continues that she began to feel especially that conventional language was "covering up my difference as a lesbian...covering up my love for women... covering up to a great extent, my feminism" (17). She kept having "a sense of erasure" when she used *understandable* language. She began to realize that traditional narratives and style produced "a cover-up of my experience" and as result she "wasn't able to express [her] difference" as a woman and as a lesbian (I7). The linguistic encounter, then, is like the encounter with death in that it is a confrontation with the limits of intelligibility. According to Irigaray, "reasonable words are powerless to translate all that pulses, clamours and hangs lazily in cryptic passages of hysterical suffering" (*Speculum* 142). Instead, to subvert the

order of the same writers must insist on blanks, places of excision, reinscribe divergences, deconstruct the reader-writer dichotomy, overthrow syntax, make it impossible to predict and irrupt circuits (142). Multilingualism reworks "the principle of authority" by threatening the process of "production, reproduction, mastery and profitability" through which phallic authority is maintained (50). Irigaray argues,

> It is still better to speak only in riddles, allusions, hints, parables. Even if asked to clarify a few points. Even if people plead that they just don't understand. After all, they never have understood. So why not double the misprision to the limits of exasperation? Until the ear tunes into another music, the voice starts to sing again, the very gaze stops squinting over the signs of auto-representation, and reproduction no longer inevitably amounts to the same and returns to the same forms, with minor variations. (143)

If language dictates thought then creating new sounds and new words means creating new ideas and opening the range of embodied possibilities. Moure contends that "sound itself conveys meaning that the words cannot. When we rely too much on the surface meanings of the words we are in danger for surfaces are already full of commerce: the meanings and neurological thought processes they evoke are those of our social and economic culture and convey those values, perpetuating them, using the words as icons" (The formation 1). In *The Unmemntioable*, Moure twice "stood and wept before the icons/of the brain" (89; 94) lamenting the ways that all that is available to the senses -- all experience -- is reduced to that which can be recognized in conventional language and therein

used to facilitate exchanges within a phallocentric linguistic and political economy. For that reason Lyotard claims that "it is necessary to alter the course of the destiny that pushes thought towards the concept [a theoretical ensemble], otherwise one will manufacture a libidinal economy which will resemble a trivial political economy, that is to say ideology" (Lyotard, "The Great" 31). Poetry and literature, then, have to disturb the logic that dominates the social order and "do so through that logic itself, by assuming and unraveling its position, its syntheses, and hence the ideologies it controls" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 83). This has traditionally required a "descent" into the most archaic stage of the subject's positing, "one contemporaneous with the positing of the social order ... so that violence, surging up through the phonetic, syntactic, and logical orders, could reach the symbolic order and the technocratic ideologies that had been built over the violence to ignore or repress it" (83). The goal is to combat "fetishism and madness" and "to shun the lie of unspeakable delirium" (84) but to still lift the veil behind which hides the coercive order of the real by accessing mental information that is qualitatively different from the thoughts that are accessible in the conscious realm, which is the domain of language.

Recognizing that "...thought cannot be constrained in 'je' or 'I' alone," Moure calls for "ex-plosivity across membranes. A touch" (*The Unmemntioable* 39). Moure posits a libidinal skin against the "hypercathexis of the process of thinking" (Freud 21), preferring the ex-plosivity of the "Body-not" (Moure, *The*

Unmemntioable 21) -- a "Moebian-labyrinthine skin, single-sided patchwork of all the organs (inorganic and disorganized) which the libido can traverse" (Lyotard, "The Great" 5).[47] Traditionally, as in Cartesian philosophy, the body is not a thinking device; "the body is a self-moving machine, a mechanical device, functioning according to causal laws and the laws of nature" (Grosz 6). The body is inert matter, "res extensa" -- a part of nature, governed by its physical laws and ontological exigencies (6). To read Moure is to read with a double-sided skin. Here, the skin is not merely the blunt outer wrapping of a body nor is the body comprised of privileged orifices as the sites of activity. The libidinal skin invoked in reading Moure is a criss-crossing network of forces across which meaning traverses. In Moure's texts it would seem that the body is "the very 'stuff' of subjectivity" (Grosz ix). Language represents the attempt to secure "a model of bodily integrity, of outsidedness, which the subjects' experiences can never confirm" (43). In the process of entering language, the subject's original state of *jouissance* is sublimated as bodily drives are contained within the strictures of "identity, meaning and law" (Edelman 25). The subject gains status within the

[47] Grosz too adopts the image of the Möbius strip as a suitable way of rethinking the relations between body and mind, "problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior by showing ... the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside" (xii).

social by relinquishing all ties to "the flux, the complex, the paradoxical" that stands in the way of the promised fulfillment of a symbolic system in which everything is "explained, integrated, unified, stabilized and systematized" (Hurst 216). This position is contingent, however, on the subject's adherence to a paternal law that restricts individual will to that "which is identical with the bidding of society'" (193). Chris Weedon further shows that while in principle the individual is open to all forms of subjectivity, in reality the individual's access to subjectivity is governed by historically specific social factors and forms of power at work in particular societies (91); consequently, "experience has no inherent essential meaning" (33). Instead, experiences are given meaning in language: "as we acquire language we learn to give voice -- meaning -- to an experience and to understand it according to particular ways of thinking, particular discourses, which pre-date our entry into language" (32). These ways of thinking, then, constitute our consciousness. As a result, "discovering conflicts and contradictions in the terms by which we make sense of our experience can lead to a rewriting of personal experience in terms which give it social changeable causes" (32). Butler explains that a recognizable or stable and proper identity is the result of "a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life" (*Gender* 145). Moure's multilingual poetics challenge the rules of cultural intelligibility that ground notions of stable subjectivity, opening space for redefinition and renewal.

Avasilichioaei and Moure declare that the goal is not to make subjectivity vanish; instead, through multilingualism, the subject is "doubled and then doubled again -- and across the folds, various subjectivities or subjectivity-figures operate" ("Translation" 214). In this process, knowledge is, then, tripled according to the "triplings" that are an effect of reading in translation such as that between "tongue, cortex, light" (Moure *O Resplandor* 97). In *O Resplandor*, OA muses by way of her notebooks that "[i]n translation, this plurality acutely matters" and expands on the cross-sensory experience that occurs in translation by claiming that "[t]he stimulation of the tongue by the word is electro-tactile, and I am sure it activates the visual cortex, not just the language centres" (97). OA further suggests that translation is like Braille reading. Just as Braille reading puts words in the mouths of blind people by activating "several areas of the brain that process space and light, *ergo* vision" (97), so too does translation alter vision by engaging nerve fibres of the tongue that, in fact, have been shown to be capable of transmitting pictures.[48] This tripling of knowledge is made apparent in the reflections of a member of the *Belladonna* collective, who, in introducing Moure's work as part of a reading series, created "a map of thoughts" that occur while reading *O Resplandor* that includes feeling like a translator; she concludes that "translation enters the body penetrating course and habits nestled in undoing"

[48]Moure is referring to "the strangest article" in which scientists relay findings that show the microelectrodes on the tongue can transmit pictures to the brain when the tongue is hooked up to a camera port. From this Moure concludes, "[s]o the tongue can see" (*O Resplandor* 108).

(Skillings). According to Moure it is a mistake to expect to understand every time we hear language (IFOA). In order to create understanding "…differences are regulated and declinable as more or less 'good' copies" of the true, "the same, the identical, the one, the permanent, the unalterable, the undecomposable, The Being" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 262). Irigaray calls upon the woman writer to "insist also and deliberately upon those blanks in discourse which recall the places of her *exclusion* and which by their *silent plasticity* ensure the cohesion, the articulation, the coherent expansion of established forms … reinscribe them within and thither as divergencies, otherwise and elsewhere than they are expected, in ellipses and eclipses that deconstruct the logical grid of the reader-writer, drive him out of his mind, trouble his vision to the point of incurable diplopia at least" (142). She calls for the creation of strategies that "overthrow syntax by suspending its eternally teleological order, by snipping the wires, cutting the current, breaking the circuits, switching the connections, by modifying continuity, alternation, frequency, intensity … make it impossible for a while to predict whence, whither, when, how, why … something goes" (142). In answer to this call Moure's texts create an important suspension in the work that troubles the reader's expectations of knowledge and knowing. Moure's texts break with the production of literature as "the terrain of Western Europe [which] has come to dominate our Western thinking about possibilities and impossibilities in words" (Moure, Preface xii), a topic that will be taken up more fully in the next chapter in light of Kathy Acker's

use of non-European languages within her multilingual aesthetic. Moure's multilingual texts create a new form of reading rooted in the process of digging between words in translation that produces new meanings stemming from the displacement of common knowledge that occurs when readers are confronted with a foreign language.

Moure pursues linguistic displacements “to see how that dents subjectivity’s membrane” (Moure and Pato 5). Irigaray explains, “Within this twisted cave of Plato’s, all are identical to, identified with, prisoners who are the same and other” (*Speculum* 260)**.** In fact, women's contributions have historically never been acknowledged or represented in the terms chosen by women themselves (Grosz xi). But Irigaray poses the question: "what if the object started to speak?” (*Speculum* 135). Moure creates her little theatres as "spacings, placings and stagings" in order to "act and enact ... in the world" (Stannard 14) in a way other than that which hegemonic politics would construct for her as a woman and a lesbian. Per the back cover of *Little Theatres*, “Moure’s poems beckon new sounds, droplets, as if they would help us open to the other without admonishment, so that we might bear our tongues again: agasallo, cortesia, pataca, amor." In a section of *The Unmemntioable*, "Narration and Censure," Moure begins "dearest trout, I would not be in this struggle if I did not desire you" (43), presumably a sinful pursuit that she acknowledges with the Penitential Act: "mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa [through my fault, through my fault,

through my most grievous fault"] (43). Desiring the *unmemntioable* means opening up unauthorized spaces in the body: throat and weir, the disavowed space of the mother as "the unmemntioable boundary/that can never come fully clear" (*The Unmemntioable* 45). Speaking in tongues that force the reader to likewise open her body, Elisa Sampedrín the trout -- and all those who follow her lead -- is a bad subject, interrupting the recognition and repetition on which coherent subjectivity is founded. Moure uses multilingualism to question the limited conditions of intelligibility concocted by hegemonic power structures, revelling in the materiality of both language and the body to reveal the body's inherent wisdom and liberate the knowledge systems of queers, women, people of colour and those constructed as third world subjects that are suppressed by the master narrative of western rationalism.

Chapter Three: If Words are Pavlovian Bells to which We are Conditioned to Respond ... Kathy Acker's Persian Semantics

"I could say the unknowable in Persian"

-- Kathy Acker (*Empire of the Senseless* 53)

"Har ciz ra miguyam: hickas dar/
har surat in zaban ra nadanad./
I say anything no one knows this language anyway."

-- Kathy Acker ("The Birth of the Poet" 100)

Arriving on the New York literary scene in the late 1970s, Kathy Acker has since been hailed as a punk beatnik virtuoso. At the time of her first publications, however, her work received mixed reviews, with many literati dismissing it as pulp fiction, while its sensational and explicitly sexual content placed her work at odds with that period's dominant feminist discourses of idealized universal womanhood. Such assessments overlook the highly sophisticated linguistic register Acker creates across her texts that includes the insertion of Farsi, French, German, Spanish and Russian languages. While Acker's work has received much critical recognition in recent years, to date her

use of multiple non-English languages across her corpus is one of the most striking yet under-theorized aspects of her writing. This chapter pays particular attention to Acker's persistent use of Farsi, which features prominently in four of her works including "A Farsi Lesson" in *My Mother, Demonology* (1993), various sections in *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), the section entitled "Persian Poems" in *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984) and the entirety of Act III in "The Birth of the Poet" (1981). Together these works reveal an undiscovered love affair with Farsi and its profound history as a language of resistance. Acker's explicit interest in Persia challenges western world views that discount the contributions non-western nations and civilizations have made to a world history in which the current precedence of the global north is but one recent shift. As part of this shift English is implicated in the spread of a particular, western phallocentric economy that is not natural but disseminated within the mechanisms of western cultural imperialism. In Acker's *Empire* and *Blood and Guts*, characters write themselves out of captivity by switching from English to Farsi. These scenarios most explicitly reflect the ways that Acker uses Farsi as a persistent metaphor within all her texts to symbolize writing out of enclosure within a western patriarchal framework.

The history of Farsi and the particularities of the language operate as an analogy for the potential of resistance in language with which Acker's work is wholly invested. Through her multilingual strategies Acker ultimately attacks the

English language as the cornerstone upholding the sex-gender distinction. Her work suggests that it is the uncritical acceptance of English as if it is neutral that leads to the acceptance of what Acker calls other "givennesses" (*My Death* 267) such as the sex-gender system and sex-gender distinction. For Acker, "the war is on the language level" (341) and death results when, in the words of Acker's Charlotte Bronte, "females fighting against male hegemony […] di[e] cause she can't be male and a female" (348). Herein, Acker indicates her contention with socio-linguistic structures that demand a divided subject. In addition, Acker's repeated choice to highlight anatomical categorizations that do not translate from English to Farsi highlights her concern with the reification of discourses that posit anatomy as the ground for sexual politics and social identities that are unquestioned in English. Acker's texts emphasize the complicated relationship between linguistic texts and political systems in order to similarly complicate presumed distinctions between sexualized bodies. In resisting the hegemony of English as a lingua franca, Acker's characters refuse "faire d'accord avec leurs grandes modèles de la réalité" [to agree with their grand models of reality] (*Great* 268). Instead, they use "زبان را به خلاص شدن از شر زبان" [language to get rid of language] (*Blood* 76). The combination of linguistic modes suggests a larger critique of the efficacy of any singular system, particularly in regards to the rendering of desire. Acker translates the body into multiple languages in an attempt to render the excess that cannot be accounted for within the discursive

containment of traditional language systems, challenging dominant systems of meaning. Her translations across differing languages point both to the instability of language and, more importantly, to the impossibility of translating a multiplicity of desires within a single discourse.

Acker's recurring motif of the Persian world draws our attention to an erased parahistory of the east that displaces dominant accounts of World History as that of white European contact with a series of Others. Acker's inclusion of characters and storylines from the Middle East in her criticisms of western hegemony, including a fictionalized version of former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, Sha'harazad, Sinbad the Sailor, various unnamed Arab women and men, a Phoenician sailor, Algerian revolutionaries and the writer Sheik Nefzawi challenges "history as we have come to know it as the master discourse of the white, masculine, hegemonic, property-owning subject" (Braidotti 51). Acker's challenges to the primacy of this subject in western discourse are well documented as a mainstay in her work.[49] In terms of method, Acker describes taking issue with work that is "too arty" -- a denigration she learned from her time in England -- meaning that it lacked political intention and so was perceived to be

[49] For further information on this topic in Acker's work see Michael Clune's "Blood Money: Sovereignty and Exchange in Kathy Acker" in *Contemporary Literature,* 45.3 (2004): 486-515 and Susan E. Hawkins "All in the Family: Kathy Acker's Blood and Guts in High School" in *Contemporary Literature,* 45.4 (2004): 637-58.

vacant and showy. Instead, she demanded that a writer must "know why you are using the methods that you are," nothing is imagination, claiming undoubtedly with tongue in cheek, "I don't have any imagination" (Lotringer 8). Deeply intellectual, according to those who knew her closely, Acker "seemed to live in the library, to study constantly, to devour books" (Freilicher 6) from which she gained an "encyclopaedic knowledge of literature" (Wollen). In addition, Acker's acumen with languages was well known among her friends who remember her entering Brandeis University as an undergraduate student with a proficiency in both Greek and Latin (Freilicher 6; Wollen). Thus, it was within her ken to choose any languages she should desire and completely within her method to choose purposefully since, for Acker, method is "supremely, politically important" (Acker, "A Few" 120).

To complement her apparent engagement with the Arab world -- its myths, conquests and insurgencies -- surely Arabic would have seemed a logical language to adopt; in fact, many commentators have mistakenly concluded that Acker did exactly that. Established critics, playwrights and directors have repeatedly referred to Acker's Farsi text as Arabic. In her behind- the-scenes study, *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World*, Susan Letzler Cole refers to "[m]ost of the lines in act three [of The Birth of the Poet] written in Arabic and

English" (253). [50] In a personal communication quoted in Cole's book, the play's director, Richard Foreman, refers to wanting to project "Kathy Acker's handwritten Arabic in the play text" (Personal communication, November 1, 1985 in Cole 252). Anthologists Kevin Killian and David Brazil perpetuate the mistake when they explain Acker's use of "the Arabic in Act Three" (586) in their summary of the play. The error is further perpetuated in Heidi R. Bean's review of the anthology in *Theatre Journal* (2011) when she refers to Acker's "Arabic-inflected 'The Birth of the Poet'" (150). Recent criticism by Andrew Strombeck in *Literature Interpretation and Theory* (2015), too, falsely classifies the Farsi fables in *Empire* as "a series of loosely translated Arabic phrases" (55) and later refers to the way in which the text is "punctuated by more Arabic writing" (56). In actuality Acker's texts are permeated by the language of ancient Iran -- the Persian language of Farsi which like Arabic is steeped in the traditions of Assyria, Babylonia and pharaonic Egypt as opposed to the lineage of the Roman Empire and Greek heritage that forms the popular history of western culture. Yet Farsi is not Arabic any more than French is English though they share the same alphabet.

[50] For her part, Cole appears to have been aware of the fact that the play text was actually in Farsi as in her own reflections on watching Act III being rehearsed she recalls that "Foreman asks the cast to deliver the Persian lines in Act II as if they were revolutionaries" (140). With her focus on directorial process, the director's misinterpretation may have appeared to Cole as an unimportant tangent that would have meant publishing a correction to the director's error. Cole signals her potential awareness of the language being rehearsed without delving into the implications of such an oversight in the play's production.

In fact, Farsi emerges as a unique entity from within the Arab conquest and the corresponding history of this era in the Middle East.

The surprising persistence of the mistaken conflation of Arabic and Farsi among critics of Acker's texts signifies a larger problem of the homogenizing and collapsing of differences that persistently occurs when reading the Middle East in popular culture and media. It is fascinating that the only Persian character that Acker criticism consistently refers to is the Persian slave trader while all other references to Persian people, culture, history or language in Acker's texts are missed or ignored. It is only when Acker names her Farsi language work as such as in "The Persian Poems" in *Blood and Guts* and "A Farsi Lesson" in *My Mother* that the language is properly identified in the corresponding criticism. The irony is, of course, that critics have mistrusted Acker's explicit identification of the texts as Persian in her titles, taking even the Farsi-identified works as, somehow, Arabic. Thus, the actual language of the text has been treated as at most incidental and is more usually ignored.

To my surprise, it appears no one has bothered to translate the Farsi text, taking its foreignness as sufficient for understanding its meaning. As Killian and Brazil purport, "Acker uses the Arabic of Act Three not as an imaginary language but one so far out of the experience of her audience that we come to doubt our own sense of self" (586). The truth of this statement is only magnified in relation

to the critics themselves. It would seem Acker's Farsi-speaking characters' reflections are apropos as when *Empire*'s heroine, Abhor, realizes "I could say the unknowable in Persian" (53) because as it turns out she and the Farsi-speaking poet protagonist of "The Birth of the Poet" are right: the poet observes, "No one knows this language anyways" (100). Peter Wollen, in his elegiac and much-quoted biography of Acker, pays homage to Acker's commitment to the avant-garde tradition, describing her technique as one that "used not only cut-up but also incorporated calligraphy, self-drawn dream maps and Persian and Arabic script in her books" (Wollen).[51] While Wollen seems to acknowledge some of Acker's Persian script it appears he -- like so many others -- must have falsely concluded that "The Birth of the Poet" is written in Arabic, mistaking the language and also missing cues that the protagonist is, perhaps, a Persian under Arab domination as indicated by the Iranian idiosyncrasies to which the character, Ali, refers in Act III.

Aside from "The Birth of the Poet" being written in Farsi, 'Finglish' [فنگلش][52] and English, the text juxtaposes Arab characters with Persian

[51] Wollen's elegy to Acker, "Death (and Life) of the Author" first published in *London Review of Books* (1998) was reprinted with minor changes as the introduction to *Lust for Life: On the Writings of Kathy Acker*, Eds. Amy Scholder, Carla Harryman and Avital Ronell, Verso: London; New York, 2006. It remains the most oft-quoted source on the author's life.

[52] Finglish (or Pinglish) is a common term used to describe Farsi (Persian) written phonetically using the English alphabet. The practice emerges most prominently with the rise of electronic communication such as email. See for example Neda Gohardehi and Amer Gheitury, "Gender and Text Messaging in an Iranian Context," *Iranian Studies Journal,* 47.4, 2014, pp. 535-546.

particularities such as when Ali expresses his distress over the loss of his king, lamenting "شاه و پِدَر را نَدارَم و اَز هَمه کَس نِفرَت دارَم" [King and father I don't have and from everyone I have hate] (Fars.)/Shah o pedar ra nadaram v az/I have no king no father I hate everyone" (100). An Arab character would have referred to his caliphate and the loss would only have been experienced by Persians whose Sassanian kings would have been replaced by Arabian caliphs. His distress at being "[a]lone" is assuaged, however, because "Farvardin is glowing its light through the dark sea" (102). Here, hope is specifically associated with Persian culture as represented by Farvardin, the first month of the Persian calendar in which the main holiday Nowruz is celebrated. Ali's experience is explicitly associated with Persian experience in an omitted stanza from an unpublished version of Act III found in Acker's personal archives in which she claims that این واقِعِها تَقصیرِ ایرانیان اَست"...In vāqe' ehā taqsire Irāniān ast [This really is the Iranians fault]/These events are the Iranians fault" (Ali 4). Acker's emphasis on Persian distinctiveness is further highlighted by reclaiming Persian folk heroes such as Sha'harazad, whose oft overlooked Iranian origin is signaled in the Persian spelling Acker opts to use in *Empire*. In his staging of the play Foreman is able to direct the actors on the sounds of the Farsi words without knowing their meaning or the origin of the language as each Farsi line is supported by an equivalent line

spelled phonetically using the English alphabet. As with all subsequent critics, the director would have to have made a point of translating the text to uncover the language -- a step that the majority appear to have deemed unnecessary in performing or writing about these texts. This general unwillingness to see or probe beyond superficial visual characteristics of the language that has provoked misinterpretations of the Farsi text correlates with the same tendency in the global north to form generalized views of the Middle East based on presumptions of shared visual characteristics of the region's peoples -- a practice that has led most Acker critics to miss both the nature and potential meanings of the Persian linguistic lineage in her work.

In much the same way that Erín Moure disperses the "invisible language" ("Into the Field") of Galicia throughout her texts, Acker's invocation of Persian history by way of Farsi insertions reminds the reader of the role of language as a tool in imperial expansions and as a site for conflict and the revisioning of ideology. Whereas Moure's use of Galician "brings us face to face with the traumas and migrations of Western Europe" (Moure "Chus"), Acker's use of Farsi expands this discourse to examine the impact of similarly invisible historical global migrations and cultural exchanges. Both works show that centralization puts "not just language under threat but our very linguistic capacity regardless of the idiom we speak" ("Into the Field"). Acker's texts differ from those of Moure, though, in that Moure primarily uses European languages in her aesthetic whereas

Acker dives into the less familiar Persian script written in the الفبا (alefbâ [Persian alphabet]) with its Cyrillic and Arabic inflections. Acker's texts force a language that, for the most part, is resisted by western culture into the mouths of her readers. With its Romance origins, Galician remains connected to western subjectivity and, so, perhaps a little less other. Though foreign, the languages in Moure's texts are, perhaps, more welcome, like "good migrants" in Homi Bhabha's terms (xvii).[53] Readers of Moure may be more assured that these foreign words like good migrants are things they can understand and so master eventually. Instead, Acker's use of Farsi unsettles the reader by pointing more blatantly to the fact of language as a "secret code" (Edwards 5) and its importance as a "concealing, disguising medium" (5) that co-exists with, and perhaps even surpasses, its more obvious communicative role.[54] As John Edwards explains, "each language interprets the world in a somewhat different way; the unique wellsprings of group consciousness, traditions, beliefs and values are thus seen as intimately entwined with language" (5). Acker's work reminds the reader that this is so by barring easy access to "the code" the pursuit of which actually constitutes

[53] Within Bhabha's critique of diversity politics good migrants are defined as "educated, economic migrants ... rather than refugees, political exiles or the poor" (xiv). Himani Bannerji makes similar observations about the contradictions within Canadian multiculturalism, reflecting that "[a]s long as 'multiculturalism' only skims the surface of society, expressing itself as traditional ethics, such as arranged marriages, and ethnic food, clothes, songs and dances (thus facilitating tourism), it is tolerated by the state and 'Canadians' as non-threatening. But if demands go a little deeper than that (e.g. teaching 'other' religions or languages), they produce violent reaction, indicating a deep resentment" (79).

[54] Edwards cites Wittgenstein as one of many writers who have made this claim about language.

the thrust of the plot in *Empire*.[55] In the words of Abhor, *Empire*'s protagonist: "Our code was *death*. I needed new instructions" (56). By code-switching between English, Farsi, German, French and other languages Acker draws attention to language as a code and holds the English language up to the same scrutiny as that which is invited by the non-English languages. In so doing Acker reveals the myths and priorities embedded in the English language, and the impact of the unprecedented status of English in perpetuating a Euro-American form of western rationalism to the effect of normalizing limited constitutions of both the self and community.

Acker proclaims in the title of the Farsi-language Act III in "Birth of the Poet:" "Ali Goes to the Mosque (At First There is Only Language and Nothing Else)" (90). This statement represents a truism in terms of the conditions in which Persians found themselves following the Arab Invasion. After Persia was largely converted to Islam, the primary difference from Arabic culture was to be found in the persistence of the nation's spoken language, Dari, which would eventually merge and reform the conquerors' script to become Farsi -- the existing lingua franca of the region and its surrounding territories. The importance of language in the assertion of Persian difference is confirmed in the reflections of Iranian scholar Shahrokh Meskoob who declares that following the invasion "...language

[55] References to pursuit of "the code" can be found on pages 36, 38, 52, 56, 134, 213.

was the foundation, floor, and refuge for the soul, a stronghold within which we stood" (39); further it was due to poets and writers that the language flourished (Meskoob 16, 53; Wilbur 27; Roth 321; Frye xi-xii, 1-2).[56] As Richard Frye observes, "poetry seems to be the first literature we find in most languages and this was true of New Persian" (173), with prose following shortly after. By the end of Umaiyad Caliphate in the 8th century, it was clear there would be no universal movement to restore the fallen Sassanian Empire and, therefore, there could be no unproblematic return to an untainted origin, instead "the new struggles were not to control the Caliphate but to win men's minds" (148).

According to Frye, "just how the Persians (and other Iranians) reacted to the Arab expansion is the story" (5) and it seems that Acker would agree. In a video pla(y)giarism of Acker's work, *Come Taste My Hand*, creators Lance Olsen, Andi Olsen and Trevor Dodge ask amidst narrated passages from "The Persian Poems" in *Blood and Guts*, "Where is Persia and why should we care?" While the filmmakers themselves do not hazard a response, Acker's "R" for Rimbaud in *In Memoriam to Identity* seems to offer one, claiming "[m]aps whose territories are named in languages which are no longer understood show where the passions are hidden" (*In Memoriam* 6). This sentiment affirms the importance of the Farsi thread that weaves its way through much of Acker's work as a reminder of the

[56] Rumi and Ferdowsi are, perhaps, the most widely recognizable of this acclaim through to the present day.

global structuring of physical, linguistic and knowledge territories and the relation of these manoeuvres to the expression of alterity. Within this context, the birth of Farsi provides an apt analogy for the political potential of literary and poetic forms since Persian resistance was effected largely through the circulation of Persian poetry and literary cultures.

This aspect of Persian history provides the link between Acker's chapter on "Plagiarism" and the following chapter on "The beginnings of romance," in her novel *Great Expectations.* The first section "Plagiarism" ends with a reference to the Timurid period which is connected to the second section, "The beginnings of romance" by way of the colon that punctuates the final line:

> A young prince enjoying the company of an enchanting woman; he receives a cup of wine, elixir of life, out of her hands. Probably Timurid period, 15th century. The period corresponding roughly to the 15th century takes its name from the great conqueror Timur or Tamerlane, whose armies overran the Near East between 1365 and his death in 1405, whose descendants held court in Persia for the next hundred years. The classic style introduced by Ahmad Musa had reached its apex under the Jalayrid Sultan Ahmad, who ruled at Baghdad till its conquest by Timur. After that his artists seemed to have taken service with the Timurid princes, especially Iskandar Sultan under whose patronage the Timurid style may be said to have been formed: (*Great* 201)

This excerpt refers to the time widely considered to be the best period of Persian cultural production and that which established the world renown of Persian

literary culture.[57] Thus, Acker distinctly marks her recognition of the history of Persian resistance and the role of literary culture and poetry in this struggle, as well as signalling by way of the colon the problematic way that Persian art has been appropriated and the culture romanticized to produce orientalist misrepresentations with the end of "plagiarism" being quite literally "the beginning of romance" as her headings imply.

The historical role of Persian literary culture is elaborated in her play, "Birth of the Poet," in which the protagonist, Ali, is at the same time an artist and a professional when the Farsi and English meanings for the same lines are taken together: "In mard 'Ali ostadi عَلی اُستادیست مَرد ین [This man Ali is a professional.] (Fars.)/ This man, Ali is an artist" (95). Rather than providing the same meaning in both languages, this double meaning suggests that the poet holds an important dual status within Persian history. The duality between artistic and market-oriented compulsions in the work of art is a trope that Acker takes up in numerous other works. Here, however, the author seems to invoke the outlaw status of the poet in Iranian history. Acker laments in an interview, "the idea that art has nothing to do with politics is a wonderful construction in order to mask the deep

[57] Most scholars would consider the time before the Mongol takeover to have been "the best period of Persian prose" (Lambton xi), establishing many key poets such as al-Biruni and a style of poetry that "dominated schools o f poetry everywhere" (Frye 226) but the Timurid dynasty produced the most widely popular forms of Persian art and culture: architecture, painting, leatherwork, calligraphy and all matter of arts: "particularly literature, historiography, and miniature painting" (The Editors) flourished. The poet Jāmī is one of the most notable from this era.

political significance that art has" (Friedman 21), going on to criticize the way that art "upholds the empire in terms of its representation as well as its actual structure" (21) when its inherently political activity is denied. Within this context, Acker decries the use of the word 'experimental,' which she claims "has been used to hide the political radicalness of some writers [as in] Oh, they're experimental [which] means they're not really important" (21). The work of Persian poets flies in the face of such assertions that would marginalize innovative artists by suggesting they have nothing to do with politics. Iranians were the first to challenge Arabic assertions that pre-Islamic Arabic poetry represented a perfect style, "almost on par with the supposed perfection of the *Qur'ān* itself" (Roth 321), and the intended dominance of this language over ancient Persian literatures and languages. By the ninth century a strong nationalist reaction to such claims of Arabic superiority ensued, with a new school of poets emerging as part of this reaction (321). This new poetry was fundamentally characterized by *badi* (embellishment or rhetorical principles) and more importantly *bid'a* (innovation) (Roth 321). Meskoob further explains that "poetry enjoyed widespread popularity in Iran -- merchant poets, tradesmen and bazaari poets, even Kings who were poets" (52). As well, poetry was an integral part of courtly life (52; Frye 202). Norman Roth adds to this the significance of love poetry. Though often misconstrued as erotica by western translators, "entire anthologies of such poetry were composed, and not only 'professional' poets but secretaries and rulers wrote

as well" (321). In fact, according to Richard Frye, "few peoples have produced the variety and beauty of poetry as the Persians" (4) and it is with the coinciding birth of the modern Persian language that modern Persian culture begins (xii). Thus, the significance of poetry and particularly *experimental* poetry in Persian culture and resistance cannot be overestimated as this is the context within which linguistic innovation occurred in Iran. This innovation would result in the modern Persian language -- now the lingua franca for territories far beyond Iran's borders and even into areas where the majority of people were Arabs. As Frye concludes, "This in a nutshell tells what happened to Arabs in Iran. They had to learn Persian" (113). As such, Acker's texts and the history of innovative writing in Iran signaled therein work against critics who would wield classifications of experimental work as "another form of sticking people in the corner" (Friedman 21). In addition, by uncovering the operations underlying non-English semantic systems such as that of Farsi, Acker shows that “language is a givenness like all other givennesses” (*My Death* 267), meaning that language is available to be questioned just as all other supposed 'givens' including the sex-gender distinction and the unified rational subject of western humanism are likewise ready for deconstruction and most often constitute her materials; anything taken as given is to Acker available for reworking. Acker's play with Farsi exposes the givenness of logocentric discourse embedded in the English language as a falsity, thereby

exposing the ways that “what we know as ‘natural’" are only "tools to control us” (359).

Whereas one of Plato's first acts in the new republic that would stand as the model after which to reform western society was to expel all the poets from this ideal city, Acker's invocation of Persian history reveals a culture founded *by* poets and through linguistic innovation. Farsi is thereby a most fascinating choice in terms of feminist linguistic politics. The history of the language is one with the history of Persian resistance within the Arab conquest of the Middle East -- a resistance through which the invading Arabic language is deflected and the language of the conquered Persians, Dari, becomes the lingua franca for the region. Existing previously as a primarily oral culture, Iran responded to Arabic domination by adopting the Arabic alphabet and using it as the basis to establish a world-acclaimed poetry and literary culture in this new Persian language, Farsi. Much attention has been directed to the spread of Arabic in the east but Frye shows that "side by side with it and by no means in opposition to Arabic went a spread of the Persian language" (Frye xi). In fact, only Iran (together with Anatolia) escaped from becoming an Arab-speaking land whereas the ancient Mesopotamian, Syrian, Egyptian and north African cultures succumbed to the Arabic language and to Arab Islam (213). As opposed to other lands of the Middle East, Iran "retained its ancient Zoroastrian faith, together with customs and practices, unchanged by allegiance to a new religion" (1). In fact, Islam overlaid

easily with Zoroastrianism in many ways so that this religious shift was less significant than a shift to the Arabic language would have been in that this would have effectively decimated the Persian culture as its imposition decimated other cultures elsewhere. As a case in point, the main day of celebration for Persians today is not an Islamic holiday but rather the ancient *Noruz*, the New Year's Day celebrated on the spring equinox (2). Thus, with its roots in the conquered Sassanian Empire and its existence born from the desire to assert Persian difference within Arabic conquest, Farsi represents the persistence of the Other, disrupting the hegemony of Arabic culture across occupied territories. In *Empire* Acker's heroine declares "[t]he whole world is men's bloody fantasies" (210). Seemingly in response, the protagonist of *My Mother* asserts amidst snippets of German-language poetry, "No new world without a new language" (224). In much the same way that Farsi evades and remakes Arabic linguistic domination Acker's multilingual literary innovations similarly unmake English linguistic dominance in an attempt to reform modern patriarchal culture upheld therein.

Language as a Tool of Imperialism, Conquest and the Patriarchal Empire

Unlike Acker's earlier work that seems to advocate for a return to the pre-Oedipal language of the body proposed by the school of French feminists,[58] in

[58] Acker indicates a number of her influences, including French feminist theory in the interview with Sylvère Lotringer that serves as the introduction to *Hannibal Lecter, My Father*. See also my Master's thesis, *Kathy Acker's French Twist: Translating Sex in the Blood and Guts Trilogy*, which

Empire and *My Mother* Acker moves toward the formation of a new myth rooted in unrecognized, minority, forbidden or taboo and non-English languages. Speaking in and out of multiple non-English languages is strategically different from rejecting language -- patriarchal or otherwise -- which only reifies the centrality of the language being opposed. Acker uses Farsi to create a degenerating language that opens to the unknowable and degrades the transactional nature of English. In so doing, her multilingual aesthetic makes room for the values, social relations, identities and knowledge systems that make up the cultural "codes" embedded in non-English and particularly non-western language systems. In *Empire* Acker's anti-heroes are two mercenary-turned-renegade terrorists: Thivai and Abhor (ne Abhorra) who meet and become lovers when Abhor is hired to collect a debt Thivai owes. Thivai falls in love with Abhor and after paying off the debt the two embark on a journey to find Abhor's boss, Dr. Schreber, who is believed to possess a special enzyme that will save Thivai from his deteriorating health. The pair must uncover and follow a series of clues that will reveal "the code" (35, 36, 38) that would lead them to "...the knower, ... the big boss" (34). To this Abhor adds, "Look.' . . . 'All I know is that we have to reach this construct. And her name's Kathy" (34). When Thivai asks who Kathy

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focuses on the ways Acker revives and innovates French feminist theory in her early work, particularly *Blood and Guts in High School*, *Great Expectations* and *My Death, My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini*. Catherine Rock continues to see the influence of French feminist theory in Acker's later work in her article, "Poetics of the Periphery: Literary Experimentation in Kathy Acker's *In Memoriam to Identity*" published in *LIT*.

is, Abhor dismisses the question, claiming "'It doesn't mean anything'" (34), from which Thivai concludes, "'If it doesn't mean anything, it's dead. The cunt must be dead'" (34). Here, Acker is making a quick and clever allusion to Barthes's death of the author while simultaneously signalling her impulse to create a narrative or new code. Someone is controlling the narrative but that person (Kathy) is dead, or rather "a construct." The death of the author leaves language itself in control. It is significant, then, that Abhor's search for the new code begins with a Farsi language sign. Of the Farsi sign she encounters she admits, "If I had been able to translate it, it still would have told me nothing" (53). This leads her to realize that she "could say the unknowable in Persian" (53). Further on in the chapter, Abhor speaks to the "Chinese boss" -- a presumed associate of the doctor they are seeking -- in Farsi, confounding his requests for clarification. He asks for exactness, "Then what do you want to know exactly" (56), and she answers him both in Farsi and in poetry by way of a fictional Chinese folk tale delivered in the Persian language, after which she concludes "I hung up the phone on my doctor, for I had nothing to say" (57). In these reflections she is alluding to Farsi as a language that degenerates -- one that is unable to facilitate transactions in the ways privileged in the text, in history and in the economy.

Thivai observes of Abhor, where "[m]oderns only wanted to destruct. On the other hand my construct (a cunt) and I had to find the code" (36). Here again

Acker indicates her desire not to destroy the code but to discover a new one. This desire is made explicit when Abhor later explains

> Ten years ago it seemed possible to destroy language through language: to destroy language which normalizes and controls by cutting that language. Nonsense would attack the empire-making (empirical) empire of language, the prisons of meaning. But this nonsense, since it depended on sense, simply pointed back to the normalizing institutions. (134)

This reaffirming by way of rejecting is what for Jean-François Lyotard necessitates "unexpected moves" rather than counter moves, which only play into "the opponent's strategy" as programmed effects that thus have no effect on the balance of power (16). Acker proposes countering the effects of "institutionalized meaning, institutionalized language, control, fixation, judgement, prison" (*Empire* 134) by speaking the forbidden. This speaking of the forbidden marks a new path for Acker and a new multilingual code. Acker reveals the tenets of the new code in Abhor's musings on the potential existence of a primary language, an "ideal unconscious or freedom" that if it does not exist she says "pretend it does" (134). Most important in her musings is her conclusion that this primary language, the source of freedom

> must be taboo, all that is forbidden. Thus, an attack on the institutions of prison via language would demand the use of a language or languages which aren't acceptable, which are forbidden. Language, on one level, constitutes a set of codes and social and historical agreements. Nonsense doesn't per se break down the codes, *speaking precisely that which the codes forbid breaks the codes*. (*Empire* 134 emphasis mine)

Non-English and especially defiant languages such as Farsi represent all that is forbidden in the globally scaled social contract represented by western humanism. Lyotard observes that in advanced industrial societies anything that cannot fit into or be operationalized to fit with new channels of communication and turned into "quantities of information" that can easily be exchanged as an "informational commodity" (4-5) will be abandoned; he refers to this postmodern shift in language use as the "mercantilization of knowledge" (5). In a similar vein, Max Weinreich summates that "a language is a dialect that has an army and navy" (qtd. in Edwards 22). The connection between linguistic dominance and imperial power is elaborated by Edwards who shows that the manifestation and specific form a language takes are determined by social influence, explaining that the Romance Languages themselves (French, Romanian, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish) began life as dialects of the Latin of the Roman Empire with the word 'romance' deriving from the vulgar Latin 'romanice' -- meaning 'in the local variety' (24). In any case, the "muscle" that these languages now have derives from the fact that their original users controlled "important commodities -- wealth, dominance, learning -- which others [saw] as necessary for their own aspirations" (40). None, however, have ever risen to the current sway of English.

Today English is spoken more than any other language, dominating in the worlds of science and technology, finance, popular culture and so on (41, 107). In addition, more than half the world's learned journals are in English, 80 per cent of

all computer information is stored in English, the language of most multinational companies is English, English is formally studied as a second language more than any other variety, and when the space probe Voyager One was launched in 1977 the chief message was from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, speaking for all the countries of the world, in English (41). Thus, English has ceased to be merely a lingua franca -- a language of intergroup convenience -- and has come to possess outright replacement value, raising serious questions about the "language-killing potential of the present 'world language'" (1). This deadly potential within the English language is formally conveyed in phrases added to the English translations of the first time Abhor speaks using Farsi in *Empire*. Though Farsi will appear later in Thivai's chapter, "On Becoming Algerian (Thivai)," it appears for the first time when Abhor narrates the chapter, "In Honour of the Arabs (Abhor)." She writes, "[Ali is pretty] (Fars.). (Ali is pretty.) *I want to kill you*. [With anarchy one kid is killed] (Fars.). ('Anarchy always kills a kid off.') *I want to kill*" (*Empire* 54 emphasis mine). The addition of the intention "to kill" in English suggests a hidden threat in the language. The fact that the literal translation of the Farsi into English is in parentheses while the will "to kill" is unenclosed suggests that the threat is the more direct meaning conveyed by the English language. Thus, the language-killing potential of English as the lingua franca of the modern age is signalled in the underlying murderous desire posited within the English translations of the Farsi text. By extension, Acker's support for

those languages made obsolete, unknown or diminished by the dominance of English is shown in her insistence on Farsi as a language that interferes with communication where communication is reduced to facilitating transactions and the general mercantilization of knowledge.

According to Edwards, language operates according to a kind of Gresham's Law wherein the most efficient linguistic choice becomes dominant at the expense of those that are intrinsically more valuable but may be harder to maintain (103). This value-assessment is based on an abstraction, however, whereby the two forms of exchange are reduced to the same equal nominal value based on their function within the transaction rather than their intrinsic value, in which terms if one is not undoubtedly superior then at the least there is one for which the full value is not recognized. The mode that is cheapest to produce is the one that is reproduced while the currency that is harder to maintain is displaced. As a result, "the concurrent circulation of two forms of exchange would lead to the disappearance of the more valuable ... so the 'cheap,' all-pervasive language will drive out its intrinsically superior but harder to maintain competitor. Thus does English threaten Irish, French loom over Breton, Spanish worry Galician and so on" (103). The problem lies in that, as Edwards explains, "languages are best seen as different systems reflecting different varieties of the human condition" (90). Since the relative quality of two linguistic systems cannot be assessed based on any conventional difference, i.e. its grammar or rules, the

value is located in its relation to the speech community and the spectrum of language as a mode of human expression more broadly. Acker's use of Farsi serves to offset the dominance of English and the western subject while her insistence on including Persian history in her narratives collapses unquestioned distinctions between the East and West. As a result of Acker's Persian figures and storylines, the Middle Eastern subject emerges as one of the forfeited existences through which the western subject is constituted. Farsi points to all that is excluded and outlawed in the primacy of English and western discourse more broadly, especially imbrications and borrowings that complicate sharp distinctions between the cultures of the Eastern and Western hemispheres or Orient and Occident respectively. In terms of Acker's linguistic politics, the 'nothing' and 'unknowable' associated with the Persian language are posited as positive attributes against English as a sense-making apparatus and the linguistic "death" (Empire 52) embedded in this code.[59]

Acker's fascination with the unacknowledged role of Persian history and its shaping force on dominant western institutions can be traced back to an early unpublished short story, "Loss/The Memory of Orpheus" (circa 1981). The story is a short personal reflection on her own conflicted feelings about the Christmas holiday that hearkens back to her Jewish childhood and connects with later

[59] While searching for instructions regarding the new code, Abhor muses that "[i]t's difficult for western minds to conceive of unity: they can only conceive death" (*Empire* 50).

experiences in adulthood wherein she found herself alone in European cities that were decorated for the holiday. Her "isolation or loneliness" (Loss 1) is reconciled when "I remembered how Christmas really began" (2). Acker goes on to account for an untold history from "the days of the Roman Empire [when] Oriental religions proliferated" (2). She claims that "[o]ne of the most powerful of these was the worship of the old Persian sun-god, Mithra" (2) whom she contends the Roman army admired so much that they "adopted and named Mithra 'The Unconquered Sun' [and] celebrated his birthday on December 25" (2). Acker continues, pointing out that the birth of Jesus remains undated in the Gospels and as such the early Church did not celebrate it; however, she contends "the early Christians envied the power of Mithra and so, at the end of the third century or the beginning of 4 A.D., began to celebrate Christ's birthday on the same December 25 in order to appropriate the power of the pagan Persian religion" (2 emphasis as in original). Thus, Acker recognizes that Christianity itself is not the mythmaker but the myth in that its foundation is borrowed from and built on appropriated Persian mythology. Acker connects this buried appropriation with the myth of Orpheus who attempts to lead his lover, Eurydice, out of the underworld but loses her for eternity in the moment he looks backward to confirm her presence. Like Eurydice in the Orpheus tale, Persian contributions exist as "a forfeited existence" (Kristeva, *Powers* 9) in the master narrative of western humanism. Remembering this fact and its consequences Acker "immediately ... walked back into the sun.

And remembered that the original Christmas was the celebration of the nativity of the sun, that pagan god" (Loss 3). Thus, integrating this absence has a harmonizing effect. Similar to Orpheus's dilemma, in looking back this early rival of Christianity vanishes and can no longer be perceived except in its absence. Thus, the Persian Other persists as the abjected and denied interiority of western subjectivity. This status must necessarily be negated, however, in order to deny the precariousness of the western subject's position of authority. Yet Enrique Dussel shows that by "affirming the alterity of the other (which was previously denied), it is possible to 'discover' for the first time the hidden 'other side' of modernity: the peripheral colonial world, the sacrificed indigenous peoples, the enslaved black, the oppressed woman, the alienated infant, the estranged popular culture: the victims of modernity, all of them victims of an irrational act that contradicts modernity's ideal of rationality" (473). According to Dussel, only in this way is modern reason transcended "not as a denial of reason as such, but rather as denial of the violent, Eurocentric, developmentalist, hegemonic reason" (473). Dussel points out that for most of Europe's history -- and so that of Euro-America -- the region existed as merely the most westerly tip of the Euro-Afro-Asian continent on which, in fact, Muslim universality peaked for most of the Medieval period and up through the fifteenth-century. Prior to the world system that emerges with the Empire-building projects of 1492, "empires or cultural systems simply coexisted" (470). As Dussel explains, before Colonialism there

was "not yet a world history in an empirical sense" (468). There were only isolated, local histories of communities that extended over large geographical areas: the Romans, the Persians, the Hindu kingdoms, the Siamese, the Chinese, or the Mesoamerican and Inca worlds in America. Indeed, the notion of modern Europe that occupies the centre of World History begins in the nineteenth century following the "world mercantilism" initiated by Spain (470). From this point on Europe starts to define all other cultures as its periphery for the first time in history (471). Furthermore, these definitions are premised on the idea of a modern and superior European civilization versus the mostly "barbaric, primitive, coarse people" (472) who stand in the way of this mission.

In *My Mother* the characterization of Arab figures as those barbaric people who oppose the civilizing mission indicates a kind of violence in line with the historical acts associated with colonialism by which "modern praxis *must* exercise violence ... in order to destroy the obstacles impeding modernization" (472 emphasis mine); Dussel contends that this praxis reaches from the 'colonial just war' to the Gulf War. In *My Mother*, the mother/narrator points out the commonplace nature of descriptions that suggest "(IN THEIR OWN LANDS THE ARABS TEAR OUT EACH OTHER'S EYEBALLS AND RAPE THEIR OWN CHILDREN. IF ONE AMERICAN SOLDIER GOES INTO BATTLE, BECAUSE RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, HE HAS TO WIN" which she attributes to

" --- some American government official" (24). Similarly Abhor explains with exasperation in the chapter "Let the Algerians Take Over Paris" that "[o]nce again a modern reminds us ... scientists and philosophers who have transmitted present-day civilization to us, from Herodotus and Diodorus, from Greece to Rome, unanimously recognized that they borrowed that civilization from blacks on the banks of the Nile ..." (*Empire* 68). Typical constructions of the other such as that provided by "some American government official" in *My Mother* mask the blurry threshold that actually separates the modern western subject from its Middle Eastern and subaltern counterparts and attempt to cover over the fact that at the time that the rational subject of western modernity established its authority, Latin Europe of the fifteenth century was "besieged by the Muslim world [and] amounted to nothing more than a peripheral secondary geographical area situated in the westernmost limit of the Euro-Afro-Asian continent" (Dussel 468). Acker's insertions of Farsi language and history disrupt the fallacy of world history, which has been commonly constructed as a unilineal diachrony from Greece to Rome to Europe that ultimately positions Europe as the starting point of modernity, appropriating texts derived from outside of Europe and their tangents as intra-European phenomena (465-466, 469). Acker reveals that while writing "Alone," a section of *Empire*, "I thought ... that today as the 'Great Powers' as they were formally known, meet and meld economically, then culturally, as more and more of the known world goes Coca-Cola and McDonalds, only the Muslim world

resists" ("A Few" 121). She concludes that "[f]or westerners today, for us, the other is now Muslim" (122). The importance of 'the other' in psychoanalytic terms is that it delineates the boundary between the state of nature and the state of culture, which constitutes "the border of my condition as a living being" (Kristeva, *Powers* 3). The semblance of a clear threshold between these states is necessary to establish the perceived stability of the autonomous subject. Kristeva claims that what "I" expel refers back to "the place where I am not and which permits me to be [...] or that elsewhere that I imagine beyond the present" (3-4). Acker's integration of Farsi language, history and eroticism into her criticism of an unquestioned western cultural imperialism ultimately confounds the distinctions on which western subjectivity and hegemony are falsely founded.

In *My Mother*, Acker inserts a "Farsi Lesson" at the end of a chapter from the book's part one, "Into That Belly of Hell Whose Name Is the United States," which criticizes America's class system, as well as the circulation of imperialist agendas by way of historical narratives and the education system. The lesson teaches,

> آن پستان شیرین است [That breast is sweet]
>
> (An pestan shirin ast. That breast is sweet.)
> نَخَیر، این پستان تُرش اَست [No the breast is sour]
> (Naxeir, in pestan torsh ast. No, this breast is sour)
> ...

> دحر، پِستان مُردِست وَ شَب سَرد اَست [No the breast is dead and the night is cold] (Naxeir, pestan mord est va shab sard ast. No, the breast is dead and the night is cold. (32)

The Farsi word "pestan" is used when referring to breast and/or nipple; both meanings are enclosed in the term. Thus, the Farsi text more strongly conveys the sense of feeding and suckling, as well as the erotic nature of this act, implicitly challenging the "sour," "dead" and "cold" historical narratives on which the West feeds. Instead, the final lines of the lesson impel the reader to "Hear the breasts' voices" and to listen for other, implicitly unheard "avazhaye pestanan [breast songs]" (32). [60]

In "Letters from My Mother to My Father" the mother/narrator proclaims, "(This is what the books tell about American history: you can travel and wherever you'll go, there'll be no one but you" (19). In this statement, she is calling out notions of World History told from a perspective that constitutes the world as occupied by the West and the rest, as well as phallocentric constructions of non-Euro-American inhabitants of the globe according to the logic of sameness wherein all are reduced to the western subject's likeness, opposite or complement.

[60] The use of the word *pestan* over the more commonly used Farsi word *cinae* produces an abundance of meanings that are not accounted for in the English word breast as *pestan* connotes breastfeeding, as well as the more poetic connotation of bosom and also being the word used in more directly or even crass sexual situations. Interestingly the same happens when one translates the German poems interspersed within My Mother. There is a profanity and perversity in the German language text that is not at all captured in the sexual innuendos that result when one translates the text into English. While the bones and death connote a sense of morbidity in English there is a disturbing sense of necrophilia when the text is read in the German language.

Dussel shows that this Eurocentric perspective emerges after Colonialism and masks the fact that Europe's superiority sprang from its accumulation of riches, experience and knowledge derived from colonized territories (471). He further asserts that while all cultures are ethnocentric, "modern European ethnocentrism is the only one that might pretend to claim universality for itself" (471). Acker's use of the Farsi word "pestan" offsets the phallocentric impulse within Eurocentrism by introducing erotics that escape the English corollaries. As well, Thivai and Abhor's use of Farsi in *Empire* associates the language with a deterritorialized existence with both existing in liminal spaces, Thivai as a pirate and Abhor as an amalgam of supposedly contradictory traits; she is part human, part robot, part black, at times identifying as a man and at times as a woman, moving between sexualities and finally by the story's end coming out as a lesbian. She is "the flux, the complex, the paradoxical" that stands in the way of the promised fulfillment of a symbolic system in which everything is "explained, integrated, unified, stabilized and systematized" (Hurst 216). At the same time she represents the "possibility or beginning" (Acker, "A Few" 122) that Acker locates at the end of the text. Just before the character rides off on her own on a found motorcycle, she is pulled over by the police who list as one of her errors that she "had signalled too soon" (*Empire* 224) to which Abhor replies with surprise "...because I didn't know there was anyone else in the world, any signalling was an act of faith" (224). Abhor's journey mirrors that of the author herself as Acker

moves "from no to yes, from nihilism to myth" (Acker, "A Few" 122) with the author seeking to reclaim the forfeited existence in her abhor(rent) heroine. Acker's texts break down the distinctions between East and West that constitute western humanism to show via the role of the Persian Empire that the Middle East is every bit a part of World History and particularly western history. Infusing the texts with Persian language asserts the forfeited Persian presence as well as indicating the use of language as a tool within imperialism and the ways English has operated as a kind of linguistic imperialism to further the spread of Euro-American hegemony worldwide.

In *Blood and Guts*, Acker uses an exercise in Farsi grammar to show this critical loss within subjectivity when univocal systems of meaning are imposed in place of an otherwise existing linguistic diversity and textual plurality. While the term “text” has come to stand in for all forms of literature, Gayatri Spivak shows this to be a simplification of its export from Derrida’s lexicon where the text was meant to refer to both literature and subjects to show their dual construction by the shaping force of linguistic representation (McCabe xii). Within this rubric, Acker’s linguistic experimentation draws attention to the “textuality," or inherent plurality, of both the linguistic text and the speaking subject.[61] Multiplicities of

[61] The notion of textuality recurs throughout Spivak's *In Other Worlds*. Her use of the term borrows by her own account from the work of Cixous and Catherine Clément who refer to "this network-web-*tissu*-text" that is "the untotalizable yet grasped 'subject' of 'textuality," Barthes notion of "the 'writable' where we are written into this fuller text," Foucault's notion of "the

meanings are shown to inhere in literary texts just as the continual capacity for reinterpretation, displacement and redeployment inheres in the subject. Lexical, grammatical and syntactical particularities within Acker's Farsi insertions[62] undermine the claims to universal law underlying phallocentric constructions of language. Inasmuch as language shapes subjectivity, the phallic law governing subject formation is then also displaced.

In *Blood and Guts* the protagonist is eleven-year-old Janey, a pre-pubescent girl who nonetheless lives within all forms of social taboo. She has an incestuous relationship with her father who supports her financially when she moves to New York. She joins a violent street gang, the Scorpions, who "smear shit" (35, 42) all over the city in scenes of war and urban violence. One night she is abducted from "the slum where she chooses to live" (56) by two hoodlums. They sell her to a Persian slave trader, Mr Linker, who then locks her in a room and "taught her to be a whore" (65). The classic Oedipal narrative that provides the frame for *Blood and Guts* and is woven throughout Acker's work establishes a critique of the psychical control of women by an oppressive phallic law that

microphysics of power" read in concert with Derrida's post structuralism, and de Mann's definition wherein "we call text any entity that can be considered from ... a double perspective as a generative, open-ended, non-referential grammatical system and as a figural system closed off by a transcendental signification that subverts the grammatical code to which the text owes its existence" (Spivak *In Other Worlds* 391; 397).

[62] My interest in Kathy Acker's use of Farsi began with my analysis of "The Farsi Poems" in *Blood and Guts* as part of my MA thesis, *Kathy Acker's French Twist*. The analyses here are a deeper and more expanded look at some of the same poems, put in dialogue with all the other Farsi language work in Acker's corpus that I did not then know of.

dominant systems of signification represent and reproduce. While held captive by the slave trader Janey discovers a Persian grammar book. In teaching herself Farsi she constructs a series of poems and lessons that elucidate many of the idioms pertaining to the literal act of translation and, by analogy, that of articulating desire across cultural schemas. This motif of capture is a recurring theme in Acker's texts that coincides with the act of translation and particularly writing Farsi in three separate scenes: Janey's capture in *Blood and Guts*, the release of Hester Pryne by way of Janey's book report on the topic, and Thivai's imprisonment in *Empire*. In this way Acker aligns writing out of English and by extension writing alterity with resistance to imprisonment.

In Janey's translations ellipses and typographical errors highlight the fragility of language, particularly within the Persian visual scroll by which the simple omission of a tick, curve or dot can render a word meaningless or of a very different meaning than the author intended. For example, in Farsi, the words "hit" and "woman" differ only by a dot, which Janey mistakenly adds, thereby turning the intended word "زَد [hit]" into "زَن [woman]" in a list that she terms "Irregulars" (*Blood* 84). Incidentally, there are no irregular verbs in Farsi to begin with. Similarly, Janey substitutes the English word "pain" for the Farsi word for "وَفات [loyalty]" in a section called "(Translate into English:)" (85-87). In other lists, the Farsi for "Janey is black" becomes " جانِی سِیاه است [Janey is blind]" and the Farsi "وَقت [fate]" is interpreted as "time" (79, 88). Other words are

complicated by their lack of word parity. For example “cot” has no strong correlative in Farsi, while "دِهقان [peasant]" is translated differently in two contexts (74-76, 89).The mistranslated words highlight the way in which terms are complicated by associative, connotative and relational meanings. In this way, Acker disrupts phallocentricism's own basis in equivalency (sameness) and substitution.

The Persian language is a particularly provocative choice on Acker's part because it lacks gendered pronouns. In fact, there are no gender distinctions inherent to the language. Persian pronouns that translate as “this,” “that” and “it” in English are also used to denote what western discourse sees as gendered subjects. Unlike English, Farsi determines gender within the context of the sentence. Janey’s translations from English to Persian and vice versa are complicated by pronoun ambiguities that would not exist in English language texts. The relationality of gender as an identity construct is implicitly recognized in the Persian language since the gender of the subject cannot be identified outside of its linguistic context. Thus, the syntagmatic semantic system underlying the Persian language is distinguished from the paradigmatic operations on which an English symbolic language is based – operations that stem from a logocentric system of reproduction, repetition and likeness. Acker draws attention to this distinction in order to challenge the “order of the same” (Irigaray, *This Sex* 197) that grounds the signifying chain within phallic constructions of language.

In a list called "Present stem" (*Blood* 82-84), Janey attempts to break Farsi grammar into English syntactical structures, seeking to put forward what would be the equivalent of English root words. Janey tries, for example, to isolate the present stems of the verbs "داشتـ ... خواستـ ... دید ...آمد [have/want/see/come]…" بُرد ...گِرفتـ.. [rob/kidnap]" according to the rules of English grammar. But, in so doing, she renders the words a mere assemblage of letters with no meaning. Janey's verb conjugations evidence the fallacy of attempting to transfer grammatical rules or lexical patterns from one language to another. These attempted conjugations show that, just as meaning is facilitated by linguistic structures, it is obliterated when structures are used deterministically. In addition, Janey's conjugations fail to take into account that verb tenses cannot be isolated in Farsi. The past tense is implied in the present tense of Farsi verbs, and the appropriate use can only be determined within the context of a phrase. As such, meaning in Farsi cannot be cordoned off from the interpretive chain as easily as within English. The effect of imposing English grammatical rules on the Farsi language stands as a metaphor for the flattening of heterogeneity that results from the superimposition of phallogocentrism on conventional linguistic systems. As explained by the French feminists, the assumption of paternal law results in the transference of grammatical and lexical patterns that suppress the heterogeneity of

languages and subjectivity.[63] Through Janey's conjugations, Acker is able to illustrate the over-determination that conditions phallocentric language and the consequence that this imposition has on the expression of non-normative desires and identities.

In uncovering the operations underlying other semantic systems such as that of Farsi, Acker is able to challenge the supposed givenness of linguistic structures. The visual dimension of the Persian language lays bare grammatical rules that are concealed within the structure of the English language. For example, Farsi makes literally visible the way in which subjective qualities are layered into linguistic signs by a series of provisional grammatical rules. The most indicative of this is Janey's analysis of an imported Arabic grammatical tool called the "ezafe." Janey compiles a lengthy analysis of the "ezafe," which she translates as the "extra," a grammatical addition that determines the subject of the sentence (72-74). The opening lines of Janey's Persian poems are a series of descriptive statements: "Janey is a girl./ the world is red./ night is the narrow street[. …]/ Janey is an expensive child" (72). In the next section of the novel, Janey translates a series of possessive descriptors from Farsi to English. The series introduces the

[63] While each of the French feminists enacts subtly different responses to Lacan's model of subject formation, the violent repression of alterity that results from privileging Name-of-the-Father logic is a central point of contention for all of them. See Luce Irigaray's *The Sex Which Is Not One* for an overview of the main tenets of French feminism.

ezafe as that which ascribes the subject's qualities. The Farsi words translate literally as "Janey's night / red's night / world's night / Janey is broken." The point of interest is the transparency of the Farsi language versus the presumptuousness of English, which, for example, translates the Farsi " شَبِ سُرخ [red's night]" as "the red night." The ezafe in Farsi makes the layering on of attributes a visible phenomenon. This grammatical tick acknowledges that the descriptor is not a natural quality of the subject but is applied manually. This is dissimilar to the English language statement, which conflates the variable quality of the attribute with the subject's state of Being. The use of the definite article "the," in the English translation, implies the subject's stasis and endows the subject (night) with a finite meaning located in the attribute "red." In Farsi, the placement of the ezafe creates ambiguity that is lost in the English translation. In the Persian script it is indefinite whether "night" is a quality of "red" or "red" is a quality of "night." Acker makes this complication explicit when she rewrites "the woman of smell" with two possible Farsi translations, one in which the attribute (smell) belongs to the woman and the other in which the woman becomes the attribute of "smell." The writing of "beautiful women" and "a beautiful woman" in Farsi also emphasizes the ambiguity of the relationship between subjects and attributes. In short, in the Farsi versions, the subjects of the descriptors are more fluid than in the English statements. Hence, the Farsi language encourages one to recognize the interrelation of terms and inherently problematizes natural

associations between subjects and attributes. Consequently, Acker's Farsi language-play flags the erased mastery inherent in phallocentric western discourse.

The treatment of sexual material within Janey's Persian translations provides another point of contention that shows the effect of the logic of sameness (phallogocentrism) on expressions of desire. The author replaces sexually charged English words with the prosaic in the Persian text. Farsi equivalents for the English words "cock," "cunt," "prick," and suggestive verbs are omitted and replaced with generic nouns such as the Farsi for "پَنجَرهٔ [window], "اُطاق [room] and "صَندَلی [chair]," and simple prepositions (79-80). In this way, the author implies that models of western desire flatten non-western or otherwise marginalized desires by forcing them to conform to an internal logic which they do not share. Simply put, one form of desire cannot be substituted for another without a critical loss. The same point is made by Acker's references to the legend of Shahra'zad and the Sinbad Tales in *Empire*, onto which were projected Western European eroticisms with each being similarly flattened and reformed to fit the language into which it was translated, adhering to local tastes and decorum accordingly.

It is now widely accepted that *The Arabian Nights* has a Persian prototype, Hazār afsān (*The Thousand and One Tales*), the significance of which has gone

largely unrecognized in western analysis (Borges 92-93; Gottingen 275). *The Arabian Nights* is, in fact, a version of Hazār afsān made through European translations of Arabic manuscripts -- beginning with that of the French Arabist Antoine Galland (1707-1717), through the highly scrupulous translations of Edward Lane (1839) and then the "bedazzling Orientalism" of Captain Richard Burton (1885). The key difference between the translations created from the Arabian manuscripts and the original stories is to be found in the missing Persian syntax. The importance of Persian syntax is reiterated by grammarian W.M. Thackston, who claims that the "syntactic and idiomatic complexity" (xii) of the Persian language cannot be overstated. For Borges too, the "stylistic poverty of *The Nights*" (Borges 99) results from the failure to account for Persian syntactical structure in translation. Working from Arabic manuscripts, the Persian stories are produced in the "dry and business-like tone of the Arabs in contrast to the rhetorical luxuriance of the Persians" (99). To overlook the particularities of Persian syntax is to misunderstand some of the most important elements of the text. Translators since have continually strived "to complete the work neglected by those languid, anonymous Arabs" (102), embellishing the text with Art Nouveau passages, localized obscenities, comical interludes, circumstantial or personal details, symmetries, and vast quantities of visual orientalism; "none of it

truthful but all of it highly readable" (103).[64] As Borges explains, more serious than the heady aspirations of western translators who infused *The Nights* with all manner of invented material "is the retention or suppression of certain particularities; more serious than [their] preferences and oversights is the movement of the syntax" (95), which was transformed in both French and British versions to suit European taste, domesticating the Arabs "so they would not be out of place in Paris" (94) nor at the "refined parlour table" in Britain (95). Acker invokes the tales' Persian roots in order to return the omitted "fire" (*Empire* 164) to the page by referring to the stories in their Farsi name, *The 1001 Tales*, and making the teller of the stories the Persian Queen Shahra'zad rather than the Arab Queen Scheherazade popularized in the westernized versions.

When Thivai writes his own version of Sinbad the Sailor in Farsi while in prison he is reclaiming the repetition and formulaic treatment of the tales, which have been alternately exoticized and diminished according to the perspective of the translator and local taste, rather than being circulated on their own terms. In Thivai's writing Sinbad the Sailor offers "[stories of my travels](Fars.)/stories of my travels. [travels from poverty to happiness, travels from unknown to strange,

[64] Burton's work was quintessential in this regard, with the translator going as far as to fill in missing erotic material with highly personal accounts of his own experiences in brothels in Bengal (98). Burton's version abounds in substitutions resulting in the coexistence of archaic words with slang, the lingo of prisoners or sailors with technical terms and a hybridization of English, Latin and Scandinavian neologisms (99).

travels from strange to strange, travels from sickness to sex](Fars)/'of travelling from poverty to sensual pleasure, unknown to wonder, from wonder to wonder, from sickness to sex" (151). This formula is repeated again when, as Sinbad, Thivai breaks Shaha'razad's story into blocks of plot points: "a tale of/ [travels](Fars.)/travelling/[poverty](Fars.)/poverty/[happiness](Fars.)/sensual pleasure/[unknown](Fars.)/the unknown/[strange] (Fars.)/wonder/[sickness](Fars.)/disease/[sex](Fars.)/sex"(152-153). The superficial and formulaic treatment of *The Thousand and One Tales* in European translations is addressed and offset when Sinbad inserts Shaha'razad's political meaning as an answer to the question: "Why do I tell stories?" (151). Then saying, "Let me tell you why," (151) deferring to Shahara'zad's motivations as an explanation for his own. As Thivai tells it, Shahara'zad's tales began because she "wanted to end patriarchy" (152). He writes, "[i]n her prison of herself, or the world, she began her marvellous exploit, a tale which lasted one thousand and one nights, which staved off death, which staved off patriarchy ..." (152). In this way, Thivai reasserts the value of Shahara'zad in Persian literature against western reductions in which she is posited as "a lovely but simple-minded entertainer, someone who narrates innocuous tales and dresses fabulously" (Mernissi 15). On Iranian terms the storyteller, Shahara'zad, is a powerful feminist figure, not the glorified harem girl she has been made into by common translations. Commenting

on the existing status of this figure, Muslim-feminist scholar and writer Fatima Mernissi explains

> In our part of the world, Scheherazade is perceived as a courageous heroine and is one of our rare female mythical figures. Scheherazade is a strategist and a powerful thinker, who uses her psychological knowledge of human beings to get them to walk faster and leap higher. Like Saladin and Sindbad, she makes us bolder and more sure of ourselves and of our capacity to transform the world and its people. (Mernissi 15)

When Thivai proclaims that "Finally, one woman, Shahara'zad, wanted to fuck this king more than life" (*Empire* 152) he reclaims the important political status of Shahara'zad and the other lesser known women of *A Thousand and One Nights* such as Princess Budur who likewise "did not write about liberation -- they went ahead and lived it, dangerously and sensuously ... They did not try to convince society to free them -- they went ahead and freed themselves" (Mernissi 133). This association of sensuality and resistance is key to Acker's linguistic politics. Like these famed Persian folkloric figures, Acker's characters live dangerously within carnal and vernacular excesses that likewise do not comply with modern modes of decorum. Highlighting the Persian origin of the stories of Shaha'razad and Sinbad by way of the spelling and language provides a reminder of the political loss when one language is presumed to be able to seamlessly stand in for another. In this case the sensuality of the tales is either erased or replaced with lewd material depending on the translator while the cultural meaning of the Persian figures is completely dismissed as the stories are reduced to "an innocent

storybook of oriental adventure" (Colligan 1) to be shared with English schoolchildren.

Acker infuses the text with particularities of Persian eroticism in order for the text to work against a culture that is in the words of an Arab woman character "preventing the living word (the movement of the living hand) and fucking (the movement of the living body)" (166). As the "Arab female" character asserts in the section called "[Death](Fars.)/Death," "my home or me [is] against you, Death" (162). While Acker's association of America with death -- "America, Death" (162) -- accords with her critiques of western capitalism, the interchangeability of the terms also works with earlier associations between the English language and the death of linguistic difference. This connection is made more provocative given that English would have at the time of *Empire*'s publication been newly established as the official language of the United States by proponents of the U.S. English Movement -- an initiative motivated by a desire to safeguard American cultural hegemony in the same way that Britain sought to maintain the power of its Empire with the first of its actions in India being to stamp out the Persian language (Khansir and Mozafari 2365; Meskoob 122). Spurred on by the supposed threat of a growing Spanish-speaking population in the United States this group sought to eliminate the potential of America becoming what would be in the words of former President Theodore Roosevelt "a polygot boarding house" (Edwards 167-168). When the character is angered by a

culture—"this prison that prevents us from finding shelter, from fucking each other" (166)—she is also referring to the threat of univocal linguistic domination in the face of multilingual realities. As indicated in the title of the section "[Destruction](Fars)," the destruction of such domination is then related to emphasizing desire in language. In the ensuing dialogue between the "Arab Female" and an "Arab Male" the latter makes reference to Sheik Nafzawi's sixteenth-century Arabic sex manual, *The Perfumed Garden*, here referred to as "the Koran's manual for fucking" (165) by "Sheik Nafzawi." Though the text and its writer are Arabic in origin, it was widely circulated throughout Persia during the Safavid Dynasty (Poynter 517) and has been mistaken by some to be of Persian origin. The text was only ever translated once by the same Burton of the famed *Nights* translation and though it provokes the same ethical concerns, it nonetheless stands as a treatise on a vast array of sexual acts and relationships openly discussed in Persian society. As Roth explains, modern Persian poetry shared none of the modest allusions or romantic reserve associated with most poetry of the European tradition but detailed "in the most explicit description and language the precise sexual activity in which the poet engages" (321). The sexual openness of Persian texts is reiterated by Cyril Elgood who claims that "to the Persians of old the sexual act was never indecent. To read and write about such things was considered no more improper than to study in detail today the menu of a smart restaurant. Both stimulate the appetite" (403). As such, Collette Colligan

argues that translations of *The Thousand and One Tales* such as Burton's, which emphasizes sexual deviance, ought to be understood more as "interesting piece[s] of Victorian pornography" (46) that likely reflect fantasies and sexual issues that preoccupied the English toward the end of the century.[65] Edward Said, too, has noted that while Burton exhibited an obvious interest in and knowledge about Arab culture, "his individuality perforce encounters, and indeed merges with, the voice of Empire" (196). While the lascivious version that Burton produced indicates a turn-of-the-century fascination with homoeroticism, the gaps that Burton was able to fill in with his own fantastic longings were produced by the "exceedingly erudite" version written by Galland that to this day exists as the "invisible manuscript" (Borges 36) on which all versions of the Persian tales are based.

The most common forms of *The Tales* were those constrained by British decorum. These would have included a distinct kind of British excess that was not disturbing in the ways it ought to have been if the telling had been faithful. Where Galland's original French version "corrects occasional indelicacies" (Borges 94) he believes to be in bad taste, Lane's British follow up "seeks them out and

[65] The fact that *The Perfumed Garden* was primarily a heterosexual sex manual was so much a disappointment to French and British translators that according to Colligan some, including Burton, resorted to fabricating the discovery of a mysterious twenty-first chapter on tribadism and pederasty that to this day has never been seen (8).

persecutes them like an inquisitor," producing "an alarmed chorus of notes" that excuse and apologize for episodes "of the most reprehensible sort" that are "wholly inappropriate for translation" (94). These episodes include mentions of a hermaphrodite fish, a case of satisfying polygamy and some tales in their entirety, undoubtedly those such as "The Porter and the Three Ladies," in which there ensues a "joyful discussion of the various denominations of the female and male sexual parts" (Gottingen 287). According to Borges, the tales are not "obscene and neither is any production of pre-Islamic literature" (95); they are ancient love stories, "impassioned and sad and one of their favourite themes is death for love" (95), a death rendered no less holy than that of a martyr. In much the same way, the role of magic and the notion of the magical do not translate appropriately from the original stories. "Magical" for the thirteenth-century Persian audience would have had a very precise classification that cannot be limited to the "mere urbane adjective" (Borges 102) provided in European translations which, for example, wax poetic on visions of "the nocturnal breeze and the magical moon" (Mardrus qtd in Borges 102). The problem for Borges is deeper than cultural references and exists in the structure of the English language itself. Borges explains that while loosened from the grip of British decorum by its "obsessive sexuality" (Gottingen 288), even the work of Burton cannot be divorced from "the almost inexhaustible process of English" (Borges 104), adumbrated as it is by the language of Chaucer as well as "John Donne's hard obscenity, the gigantic vocabularies of Shakespeare

and Cyril Tourner, Swinburne's affinity for the archaic, the crass erudition of the authors of seventeenth-century chapbooks, the energy and imprecision, the love of tempests and magic" (104). Thus, according to Borges, "whatever their blemishes or merits" (104) these works of translation presuppose a prior process of linguistic development that -- in the case of translations of *The Tales* -- at best give access to the French and English languages as products of history and process. These processes are at work at different time periods and cultural contexts to contain or embellish the text in translation, thereby transforming not only the syntax but the subjectivity embedded in the original language with particularly detrimental consequences to those associated with minority languages or perspectives existing on the periphery of a dominant culture.

As with the Farsi sections of her work, Acker's French sections draw attention to the foreclosure of marginal desire that occurs with the imposition of a univocal system of meaning. In *My Death,* for example, Juliet is frustrated by her inability to understand Romeo's professions of love. Nor can she express her own desire. Asking "What does this language mean?" (264), she concludes she must "*no longer speak English"* (268) and so switches to French. Within the ensuing French dialogue, Juliet implicitly criticizes phallocentric language when she claims that it is men who "pronouncer la réalité" [articulate reality] and that, in so doing, they "nous incapables de le langage parler" [render us incapable of speaking]" (268). Herein, Juliet reflects a recurring theme in Acker's texts –

characters' expressions of the impossibility of their positions within a disabling phallocentric semantic economy. However, breaking into the dialogue, the narrator claims that “Cette écriture est réelle. Cette réalité est mon message á vous" [This writing is real. This reality is my message to you] (269). The implicit assertion is that some other reality arises through the movement between languages and particularly away from English.

Fire on the Page: Persian Language and Semiotic Motility

Aside from dedicating one of her novels to the memory of Pier Paolo Pasolini, in an interview Acker reveals being fascinated by Pasolini's work, contending that "the influence of [his] theories on [her] work is particularly important" (Friedman 20). Pasolini's goal was to come up with a "non-instrumental theory of language" (Mariniello 106) that would exist against the typical uses of language that exasperate Acker as articulated through the character Thivai: "computer language, journalese, dictation of expectation and behaviour, announcement of the allowed possibilities or reality" and all those ways that language "control[s] like money" (*Empire* 164). As such, poetry enjoys exceptional status in Pasolini's theorizing in that it affords "infinite variations" and "the maximum vibrancy" (Mariniello 109). The special condition of poetry is indicated in its etymology, deriving as it does from the Greek *poieo*: to make, to do, to act. Thus, poetry makes reality in Pasolini's theorizing -- a sentiment

echoed by Acker who claimed in one interview that "when you write you are making reality" (Acker and Wollen). According to Pasolini, poetry is translinguistic and endlessly creates manifold relations between addresser and addressee, orality and literacy, history and prehistory (Mariniello 109). As a Friulian poet Pasolini was interested in the "process of struggle between subaltern culture and official culture" (112) and the effect of neocapitalism on language whereby factories and business firms replace universities in spreading culture, as a result of which "a new completely different society comes to life" (114). Pasolini explains that this is the context within which Italian is born as a national language for the first time and laments that as a result dialect loses its pertinence to become "a holdover now not a living reality" as it should be (114). Much like Acker herself who looks for "somewhere to go" ("A Few" 121) and Kristeva who decries the "unspeakable delirium" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 84) that would result from a return to pre-Oedipal language, Pasolini contends that there can be "no return to the origins" (Mariniello 114). This is where Farsi again is a provocative choice for Acker's linguistic politics and particularly the search for a new myth that emerges in this later work. Following multiple occupations Persian identity survives due to its flexibility as reflected in the national symbol of the Cypress Tree. As opposed to the sturdy oak that breaks as it tries to resist elemental forces and the rootless tumbleweed that holds no ground, the cypress bends and maintains its integrity, growing and persisting through all the changes to the

Iranian plateau (Frye 232). Rather than being overrun by the imposition of Arabic, Persians transformed the script into the new language of Farsi with the rules of Arabic poetry only serving to stimulate creativity (168). The oral quality of the original Dari perseveres in Persian syntax resulting in a language skewed toward the poetic and semiotic.

For Pasolini "orality cannot be suppressed; it is a constant factor of contamination" (Mariniello 120). Orality refers to a continually divided nature and consistently represents an archaic historical period of the written language, its vital necessity and its type (120). According to Pasolini the features of orality are the features of reality itself: "continuity, materiality and necessity" (120). Acker infuses her texts with a "living" Persian language that "need[s] the transcription of sounds" rather than close transliteration (Frye xiii). This is reiterated by Thackston who says that the most important aspect of Persian grammar is not found in the writing (xi). In fact, Persian "abounds in figures of speech and figures of thought" (Wilber 27). Persian verbs are "loaded with ambiguity;" the most startling of the language's contrivances and "possibly the ultimate in ambiguity, is the existence of words which have opposite meanings" (27). Thus, Farsi maintains the "acoustic space" that Marshall McLuhan ascribes to poetry -- a space that is "boundless, directionless, horizonless" (McLuhan 48). In line with this, Thivai observes when the Arab prisoners arrive "they speak to each other in poetry" (*Empire* 162). According to Kristeva, the task of a revolutionary poetic politics is

to find practices of expenditure capable of confronting the machine: colonial expansion, banks, science, Parliament -- those positions of mastery "that conceal their violence and pretend to be mere legality" (*Revolution* 83). Echoing Kristeva, Acker's character asserts that "...literature strikes, at this base, where the concepts and actings of order impose themselves. Literature is that which denounces and slashes apart the repressing machine at the level of the signified" (*Empire* 12). This explains Farsi's role in Acker's texts as a response to imprisonment -- ideological in fact but made literal in her stories.

While imprisoned Thivai revels in "[t]he movement of the hand across the page in the Persian language ... the movement of the spirit or of fire" (164). His "imagination soared" (148) as he constructed stories for himself in Farsi, rewritings of the Sinbad stories and the tales of Shahra'zad that emphasize the eroticism of Persian poetry and the desiring nature of language. Though much has been written on the influence of Arabic literature on Persian literature and especially poetry, according to Frye, "the truth is that Persian became more diverse, rich and voluminous than Arabic poetry" (234). Such is embodied in this common Arabic adage, "al-adab 'in da' l-Furs" [literature belongs to the Persians, as religion to the Arabs]" (234). As Frye explains, "Arabic literature had become very sophisticated but had lost its natural quality and its spontaneous character" (124). As a result, Iranians turned to Persian as a new vehicle for expressing their feelings. The language seemed to possess "new fields and new possibilities of

expression" (124-125). The effect was that new Persian literature rose to greater heights than that which was written in Arabic to become the main vehicle for poetry and belles lettres although Arabic remained as an instrument of science and learning (172). These developments had an enormous influence on Arabic literature as well, as almost every Arabic book contained stories of the wisdom of the Sassanian sages or kings, habituating Arabs to turn to Sassanian examples for court practice and rules of conduct (20). Thus, whereas Arabic was for many years after the conquest the primary language of bureaucracy and administration in Iran, Farsi took hold as the language of courts, poetry and remains the universal spoken language, eventually making its way into bureaucratic functions and spreading the language and its literatures among common folk within and beyond Iran's borders.

This encounter between the written Arabic and the spoken Persian language of Dari that would birth the written Persian language of Farsi is likened to the symbolic encounter with pre-existing semiotic drives. Organized by the structure of the Arabic language, Persian becomes an overwhelming content that spreads beyond the transactions intended by the form. Yet it is through the Arabic structure and innovations in Arabic prosody that the Persian oral language is able to communicate its difference. Thus, Farsi becomes a model for language as a site of resistance, standing as it did in the way of total absorption by Arabic culture. Without giving up their language and culture native Iranians became Muslim but

not Arab. As the new language gets written it absorbs the structure of the Arabic language in the double activity of opening and transmitting that constitutes such permutation, enabling an impressive continuity of ancient Iranian traditions down to the present. Most interesting is that in this configuration it would appear that the language that survives conquest and has persevered is the one weighted on the side of the semiotic, if an easy distinction could be made. The Persian language retained by Iranians was considered highly for being a "language fit for stories about Sassanian kings and to be told at night" (Frye 232). It was "the language of rapture and mystical states" (Meskoob 72). The eroticism of the Persian language stands in contrast to the system of tools made available and constituting the Arabic language as they were distinguished at this time. Thus, Persian syntax fills the Arabic alphabet with the content of modern Iran the way that the semiotic fills the symbolic with its drives, compelling the subject to speak and giving language its force and urgency. The new language overflows and seeps like blood into surrounding countries, with its tales of Kings even permeating the West by way of the stories of Scheherazade, Sinbad's tales and even the magical court of King Arthur whose famed Excalibur is believed to be of Persian origin.[66]

[66] Research has indicated that the legend of King Arthur and his mystical sword Excalibur may have been Iranian in origin (Farokh 123)

In addition to the ways Thivai uses Farsi to free his imagination and eventually walk out of prison in *Empire*, in *Blood and Guts* Janey adopts the language while held captive in order to write for her own survival and that of another imprisoned figure: Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, by way of a book report she compiles on the novel while in confinement. Drawing a parallel between herself and Hester Prynne, the first lines of her book report read: "We all live in prison. Most of us don't know we live in prison" (65). Later, she contends "[e]veryone's a slave" (94). The Persian Poems are dropped in the midst of this report on a character known for her defiance in the face of Puritanical oppression. As Janey explains, they "hated Hester Prynne because she was a freak and because she couldn't be anything else and because she wouldn't be quiet and hide her freakiness like a bloody Kotex ..." (65). Following the Persian poems there is a shift in emphasis in Janey's report from Hester's physical confinement to her linguistic confinement. In the first part of the report Janey sets up the historical context: "[Hawthorne] set his story in the time of the first Puritans ... the society that created the one we live in today" (66). She describes how Hester Prynne "had wanted to be a good girl ... Hester was being a good dead girl" (67). According to Janey, "Hawthorne gives us a description of motherhood in the fucked up society" (67), identifying with Hester who is at the story's beginning "just stepping out of prison, out of prison, out of prison, but this is worse: huge staring eyes, whispers, her child laughed at, mocked, she's a woman ... " (68). Finally, Janey or Hester --

it is not clear which -- asserts "I don't want to be a slave, I don't want to be a whore, I don't want to be lonely and without love for the rest of my long life. I've got to find out how I got so fucked up" (69). Shortly thereafter Janey "finds a Persian grammar book. She begins to teach herself Persian:"(70) and "The Persian Poems by Janey Smith" (71) begins. In the continuation of the book report following Janey's exploration of the Persian language and the subsequent challenge to the English language's basis in phallogocentrism that is enabled therein, Janey's Hester begins to question her confinement in language, crying "TEACH ME A NEW LANGUAGE DIMWIT. A LANGUAGE THAT MEANS SOMETHING TO ME" (96) and masochistically asking the Reverend renamed Dimwit to "Verb. Me" (95) in acknowledgement of the way in which masculine language acts on her body like a violent sexual move. In Janey's reading, as soon as Hester stops protecting her husband, "as soon as her ego-obsessions are beginning to break up ... she and Dimwit and the society around them begin to move from prison to being free" (98). Janey concludes "The Scarlet Letter is the best book I've read locked up in the Persian slave trader's room and I think everyone should read it" (100). By positioning the Persian grammar lessons within the book report on *The Scarlet Letter*, Acker associates this non-English linguistic play with the release of both Janey and Hester from their respective and variously bound existences.

The root of this bounded existence for Acker and all western subjects is the way language has been taken as sufficient proof for the supposed fact of the sex-gender distinction and the way this upholds a patriarchal model of subjectivity. Throughout her novels Acker challenges the givenness of heterosexuality and posits the destructive effects of the subsequent superimposition of the heterosexual contract on women's lives. Acker frequently refers to heterosexuality as a disease and the marriage contract as akin to rape. In *Empire*, Abhor recounts the story of Baudelaire who fell in love with his girlfriend "as soon as he had given her syphilis. A case of heterosexuality" (52). She struggles to figure out "what to do about the useless and, more than useless, virulent and destructive disease named heterosexual sexual love " (64) and later realizes "heterosexuality a bit resembles rape" (127). As a result, Acker likens marriage to a form of "collective crime" (14) and Abhor admits "I would like the whole apparatus -- family and memory -- to go to hell" (52). A number of characters from Acker's other novels experience the heterosexual matrix as alienating and, in fact, dangerous. One character claims that “if you’re not a couple you don’t exist” (*Blood* 94). Another decrees that the “heart of fear for women is heterosexual sex” (*Great* 225). The alienation and fear expressed in these sentiments imply Acker’s own wariness regarding the effects of compulsory

heterosexuality,[67] which Adrienne Rich describes as regulatory practices that delimit erogeneity and desire within the telos of procreation.

In *Empire* and "Birth of a Poet," Acker uses sexed distinctions and gender terms interchangeably to highlight the extent to which this logic has been naturalized according to linguistic structures. Acker commonly uses the term his or her "sex" to refer to a sexual organ, as in "[h]is right hand tugged at, then pulled away the slip which had slipped between his and the young girl's sexes" (*Empire* 91). In so doing, Acker highlights the ways in which anatomy has come to be synonymous with sexed identities, as if the body parts privileged in the construction of socio-sexual identities point naturally to what are in fact gendered and heterosexist distinctions. The effect of the linguistic imposition of difference is made clear in "Birth of a Poet." In "Act III" Ali makes a series of professions in which he identifies as both male and female, finally admitting "Maqze man ateshi st مغزِ مَن آتِشیست [My brain is on fire] (Fars.)" and "Faryad mikonam [I'm screaming]" (101). In this section, the text is written in Farsi first with the English translation of each phrase following line by line. In these lines, the Farsi word for gender, *jense*, is translated into English as "vagina" (100, 101) or "cock" (100) to show the ways gender is read in English as if it points to a crudely defined biological fact. Ali proclaims, "Jense mo' annasam beto baz ast [My gender is

[67] See Rich's chapter of the same name: "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" first published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society"* (1980), Vol. 5.4, pgs. 631-660.

open to you]. جِنسِ مؤ َنَثَّمْ بِتُو باز اَست [Is open to you my female sex of] (Fars.). My vagina is open to you," which is followed by "Knse mo'annasam dame dastat ast [My gender is at your hand]. جِنسِ مؤ َنَثَّمْ دَمِ دَستَت اَست [Is your hand in my female sex of] (Fars.). My vagina is at your hand" (100). Later, the same word, *jense*, is used to refer to the act of sex: "با مَن جِنس بِکُنَ [do gender with me] (Fars.)/fuck me" (159). Incidentally, had Acker wanted direct translations for the words "vagina" or "cock," or for any sex acts she could have harvested any number of terms for sexual body parts and acts from *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delights*, to which she refers in *Empire*. This ancient sex manual provides an entire chapter on various names used in Persian to denote sexual body parts and activities. Despite the fact that other words are available Acker consistently uses the word, *jense*, to refer to sex acts, sexual organs and gendered distinctions in order to show the ways the artificial division between these terms masks the functioning of an oppressive sex-gender system. [68] Acker's challenge to sexual categories is reiterated when Ali asks in Farsi, "آیا مَردان هَست؟ [There are men?] (Fars.)" but this

[68] When the Farsi script is translated word for word the literal translation of *jense* is "sex of" though the word means gender and is understood as such when it is spoken as in the Finglish. While the inclination is to impose the rules of English grammar in translation, the problem as discussed earlier can be a significant loss in meaning. It is important to translate the Persian syntax as the direct translation highlights the ezafe thereby translating the ways the structure of the Persian language complicates the possession of attributes taken as given in English so that in the Persian language it is not clear whether female is a quality of sex or sex is a quality of female. It is the "of" in ""my female sex of" that disallows the conflation that occurs in English. Though the phrase might be more easily said in English as "my female sex" an important ambiguity is lost without translating the effect of the ezafe.

is translated into English as "Are there males?" (91). This stands out because elsewhere Acker translates the English word for man/men with the equivalent term in Farsi as when Ali says "This man is lobotomized" which is translated in Farsi as "این مَرد بی مَغز اَست [This man is without brains] (Fars.)" (95). Once again, in English the meaning of men is conflated with male but the reverse is not so; these translations suggests no separation in English between the idea of gender and sex though the former is a socially constructed category of people and the latter points to a biological distinction between bodies based on the presence of particular anatomical features. Monique Wittig argues that language "stamp[s]" and "violently shap[es]" the body in the service of a "compulsory heterosexuality" that seeks to organize the social world and delimit sexuality according to the goals of sexual reproduction (*Mark* 4). Wittig asserts that sex is not a natural category and, like Judith Butler, believes that its hegemony derives from a "regime of sexuality" (Butler 31) that seeks to naturalize a coherent identity rooted in the mythic alliance of anatomy, desire and sexual behaviour. The repetition of sexual difference in language is the most insidious operation of this naturalization. The pronominal differentiations between "she" and "he" that form the basis of speech legitimate gendered distinctions by which human beings are artificially divided into male and female sexes. Wittig notes that, outside of compulsory heterosexuality, this division makes no sense because it relies on the arbitrary assignment of particular body parts to a person's ontology; penises become the

literal meaning of men and vaginas become the literal meaning of women. Furthermore, this distinction falsely assigns erogeneity to gendered bodies. The penis, vagina and breasts become normative sights of erotic pleasures, thereby closing off sexuality within a heterosexual paradigm that is oppressive to women, gays, lesbians and others. Wittig refers to this as a "coerced contract" whereby the linguistic category of sex compels the social configuration of sexed bodies (*Mark* 4). Thus, when Acker's character admits, "I dream of having a body" (*My Death* 282), she is expressing her alienation from bodily discourses that legitimate pleasure as formed within a matrix of gender norms. Further, Wittig claims that gender finds its ontology in language, as "the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes" (*One* 48). When Acker's character realizes that her "identity doesn't exist" (*Great* 195), she is acknowledging her own impossibility or unintelligibility within the logic of heterosexism.

Acker's reinterpretation of canonical literary heterosexual pairings such as her reworking of Propertius and his muse Cynthia in *Great Expectations* indicates a further congruence with the views of Butler and Wittig. Disgusted by Cynthia's aggressive sexual advances, Propertius declares that "he doesn't want to fuck Cynthia again" because "she isn't female" (237). With this declaration Acker displays her affinity with the views of Butler and Wittig that sexual identities are inseparable from gendered ideals. Instead, Cynthia's desire sets her apart from a "proper" female identity. Not only does Cynthia express a virile sexual appetite

towards Propertius but she also confides that sometimes she "wants a wife with a cock" and at other times she "changes and this real fem part comes out" (234). As such Cynthia expresses a more fluid sexuality than is allowed for within heterosexual paradigms. Wittig asserts that the most insidious effect of conventional language is its ability to produce "reality effects" ("One" 9-20); the most pervasive of these is the naturalization of sexual difference, which is understood as the coherence amongst "proper" sexual behaviour, desire, gender and sexual anatomy. Butler argues that the category of sex has been constructed through historically specific regulatory practices that posit sexual anatomy as the cause of sexual experience, behavior and desire. Butler determines the task of current feminist political practice, then, as the critique of naturalized categories of identity within the historical present. The current critique must move beyond showing that gender is a social construction toward examining the notion of two sexes as itself a construct. The duality of the sex/gender distinction leaves sex as a given and gender as constructed. Butler questions how this categorical split came to be (*Gender* 10). Is sex to be understood as anatomical, chromosomal, hormonal, natural, some combination of these elements, or perhaps something else? It becomes apparent that, when pressed, the category of "sex" does not hold up to analysis. Acker's conflation of sexual acts, sexual identity and sexual anatomy in her Farsi text indicates a similar critique of the ostensibly natural fact of sex upheld in the English language.

Acker, herself, expressed a more fluid sexuality than was allowed by the terms dictating sexual politics at the time and one that indicates that her rebellion was most set against the sex-gender distinction. Acker' s diary entries display a deep loneliness and mark a disabling sex-gender system as the source of this angst. In numerous entries Acker expresses anxiety over her desire for women and whether or not she must identify as a lesbian though she finds gay politics almost as restrictive as those dictating heterosexual behaviour. She writes, " ... I keep having this suicide desire like I can't get along I'm a butch or a fem?" (Section 17). She admits being "hung up about this lesbian business" (21) and having "fantasies about homosexuals" (17) but being confused by "top and bottom" politics (21). She recognizes that the politics of sex acts interrupt the "desire to be equal," believing "no other desire could be as powerful" (21). After admitting her confusion about gay sexuality she muses, "...hopefully lesbians have more sense" but admits "I don't enter that society because it's the only one left to idealize ..." (27). Though she had been "wanting to sleep with a girl" and "fantasizing" about women she contends, "it's not that simple" and wonders if it means she "should join women's lib" (24). She reveals that she "dislike[s] straights" and "also want[s] to be gay" but recognizes that this need to identify on one side or the other is "fake" (24). She shrinks away from her sexuality at times, "too aware of what I want...I scrunch away" (24) and then identifies in other entries as "a lesbian, I thought" (3). Realizing that the problem is not necessarily her sexual identity but

her gender identity she recounts "telling Mark, well I'm not a woman" (6). She then realizes, "I can't trace my sex" (7) and asks, "do I want to screw another woman meaning I'm a female?" (7). In later entries she concludes "I feel like I should be a female" (28) but without indicating what this means. The angst surrounding her sexual and sexed identity is so disabling at one point that it interferes with her writing; she notes "I haven't been able to write going through some crisis as yet unknown grasping on only to the homosexuality" (9). At another point she records "I shave all the hair off my head ... use to hope but not very well pretend that I was very tough and male ... " (10). Thus, just as a character in *Blood and Guts*, Natalie, struggles to comprehend "this identity [that] doesn't exist" (195) and longs to "become another" – freed of the leash and collar literally linking her throat and genitals in a forced act of bondage, and perhaps more so freed from the trap of identifying with her female genitalia -- Acker too struggles with a sexual identity that does not seem to exist. Fluctuating between a sexual desire for men and women, as well as a gender identity that is alternately masculine and feminine and one that mostly rejects biological categories of femaleness and maleness, Acker puts forward a more complicated socio-sexual status than is allowed for within popular terms. As a result she records, "...I'm almost completely alone I make no group identifications except through fantasy and they're running wilder and wilder" (11).

As a result, Acker admits being compelled to search for "a kind of myth that would be applicable to me and my friends" ("Devoured" 18). The group with which she identified were those at the fore of the burgeoning queer movement. Acker explains in an interview with the American-punk artist and sculptor Kiki Smith that "political life is now deeply defined by the sexual arena" and so "it takes place in more than lesbian communities" ("Running" 3). In fact, "these days some of the queer community, including myself, question the meaning of 'female' ... For if gender is performative, it is no longer clear what 'female' refers to except within certain historic, especially patriarchal contexts ... " (4). She goes on to assert that " ... many in my queer community suspect, then identity can no longer be based on gender, but rather on desire. Desire, whose names are infinite" (3). As for her material, Acker makes clear that she is "only interested in real experience ... in what women really do, what their bodies do. Lactate, dream. It's now politically essential, within the art world and outside, for people to talk from their own experience" (4). Acker's experience was one of frustration at the rigid ways in which sexuality and sexual politics were being defined during the years she struggled to come to terms with her own sexual identity. Thus, as a self-defined "perverse straight woman" (Schlichter par.1). Acker found herself caught between militant lesbianism and the equally aggressive war on sexuality led by right-wing anti-porn feminist activists, mainstream gender wars, language wars and the war against HIV/AIDS. Thus, she concludes, "we now have to find somewhere to go,

a belief, a myth. Somewhere real" ("A Few" 120). Her response was to delve into the world of experimental languages. With no language of her own to speak Acker invented one that is an amalgamation of raunchy trash talk, highbrow deconstructionist theorizing, textual piracy, visual imagery, political proselytizing and experiments with multilingualism. In particular, Acker's Farsi language play challenges the conflation of sex with gender, a habit made all the more significant by using a gender-neutral language that does not distinguish subjects in the ways taken as natural within a western and specifically English linguistic paradigm. In *Empire* "With him" becomes "با او [with him or her] (Fars.)" (150) in Farsi in the absence of gendered pronouns. In addition, the ambiguities innate to the language mean the subject is not dominated by binary logic in the same way and so can think of things and their opposites at the same time as when in "Birth" Ali sits down to "داخِلِ مَسجِد چای وَ شیرین را میخُورند [eat/drink sweets and tea mosque in the] (Fars.)/Daxele masjed cay va shirini ra mixorand" (99), which is translated into English as "[i]n the mosque they drink tea and sweets" (99). The Farsi verb mixorand is used for both eating and drinking; both actions are covered without loss whereas in the English language either two words are needed for these separated concepts or one meaning must be sacrificed. Thus, the structure of the language indicates forms of thought not accounted for in western discourse with its focus on the word and eye ("I") versus orality and the ear. Acker's insistence on the Persian language intercepts the modern impulse to isolate, dissect and

"shun the voice" (Mariniello 122), instead encouraging the harmonizing and connecting that are invited by the poetic ambiguous language of Farsi.

Writing Out of Prison

To Acker, any unidirectional use of language is akin to writing her own prison, she declares: "[i]f I had to force language to be uni-directional, I'd be helping my own prison be constructed" ("Dead Doll" par. 15). In *Blood and Guts, My Death, My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Empire, My Mother* and "Birth of the Poet," Acker experiments with non-English languages as a way of circumventing the constriction of phallogocentrism. Instead, the use of many "[tongue[s]] (Fars.)" (*Blood* 76) obliterates the dominance of any one. In the interview with Smith, Acker also reveals her affinity with Smith's artistic project "to test out living situations" ("Running" 2). Acker explains that the American punk movement with which she identified was "more situated in the art realm than its English counterpart" (2). In this vein, she like Smith viewed art "as a model for political reality" (4), imagining and creating new worlds to test out in experimental forms, in order to "transform society in the name of those energies and values which art embodies" (Eagleton 20). Whereas the use of Persian is, perhaps, curious when Acker's earliest texts are taken on their own, its meaning is crystallized in *Empire* through its association with prisoners, slave revolts and decolonizing struggles by which it becomes associated with successful resistance

movements and suggests language is a powerful site for actualizing successful political resistance.

Acker constantly identifies her female protagonists with slaves, blacks, Arab revolutionaries, decolonizing movements and slave leaders. In *Empire* Abhor frequently draws inspiration from Haitian figures such as the maroon leader Mackandal known for poisoning slave owners and orchestrating guerilla revolts. As well, Abhor recalls The Black Napoleon, Toussaint L'Ouverture, who is credited with leading the slave revolt that would essentially transform an entire society of slaves into the independent state of Haiti. Acker also injects the spirits of voodoo Loas, Baron Samedi and Erzulie, into the text, who are both called on for their disruptive and excessive behaviour. In addition, Acker dedicates *My Mother* to the memory of Hatuey, the Taino from what is now Cuba who led the first Indigenous uprising against colonialism in the new world. Thus, Acker is aligning resistance in the Persian language and by extension the semiotic aspect of language with slaves, the oppressed and successful stories of revolt. Drawing from the success of Persian resistance in language and Haitian slaves against colonial powers, Acker seems to suggest that a new language that insists on desire can likewise succeed against western hegemony and the imposition of patriarchal sociolinguistic identity therein.

The struggle between the Persian and Arabic languages makes the work of language visible and shows an ultimate winning on the side of the semiotic by virtue of the ways in which the poetic language of a fallen people was able to insist on its circulation and assert itself against domination, to be realized in spoken language, law, literature and culture. Such histories challenge the dominance of English as the lingua franca of the modern age. To oppose the language is to oppose the history circulated as a condition of that language and more so the binary constitution of subjectivity perpetuated by its unquestioned status as a universal means of expression. Acker's work suggests that to dismantle English, then, would be to finally "meltdown that frozen slab of history that is the patriarchal symbolic" (Braidotti 61). This transformative impulse is the prime mover of all of Acker's work which repeats in traumatic excess a desire to "transform the person" (Acker *Great* 233), attending to sexuality as that which encompasses this potential. In conversation with Sylvère Lotringer, Acker shares the profound effect the writings of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari had on her, to the extent that she wondered "why don't they know me?" and after the reading of which she endeavoured to "go farther..." ("Devoured" 10). The task she set for herself amounts to no small feat, for the challenge that Foucault posits in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) is to strive to see the strangeness of our ideas now -- in the moment -- in the same way that we can look back on the barbarism of earlier years and see it as such. In response to Foucault's call, Acker

relentlessly attacks the sex-gender distinction as a cornerstone of the episteme of the modern era -- the binary logic that conditions every distinction and separation. As Rosi Braidotti explains, "the very idea of the separation of self from society -- that is, the separability of material from symbolic forces -- is a politically enforced process of dividing and conquering which lies at the heart of the Phallic regime" (61). In fact, "the sheer thinkability of this separation is the mark of the patriarchal, cash-nexus of power [that] starts from the theft of the bodies of women and 'others' and their confinement into a binary, Oedipalizing cage of negation" (61). While Acker's recurring criticisms of capitalism and its imbrications with the marriage contract mark her as radically materialist, she was deeply committed to "fighting against Oedipal structuring" (Friedman 19). Acker shares much in common with both Moure and Nicole Brossard in that all three writers use multiple non-English languages to reroute desire in all directions throughout the body, activating all the body's surfaces to unleash embodied knowledges and alternative subjectivities. Whereas Moure encourages the reader to make sense of texts using her libidinal skin, and Brossard, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, creates an erotic zone between texts where both languages and subjectivities proliferate in translation, Acker uses the particularly distant language of ancient Iran to revalue the forfeited other, abjected and lost within dominant accounts of both history and language.

While Wittig claims that language creates social realities, she also points to its "plasticity" (Mark 4). Wittig posits language as malleable due to its reliance on the repetition and confirmation of dominant meanings. The sexual identities prescribed in language are the product of this repetition and, in her view, available for reinscription. This sense of potential transformation is conveyed in the Egyptian imagery at the end of *Blood and Guts*. A person is carried on the back of an alligator into the afterlife. Birds streak from an underworld to the heavens. A human spirit rises from a corpse formed of birds, lizards and other animals. In an Alexandrian cemetery, "people's sex and their most private beings get totally transformed" (151) outside a tomb that is believed to hold a book with the secret to "becoming something else" (147). The ultimate prescription at the end of "the journey" (149) that constitutes the title and theme of *Blood and Guts's* final chapter is to "create a world in our own image" (164). Acker's multilingualism suggests that the transformation of sexual identity indicated here and necessary to make such a world is to be effected through a reconfiguration of language: the permutation of dominant linguistic systems.

Chapter Four: Translating Subjects: Nicole Brossard's Interlinguistic Innovations

Moving from new words to new worlds, from new syntax to new symbols, women who write are always already translators. Evelyn Nien-ming Ch'ien, drawing on Wittgenstein, argues that "implicit in the use of language is the search for an arena in which it is meaningful" (38) and so using language "is a means of searching for a community and when the community is intangible or inaccessible or the immediate communities dissatisfy, language can become a tool to find a new one" (38). Nicole Brossard makes a similar point when she muses, "I had the feeling that if language was an obstacle, it was also the place where everything happens, where everything is possible ..." (*Fluid* 107). These obstacles and possibilities arise as a result of Brossard being multiply situated, by her own account, as a minority Québécoise, a minoritized majority as a woman, "a marginal elsewhere" as a lesbian and an authorized minority as a writer (201). Fluctuating among these multiple peripheries, her texts invite readers to explore the space between languages and linguistic systems. Brossard's focus on the interlinguistic space marks a movement from established tropes of "the speaking subject" established by Julia Kristeva, "parler femme" introduced by Luce Irigaray and "écriture féminine" popularized by Helene Cixous. Brossard introduces a translating subject whose medium is not the combination of linguistic systems but interlinguism itself, defined by Barbara Godard as "the relationship

between distinct linguistic systems operating through each other and the inter-language that is produced in the process" (*Translating* 112). The theme of translation dominates the texts that will be analyzed here: *Mauve Desert*, *Yesterday at the Hotel Clarendon* and *Fences in Breathing*. Brossard's *Mauve Desert* provides a powerful allegory for the complex relationships of women to language as one text is written and rewritten by various authors, translators and readers. Multiple languages are interspersed in the narration and dialogue in *Yesterday at the Hotel Clarendon* with each language revealing itself to be adept at translating different elements of reality. Finally, in *Fences in Breathing*, the narrator is compelled to write in a language she does not know, mirroring Brossard's own desire in her poetics "to make room for un-thought" (*Fluid* 35). Brossard explains that "[i]magination is the faculty that enables us to make new patterns of what already exists, to associate words, images or sounds in such a way that they might change the course of meaning and therefore change the course of our questioning and behaviour about existence, society and the universe" (59). Brossard's post-colonial, lesbian-feminist poetics radically transforms basic epistemological categories of truth, objectivity and the knowing subject. Like Brossard, Acker and Moure work in non-English languages to open up foreclosed sexualities and subjectivities respectively. Brossard takes the practice further by moving beyond combining languages to working explicitly in the space that opens up between various historic, marginal and contemporary

languages when they are put through the activity of translation. Through the motif of translation and especially the implicit call to read, study and write in a language one does not know, Brossard's work opens the reader to the possibilities inherent in interlingualism, intersubjectivity and jouissance.

The translating subject operating in Brossard's texts develops out of the work of French feminists whose combined critiques of western philosophy, psychoanalytic traditions and structuralist linguistics show the ways that language shapes subjectivity by determining one's relationship to one's body. Furthermore, their collective criticism exposes the phallocentric nature of linguistic socialization for the ways that women are forced to submit to representational systems that reduce them to a relation of dependence on men. Within the psychoanalytic tradition, the phallus is granted the status of transcendental signifier based on its placement as the point of origin for the subject's formation. French feminists have shown, however, that the subject's formation begins before the acquisition of symbolic language and that the introduction of phallic law in fact represents a violent repression of the subject's natural heterogeneity instead of a point of origin. This repression of the subject's psychical heterogeneity is akin to the repression of heteroglossia that occurs within traditional searches for original meaning in texts. In this way, translation theory proves useful as "a tactic of intervention into the basis of linguistic identity" (Godard *Writing* 92). Current

translation theory resists any search for the essential truth of a text, accepting the impossibility of a unified original meaning. Instead, the threshold between texts is viewed as a locus of possibility. Just as concepts of original text and translated text are complicated by the translation process so are notions of subject and object or symbolic and semiotic when the tenets of this theory are applied to understanding women's subjectivity. Brossard's work pulses at its linguistic, bodily and textual thresholds, transforming these limits into sites of feminist production.

In Brossard's texts, multilingual strategies create a new linguistic plane -- a space between languages in which other subjectivities can be realized. This space of translation is most succinctly conveyed in the closing passage of *Fences*, when the narrator concludes "I am everywhere I am" (114), a sentiment she expresses verbatim within the first pages of the narrative when she says "I am everywhere I am" (9) while thinking about existing in the foreign language she will use to write her book. Once again the phrase comes up in a similar form midway through the text when she reflects, "I am everywhere I say I am even though I forget I am waiting comfortably coiled in the roiling of words ... I am everywhere I am" (83). The phrase brings to mind God's response in the bible when Moses asks his name; God answers: I am that I am. Brossard's response replaces a state of being (I am *that*), with a place of becoming (I am *where*), that is consistently associated with

an unseen dimension of language.[69] This dimension is described such that it has components of both space and time, and so may be thought of as a place or plane of existence. The narrator of *Fences* observes that "in the foreign language, I am unable to correctly assess the proximity of beings around me. Nor am I able to measure the distance that separates us. Proximity remains difficult for me to comprehend" (18). In this revelation she is noticing, for the first time, the space of language, in so far as it brings her more or less in touch with other beings -- an effect that is not perceptible in one's own language when distance and so the spatial dimension of language are not as palpable. Similarly, the narrator of *Yesterday* notices that "when Carla talks for more than twenty minutes without stopping I enter a rare time dimension, which is neither hers nor mine but the time of literature" (116). In addition, the narrator of *Fences* notices that "[i]n each language, time could be stretched or it could contract ..." (74). Thus, writing, reading and translating multiple languages opens up a new plane of existence characterized by interlanguage, the parameters of which are much vaster than those of any single language. This is also a plane without markers, referents or

[69] It is significant that God does not provide a name when asked since in the bible naming essentially brings things into being. This is evidenced earlier, in the book of Genesis, when Adam is given the task and power to name all God's creations. Adamic naming is the first act establishing a world made according to Adam's dominion to enact God's patriarchal language. Brossard's work is wholly a criticism of the presumed universality of patriarchal definitions of the world.

symbols. In fact, the narrator finds that "the foreign language deletes all my landmarks" (61). Chronological time, too, is disrupted, as reflected when she concedes, "I will never get used to time's fluidity in the foreign language" (60). Furthermore, the narrator of *Fences* discovers that "[i]n the other language ... zones of knowledge have no limits" (75). Interlingualism, then, constitutes a new landscape, a place traversed and trodden by the translating subject in which new zones of knowledge are also located.

Translating *Authership*[70]

Modern translation praxis adheres to a combinatory process rather than an act of substitution, recognizing that the text represents a meeting place between authors, translators, the framework produced by linguistic and literary conventions and the social, political and economic forces producing these norms and subjects; these elements together form an erotic zone in which texts and subjects engage in interplay and a form of *stextual* intercourse. In *Mauve Desert* a high school literature teacher, Maude Laures, becomes obsessed with a book that she finds in a used bookstore by the unknown writer, Laure Angstelle. Her

[70] Brossard proposes a new form of "authership" one that is less concerned with using words for their assigned patriarchal meanings, and more interested in their connotative and sonant effects (Wheeler 449). The word *auther* is, in fact, Suzanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's translation for the original French term *auteure* (Simon 21). In *Mauve Desert*, the translator refers to Laure Angstelle as the text's *auther* (57). The term *auther* will replace *author* throughout.

experience of the book is distinctly erotic. In reading the text she succumbs to it; she "let herself be seduced; *sucked in* by her reading" (*Mauve* 55, emphasis in original). The experience awakens in her a desire to translate, which Gayatri Spivak refers to as "the most intimate act of reading" ("Politics" 183). Intimacy is the preeminent condition of translating because the translator "must solicit the text to *show* the limits of its language [and] unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text" (183 emphasis mine). Translation must be "the site of the exchange of language" (184). As such it involves not assimilating one into the other but "knowing that the rhetoric of the text indicates the limits of language for you ... you have to be in a different relationship with the language, not even only with the specific text" (183). Heeding this special call, Maude Laures gives in to "existence among the scenes and sure symptoms which, in Laure Angstelle's language had seduced her" (*Mauve* 62). According to Spivak, one of the "seductions of translation ... is a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self" (179). This intimacy between translator and trace is most succinctly represented by the chiasmic relationship produced by the names of the two writers: *Laure* Angstelle and Maude *Laures*. In the chiasmus the order of elements in parallel phrases is reversed, creating a specular or mirror-like effect in the distribution of the elements. The chiasmus produced by the juxtaposition of the authors' names indicates the inherent in-tension shared by these texts. Beyond

"the diffuse feeling of a reciprocity" that she had sensed while first reading the text, through the act of translation "Laure Angstelle's world was taking place inside her" (*Mauve* 60). The sensation Maude Laure experiences when she begins to translate speaks to the "implacement" (Benjamin 163) of texts within one another, that is to the ways that texts are not merely interrelated but actually anticipate one another. In this sense, texts have within them an inherent intension/in-tension to be rewritten whether by translators or readers, propelled as they are along the interpretive chain that conditions all meaning in language.

Realizing that the texts are already occurring within one another, Maude Laures refers to herself as "nothing but a resonance instrument" (*Mauve* 154); "she was a minimal presence, a misted space in front of the window, a marker perhaps between this book and its becoming in another language" (51). To honour the implacement she senses, Maude Laures aspires to "harbour this huge open space, cover every word with another in such a way that the first one does not sink into oblivion" (61). As indicated by the chiasmus, the texts are intrinsically linked, cross-hatched rather than born in chronological relation to one another. There is no "before" of the original, nor is there an "after" of the translation. This in-tension to be translated complicates such timelines. This is apparent in *Yesterday* when the text is interrupted by instructions that appear to be intended for the next rewriting of the text. Frequently, the narration is broken by parenthetical directives for the section to be written in another language or with indications of

missing descriptions. Dialogue or text currently in English will appear "in Swedish in the text" (39; 50; 68), when Descartes speaks it will be "in English in the text" (114) and elsewhere when a character talks aloud to herself it will be "in Portuguese in the text" (35).[71] In these moments, the reading is destabilized as Brossard seems to signal the treachery of the text, in a move reminiscent of Magritte's challenge to the solidity of the image. Moure's inclusion of a selective dictionary and Acker's use of a language "nobody knows" work similarly to indicate that the text at hand is not the definitive text: *ceci n'est pas un texte*. The text is actually happening somewhere in between the present text, the imaginative text in the reader's mind and the future of the text in translation. Consequently, the authority of the present text is undermined by acknowledging some future iteration not yet written. It is unclear to whom the imperatives are directed or who will carry out these future iterations of the text: is it the reader? a future translator? the author? The narrator of *Fences* faces a similar quandary when she asks, "Who translates what in the alternating pattern of words' shadow and desire's infinite renewal" (*Fences* 44). It would seem that the text itself is alive with future potentials that need not be located in any particular agent. As Maude

[71] Other examples are when the narration is broken to indicate descriptions that presumably will be added later as when the narrator visits her parents grave where "[t]he ashes of both my mother and father have been deposited in a vault (*description of the vault*)" (47 italics in orig.) or when she and the writer, Carla Carson, visit a young writer who "...invites us in for a drink. (*description of the living room*)" (66 italics in orig.) and when she approaches Simone Lambert about a show she would like to curate and Simone "leans over to write (*description of hands, little veins, two age spots, a spiral-shaped gold ring on her left forefinger*)" (104 italics in orig.).

Laures realizes, the translator is a minimal presence who best serves the text by honouring "the huge open space of language" (*Mauve* 61), rather than attempting to seal the text and force its heterogeneity into oblivion.

The structure of the chiasmus in general is such that it points to a relationship; neither term controls or produces the meaning on its own. What can be gleaned, however, are the contours of each term and the excitement created by their interpenetration. In this case, the meaning of *auther*/original (Laure Angstelle/Mauve Desert) and translator/copy (Maude Laures/Mauve Horizon) cannot be extricated from the act of their touching. The meeting of these texts in translation is like the meeting of subjects at the contact point produced by a touch or handshake. The reversibility of the experience -- that the hand touching is also being touched and vice versa -- is the key to the politics of translation and to the translator's unique bodily relationship with the text. The boundaries between languages in translation like those between two bodies in contact dissolve due to the fact that the limit between where one and the other begins is indistinguishable. In readying herself to translate the book, Maude Laures gears up to "tak[e] on the book body to body" (*Mauve* 161). The imagery of taking on a text body to body speaks to the similarity between the act of translating and the double sensation of the caress. The phenomenology of the caress is significant because within this activity it is impossible to distinguish what is touching from what is being touched to the extent that the dichotomy between the "I" and "you" of the touching bodies

like that of the subject and object of translation is dissolved. In Irigaray's formulation, "you touch yourself, touch me, when you touch yourself again through me" (*The Sex* 206). According to Spivak, to surrender to translation is, then, more erotic than ethical. To achieve an ethical standpoint one has to "turn the other into something like the self" (183). The ethical position is based on seeing someone like me, with the same needs and rights as myself and feeling compelled to protect those rights out of a duty bound up with existing in the same social universe; in essence liberal ethics are based on reducing the other to the condition of sameness. Translation, on the other hand, invokes an erotic relationship with the other based on maintaining the conditions for mystery and surprise.

This approach to translation leaves room for meaningful difference in the text that has important political implications. Within Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, alterity and subjectivity are themselves chiasmically intertwined. The interaction between self and other is framed as "overlapping and transformative" (Reynolds 65); however, "the other is only truly other if it gains entry into this world perspective by altering this totalizing system precisely on account of its difference" (75). In translating Laure Angstelle's text, Maude Laures becomes aware of a movement "[f]rom one tongue to another ... that moving substance, which, it is said, enters into the composition of languages and makes them tasteful or hateful" (*Mauve* 62). This alterity in language is sensed

most prominently in *Yesterday* through the homonyms that embarrass one character and exist as a source of amusement, even salvation, for another. In *Yesterday,* Simone Lambert -- a museum director and one of the four main characters -- "blushes when dictating to her secretary, 'I look forward to meeting you" (*Yesterday* 42). Words "unravel in her head" when she says "[w]hen shall we meet? and the word *meat* insidiously intrudes between herself and the other person" (42). The word's fleshiness slips into its intended meaning via the homophonic relationship between the two words, alluding to the uncontainable quality of language's other side -- the side of desire which though cordoned off by the process of differentiation (this is not that) is, however, always present in the word. Another of the four main characters, Axelle, has a similar revelation while contemplating her love of puns, another form of homonym. Driving in the car, she "repeats out loud, 'I need no such pessoa' ... speeding up a bit more each time" (35). She "noticed the word on a book cover" in a bookstore the day before and a little later in the same day "the same word appeared on a sign recommending that no more than six pessoas ride an outdated elevator" (35). Here, the "word" pessoa on the book cover undoubtedly refers to Fernando Pessoa, perhaps the most famous of over forty heteronyms used by the Portuguese writer also well known as Alberto Caeiro.[72] Moure creates a similar textual agent in the persona of her

[72] *The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa*. Ed. and Trans. by Richard Zenith Grove NY: 2001

own heteronym Elisa Sampedrín and to similar effect. Pessoa means "persons" if translated into English from Portuguese. The conflation of name with noun and the humour produced if the elevator sign is read as barring any more than six Pessoas signals the ways that meanings overflow the signifying barriers of words and names. As well, the invocation of a situation in which there are six Pessoas speaks to the ways in which subjects are created in-text or in language. For Axelle, there is something lifesaving in this word play. She reveals that, in social situations, though she may claim that she enjoys reading, "she never says that it allows her to stock up on puns that help time go by when she feels like dying" (34). Puns produce humour because of the ways they rupture the semantic economy. The word is both what is intended and more at the same time. Laughter emerges from the body as an effect of this dissonance. It is the primary symptom of a breakdown in signification. As Baudelaire explains, one who "observes and knows," who claims mastery of a scene, does not laugh (quoted in Kristeva, *Revolution* 223). Laughter points to the signifying economy and to the process of negativity that governs that economy -- its outer limits -- and, therefore, expresses "the power of being oneself and someone else at the same time" (223). This is the restorative potential of word play to which Axelle holds and from which she derives satisfaction. The double-entendre points to something more than real. Laughter emerges as a response to the space that is torn open in the symbolic economy by the encounter with the other in the pun, riddle or heteronym. The

reference to Pessoa/pessoa is powerful in this regard, indicating a subject that is multiple and textually situated and, therefore, one that is also beyond containment.

In a similar vein, the narrator of *Fences* perceives in translation an "irresistible arousal" that "requires words ... because their great reserve of the absolute revives the meaning of life time and again" (111). Both Axelle and this narrator are aroused by encountering the infinite in words and see in wordplay and translation respectively a life-restoring potential that exceeds the limitations to modes of speaking and being imposed by everyday language and its rules or grammar. It makes sense, on the one hand, that Simone Lambert, who is someone occupied with archiving and documenting and who looks for reassurance in the certitude of archaeology to provide staid archaic meanings, should be unsettled by the slippage in her own word use. Her granddaughter, Axelle, on the other hand, is associated with the body, sex, dancing and masturbation. She is a scientist engaged in gene-splitting projects and the potential for technology to provide new forms of procreation by manipulating the body's materials. She has a visceral quality and so feels saved by the unruliness of words. For her, being made aware of their limitlessness staves off a feeling of hopelessness.

As the unnamed narrator of *Fences* struggles to write a book in a language she does not know, she ultimately finds herself meditating on the meanings that lie buried out of the range of perception in her own language and so becomes

aware of the other side and subject of language. The verb 'to dive' begins to take shape as she says it out loud, then more so as she murmurs it, then chants its syllables; she apprehends within the verb, "[p]arting of the veil, the surface that is obstacle or attraction, opacity or transparency" (*Fences* 81). Finally, she realizes that "diving resolves the question of diving" (81). Said another way, "to dive" conveys the act of diving, as into water or between two lips, and the breaking of a surface: of water, hymen or bar, thereby revealing the other side of a veiled closure no matter the surface penetrated. In *Fences*, two lovers intertwine with the grammar of the text to the extent that their contact can only be transcribed by describing them as sentences themselves: "They were sentences that did things in grammar and in the wind, did the same things repeatedly" (99). As their romance progresses the narrator and her lover -- a lawyer working on decoding the Patriot Act -- take on the qualities of texts in translation: "They were two sentences with wings and desire, one always ready to seduce the other into conceiving, beyond words, a moistness of life in its slightest splitting of gaps and saliva, there where mouth, caressing the dream's find fabric, ventures all the way to the source" (99). Sentences interpenetrate in translation just as bodies are redoubled in the caress, words split into subject and other within the translation process just as bodies lose their boundaries within lovemaking. According to Spivak, an ethic of translation facilitates the "love" between "the original text and its shadow, a love that permits fraying, holds the agency of the translator and the demands of her imagined or

actual audience at bay" (181). This is why the translator panics at the thought of replacing the author, struggling with a "wild desire, which forever lingers, the panic fear of substituting herself to the auther of this book" (*Mauve* 53). The panic derives from the fear of loss that is a consequence of any act of substitution. Instead, "an incalculable returning-effect of words" keeps her tethered to "what is calling her" (53) so that, like both Carla and the narrator of *Fences*, she realizes that "it's the invisible part that gives life to the life in me and around me" (*Fences* 113). The lovers' bodies are like sentences in translation; like bodies approaching orgasm translation finds its way to the other side of words and *jouissance*.

In *Mauve Desert*, the translator is enthralled by the ways "this strange story" (54) acts on her, and creates "surprising feeling" (54). Her uneasiness gives way to astonishment as when through translation the text reveals "things only very seldom seen" (161). Within French feminism, *jouissance* refers to the pleasurable transgression of aesthetic and cultural conventions that is produced in women's writing. Roland Barthes defines *jouissance* as a reading experience that triggers "the surprise of orgasm, bliss, ecstasy" (1475). In this definition Barthes draws attention to the way that language acts on the body in unexpected and uncontrollable ways. The unpredictability within language derives from its origin as a consequence of desire. It is desire that motivates the baby to point for something it wants or to call out for some need unsatisfied. Thus, bodily desire remains forever embedded in all the subject's impulses to speak and to use

language. The symbolic language of cultural transactions attempts to symbolize these primal desires by transforming and sublimating them into discourse but desire always exceeds language, which acts as its artificial constraint. Irigaray's "womanspeak" (*The Sex* 141) and Cixous's *écriture féminine* aim at transcending this constraint by positioning women's writing outside of patriarchal language and culture. Seeking to rescue women's sexuality, corporeality and expressive language from stigmatization, these feminists embraced the potentiality within women's status as the "mysterious other" (Felski 37). Kristeva's approach differs from these other psychoanalytic feminisms in its emphasis on the "semiotic chora" (McAfee 19) as a space characterized by the mutual existence of maternal somatic energies with symbolic structuring logic. As a result of these somatic energies, language thwarts any attempt to find the *right word*. For Acker, the goal is "[t]o go into the space of wonder" that exists "past failure" ("Devoured" 23). Moure, too, seeks opportunities to put herself "bodily in circumstances where it is difficult to communicate" (Moure and Pato). Building on the French feminist tradition and in line with these contemporaries, Brossard's translator must contend with the ambiguity that arises in translation and the thrilling sense of vertigo this failure produces.

The narrator of *Fences* notes that "[g]rasping the other in oneself always puts language to the test" (18). Feeling the effects of this challenge, Maude Laures admits that during the process of translating, the book "without warning had

undermined her equilibrium" (*Mauve* 54), forcing her to include "the alternative in each word" (54). The translator's struggle elaborates the connection between the other within and the alternative in each word. Later, the translator finds herself on the "wrong side of words" (59) as she gets lost trying to pin down intended meanings. She "would then search ... with a hint of panic ... " (59) as the words "would, in moving from the *innocent* book to the translated book play out their part, sweeping [her] away in the flow of constraints, exceptions and principles" (161). Here, the translator gets caught in the slippage between the ever presence of language's other side and the linguistic rules by which she is bound. Kristeva's *herethics*[73] provide a useful way to rethink the conundrum of language use. For Kristeva, the aim is not to reject the symbolic but to enable a subject that is not in conflict with the semiotic. Kristeva does so by emphasizing the "strange fold" of the mother's body. Often interpreted as a nod to a feminine ethic, as in 'her ethics,' the term also refers to a heretical ethics. *Herethics* is heretical in that claiming the pre-Oedipal maternal relationship as a model for ethical relations between people means doing away with the notion of an autonomous ethical being. It is only through maternity that one is confronted with such a profound blurring of selfhood since it represents a relation to "an 'other' who is never wholly other but at the same time not entirely oneself" (76). Maternity disrupts the symbolic

[73] For more on Kristeva's notion of *herethics* see "Stabat Mater" in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, Oxford: Blackwell, 160-86

economy that seeks to organize culture into nameable categories and assigns hierarchies of meaning (self/other, inside/outside, nature/culture, he/she). Instead, the maternal body is necessarily plural, heterogeneous, a body of folds and a "catastrophe of being" (Kristeva, *Stabat* 149). In Kristeva's conception, the maternal relationship sets up a revised ethical framework based on one's obligations to the other as obligations to the self and the species. This ethic is not based on law or duty but on an infinite love for and giving over of oneself to the other within.[74] This ethic is the same that Spivak describes as the imperative of the translator who must recognize the status of a language in the world and develop intimacy with that language, in order to succumb to it and facilitate the love between texts and subjects.

While Maude Laures fearfully struggles with the text in translation, the narrator of *Yesterday* recognizes that "once written down and especially once in print, the sentence ... forever goes to the side of fiction" (*Yesterday* 155). In both cases, the characters' sentiments are pointing to the place "where we are not, which by the same token forces us to imagine in order to understand" (155). In

[74] To reject the maternal body is to put oneself "at odds with 'the other' within" to the further effect of diminishing one's capacity to "come to terms with the others in their midst" (McAfee 2). Thus, the impetus underlying Kristeva's poetic politics is to reclaim the total body such as that experienced within the maternal dyad wherein desire flows undirected and unrestrained by social taboos and ascriptions and before the process of cathexis whereby bodily energies are arranged according to various constraints imposed by family and social structures.

Merleau-Ponty's terms, interactions with the other involve us in a renewed appreciation of alterity because of the ways in which they elude us. The other is that which allows us to surprise ourselves and to move beyond the various horizons and expectations that govern our daily lives (Reynolds 65). Merleau-Ponty views the other as exceeding the subject's experiences and resulting "horizons of significance" rather than being contained and domesticated by them (65). Acquired meanings are disrupted by the unavoidable fact that interactions with the other often differ significantly from one's expectations, which creates surprise and disorientation. In this interaction, there is in no effacement of the otherness of the other precisely because it is the other's alterity that induces change in the subject (65). As a translator, Maude Laures must wander through the landscape of both language and memory provided by the *auther* but must also go beyond what is there to imagine what it is like to occupy the linguistic, subjective and historic space of the text because not all details are included. The dialogue between the translator and the text is then posited as a productive kind of transgression. In order to realize her version of the story -- the translation that she refers to as "her book" (57) -- Maude Laures must grab the story's protagonist, Mélanie, "sit her down ... make her talk. Put colour in her hair, features on her face" (*Mauve* 55). She would "Arouse event. Yes, a dialogue" (56). She would "[f]orce Melanie into a conversation" (56). Maude Laures determines that what is needed is "a sumptuous dialogue, an unreasonable expense of words and

expressions ..." (56). Only through dialogue would she be allowed "to penetrate her mother and Lorna's room" and "with Mélanie carried away by words, to travel by her side in the Meteor, to open the glove compartment, to touch the revolver, to leaf through the maintenance notebook" (56). Maude Laures must enter into dialogue not only with the *auther* but with the text itself, in order to come as close as possible to finding the material dimensions of the protagonists' memories, and, in essence to touch the texture of the real. Thus translation, as an act of reading, is posited as kind of dialogue through which, as the narrator of *Fences* concludes, "I can now rid myself of my own presence" (*Fences* 57). In *The Unmemntioable* Moure's narrator, EM, draws a similar conclusion, recognizing that "[i]f, in translation, there is a difficulty with 'je,' isn't there even more so with 'I'?" (37). In Acker's works, too, multiple imprisoned characters write themselves out of containment by switching languages, just as it occurs to Brossard's Maude Laures that she must "change languages to get closer to the secrets on the reverse side of the real" (*Mauve* 57). Working in a foreign language, then, bypasses "the cold habit" (144) of reading and in Maude Laures's experience, "assigns me other tasks" (144). When finally "the time had come" (161) to begin her translation, that "time would give way to astonishment regarding things seldom seen, sited in the background of our thoughts" (160). The experiences of these translating subjects exhibit the ways that multilingual texts move "beyond transgressing patriarchal knowledge to bringing forth new material" (Brossard *Fluid* 36). By emphasising

the reader as one of many translators rewriting the text, Brossard's multilingual texts capitalize on the "erotico-semantic gap" (*Yesterday* 70) that already exists within the rhetoricity of fiction to open up the other side of language and make room for women's alterity.

Multilingualism and Linguistic Existence

The experience of sliding into a language unknown to oneself (a foreign language) is described as akin to slipping into a stranger's bed -- the structure is familiar but the texture of the sheets or pages is foreign and so the senses are aroused, stimulated by the difference and alert to new sensations. In *Fences*, the narrator realizes, “the dark ... come[s] alive in a foreign language" (10). In actuality, it is not the foreign language itself but the transition between languages that opens the space of alterity, unleashing language's potential. Acker draws attention to the various codes embedded in different languages, and it is likewise the movement between languages that releases her characters from various kinds of restraints and frees up the space in language to articulate alternate sociosexual subjectivities. Moure too, introduces a reading practice informed by her own principles of poetic method and body-oriented translation, which revels in the space between languages as the place where news meanings might be discovered, and texts and subjects might be re-formed. At the outset of her mission to write in a foreign language, Brossard's narrator reveals her longing to be like a foreigner in

a new language, to "dive into the landscape of a temporary world where meaning parts meaning as I move through it" (*Fences* 7). This landscape where meaning parts meaning is the domain of poetry, rhetoricity, multilingualism and, ultimately, interlingualism. Brossard's work shows the ways that translation opens the "fertile void" (Brossard *Fences* 8) that exists between languages and within any rhetorical move, drawing attention to "the always possible menace of a space outside language" (Spivak "Politics" 181). According to Spivak, rhetoric or figuration is how we form our ethical outlook. This is because "...rhetoric points at the possibility of randomness, of contingency as such, dissemination, the falling apart of language, the possibility that things might not always be semiotically organized" (187). The translating subjects of Brossard's texts revel in this void, refusing to be constrained by any singular language. Reading and writing in multiple languages produces an alternative plane of existence into which Simone, *Yesterday*'s archaeologist digs, the narrator of *Fences* dives and through which the protagonist of *Mauve Desert* sustains herself.

In all three texts, words engender fear and anxiety in the various narrators, protagonists and translators as a result of the limitations imposed by language. The fifteen-year old protagonist of *Mauve Desert*, Mélanie, confides that she "was certain of everything except words" (*Mauve* 23). Words for her produce "fear of words. Slow fear. Strains to say. Strains to hear. Pain in all my veins" (23). Living in a secluded part of the Arizona desert with her mother and her mother's

girlfriend, Mélanie relishes life lived in close proximity to a visible horizon, speeding uninhibited down the open road and the freedom of lesbian existence in this all-female space. The hotel they own exists as a safe haven and destination for other lesbians travelling through the area or on vacation including the geometrist, Angela Parkins, and "some women together for whom existing seemed really well-founded" (15). The pain she describes derives from the knowledge that her lesbian reality exists outside the realm of conventional language and the fact that "words can reduce reality to its smallest unit: *matter* of fact" (30 emphasis in original). She realizes that there are no words with which to enclose her feelings, her relationships and her sexuality; language, therefore, generally accounts for only a small portion of the range of human and especially women's and moreso lesbian experiences. When translating Mélanie's narrative, Maude Laures expands on this idea in her version of the text by attributing the "frightful pain in all [her] veins" (179) to the desire to "exist without compare" (179). Mélanie's longing indicates the consequences for women of the metaphorical and metonymical character of language.

Within a metaphoric understanding of language, a thing is explained by analogy, through comparison to some other thing that shares similar characteristics but from which it remains separate; the formula *this is (like) that* produces classes of things that are then differentiated from dissimilar things in a process of dissemination and deferral, which produces the formula provided by de

Saussure and then Derrida: these are *not* those.[75] Meaning is determined by the relation between terms within a closed system that is, then, as much metonymic as it is metaphoric. Distinctions are made between signifiers but signifieds can only ever represent their relation to the whole system. Lacan explains the conflation of part with whole that occurs within the process of signification when he shows that "the signifiable appears to succumb to its mark, becoming the signified" (*Ecrits* 578). Lacan further proves over and over in *Ecrits* that the signified itself is actually conditioned by the signifier. Put together, then, the signifiable becomes the signified by making itself look like the signifier, which precedes it. An idea can only materialize by making itself exchangeable with other signifiers that already exist in the linguistic system, so while meaning appears to function by analogy, in reality the part actually stands in for and so stands up for the whole (system of relations). Entering into this debate, Sara Beardsworth argues that signifiers actually share a metonymic connection with those in the rest of the chain; "one word for another: that is the formula for metaphor" (33).[76] Each word

[75] For full details on structural linguistics see de Saussure's *Course on General Linguistics* (1910-1911) and for Derrida's developments of de Saussure's theories see "Différance" translated by Alan Bass in *Margins of Philosophy* (1982), University of Chicago Press.

[76] This is a subject of much debate in linguistic theory and psychoanalytic theories. Irigaray sees value in metonymy as a relation of contingency rather than metaphor as a relation of substitution; perhaps ironically her notion of parler femme is represented by a metaphor for metonymy: the two lips that are always murmuring by being constantly in relation or in touch with one another. Kristeva, on the other hand, sees value in the surpluses created by the metaphoric "is," which indicates just as strongly that it "is not," as in Juliet is [not] the sun. The "is" for Kristeva points to a semantic rupture, that "opens the surface of signs toward the unrepresentable" (Oliver 171). In this case, however, the equation of Juliet with the sun on which the metaphor is based is actually a metonymic association whereby one stands in for the other.

is only a substitute for the whole, producing what Lacan calls the Gold Standard in language. By this Lacan is referring to the way that the supposed natural value of gold creates the illusion that gold exists outside the market and the monetary systems that are, then, grounded on its unwavering and permanent worth. In fact, gold's value derives from the existence of the system it conditions; it is like a transcendental signifier, occupying the same status as the Phallus in language.[77] If language is metonymic in nature then the detriment to women is greater since metonymy functions by way of association or contingency. For women to be defined by comparison to men is contentious enough but to be defined as contingent with the Phallus denies women any autonomous reality -- a painful truth to swallow, which explains why for the translator, Maude Laures, "[w]ords were in the mouth like little pits ... a presence, a solid body needing to be expelled" (*Mauve* 157). This "hardest and brightest part" is a projection in front of oneself of "the indivisible part. Between the teeth then remained only flesh and taste, edible part, a good daily portion. But a whole word too could be spit out" (157); the pit is the projected, inscrutable materialization of the signifiable separated out from the flesh. Melanie has a similar feeling when she laments "I myself was a girl like a word in life" (23). In other words, what she is realizing is

[77]According to Lacan, "the enigma of gold ...is that it has no value in itself but acquires its status as a 'natural value' from the system itself, not in the sense that it is simply an element within the system ...but in the sense that it is a 'surplus-effect', a 'product' of the system that expels it from the chain of representation and buries it in the earth where it can be 'found again'" (Lacan 22).

that it is in becoming self-identical with the signifier that meaning-effects are produced. Maude Laures wonders if the "heavy fear" engendered by words is caused by "lapse of fervor or that which constricts the senses, their distribution over the skin ever ready for more, the folds one would wish to open ... " (148). While working on her translation, she is apprehensive of the ways in which "words were taking over the action, poised for the capture of the senses" (55). In *Yesterday,* Carla likewise admits that "words have always scared me" (167), pondering if "[m]aybe that's why I fold and unfold them over on themselves, in myself" and asking the narrator if "[m]aybe ... you're afraid of words too" (167). Despite all the limitations and constraints represented by words, ultimately, surrounded by the open landscape of the desert, Mélanie realizes that "words are nonetheless but words" (24). In this statement -- equal parts ominous and dismissive -- Mélanie sums up the problem of words. Words must be contended with as constraints and nothing less but by being words they are subject to transgression, nonetheless.

Brossard's youngest protagonists Mélanie and Axelle, as well as Carla Carlson and *Yesterday*'s narrator use multilingual strategies to move past the fear of words. Recognizing that they must use words to communicate, the interlingualism produced in translation nonetheless keeps language open and available to articulating more than words signify. Carla Carlson argues that despite her own apprehension about words, "being afraid of writing that must be

like being afraid of living, being afraid of oneself, fearing life itself" (*Yesterday* 172). Like the narrator, she recognizes that words also have the power to "ignite" (9;10). Words are insufficient to articulate many bodily realities but are also the way we can access alterity. If deployed strategically, words like homonyms expose the other side of words. But, in *Mauve Desert,* Mélanie cautions, "words are not always worthy" (185). Mélanie explains, "There no doubt comes a moment when one has to know to stop, to halt in front of stupidity, to acknowledge that words are not always worthy" (185). In these cases, words pale in comparison to experience and fall short of expressing the realities with which we attempt to invest them. Searching amongst the newspaper clippings, file cards and definitions she has accumulated in her search to faithfully reconstruct Laure Angstelle's text, Maude Laures realizes that these supposed truth indicators are "like as many deflagrations in consent" (155). The implied violation of consent sets a sexual overtone that connotes a *stextual* violation, as if the text did not consent to being reduced in these ways, split and dissected in a search for its absolute meaning.

Multilingualism, however, staves off deflagaration by definition, allowing words to be redeployed, even using words to "lasso" (*Yesterday* 23) the usual suspects within the Cartesian humanist agenda and freeing others sublimated by their oppressive rule. In *Yesterday* the writer, Carla Carlson, uses words as in battle: "putting an angle to death gives her a pleasure she terms erotic" (22). Carla

is an English-speaking writer who has come to Quebec City to finish her latest three books, a habit she has kept to over the course of her writing life. The primary project of this trip is capturing a story Carla's mother told and retold her with variations over her entire life. It is the story of Descartes's death. The entire story takes place at Descartes's deathbed where he is kept company by a Cardinal and nursed by a Swedish maid, Hiljina, who is also his lover and whom he sometimes confuses for his daughter. In conversations about the plot development, Descartes and the Cardinal become interchangeable with memories of Carla's father, thereby coming to symbolize the paternal figure in literature and western philosophy more broadly. The narrator notes that "[i]n the jumble of our conversations, she often talks about her father, about her way of walking around with him as if he were her property ... Mythical and unfathomable, this man reappears in all her novels" (23).[78] Similarly, Hiljina is alluded to as a representation of Carla's Swedish-speaking mother and so Carla's struggle to find words for this character to speak is emblematic of the struggle to locate her mother's voice. She finds Hiljina to be "the more difficult of the four parts. I never know what to say" (60). She is "frozen as if afraid the words will unleash an overpowering anger like Mother's when she gets mad at Father and spews words"

[78] "She calls him the old man, Father or my papa, depending on whether pity, duty or affection is pushing her pen ...." (23)

(60). Like the narrator in *Yesterday*, it is not words that scare her but the "conflicts hiding inside words" (168) that she is afraid of. At the same time, she admits "they give me a lot of pleasure" (168). Carla explains the phenomenon, referring to the narrator's aversion to the word agony, which she accidentally uses when speaking of her mother's death:

> The word *agony,* which scares you so much and which you didn't want me to use because it grates your ears. A loaded word, with two others inside it: one, *go,* that makes you move forward, the other, *ago,* that forces you to look backward. When I was very young I started deconstructing words, messing around with their syllables, like when you shake a handbag until the last coin, the tiniest key, falls out. Falls at our young feet. Falls into our young gaze. Actually, you know, words have always scared me ... That's it: you're afraid of words too. (167)

Unlike the narrator, Carla enjoys the terrifying fact that words can at any time overflow and ignite, especially in her mother's mouth. Like Axelle in her love of puns, Carla takes pleasure in the ways words can be deconstructed to reveal meanings hidden and thought lost. Descartes, on the other hand, is associated with the prosaic. Carla explains, "So, Descartes is a man of few words. Every one of his sentences is solemn. He speaks French" (60). He also speaks "normally....[and]... slowly, simply, like a tired, happy man. He coughs a bit" (60). She shows the narrator that she can "make him talk like this" (60) and proceeds in a matter-of-fact voice, describing a market scene that carries no allusions to anything more. There is nothing particularly terrifying in his words, only in his authority, which is supported by the Cardinal and so represents a unity between

the dominant thought systems they represent: western rationalism and Christianity. The Cardinal is overlaid in Carla's mind with images of Francis Bacon's 1953 portrait of Pope Innocent X, the effect of which is "dreadful - the Cardinal becomes Machiavellian" (60). The Cardinal speaks in citations only, a variety of biblical quotes or selections that Carla takes from "in the pink-pages section of the Larousse dictionary" (60), making him speak various clichés or familiar proverbs. "[A]ccording to [her] mood" (60) he says things such as "'Non omnia possumus omnes [We can't all do everything] or 'Medice, cura te ipsum' [physician heal thyself] or 'Non nova sed nove' [Not new but new]" (60).[79] Carla has no hesitations in subjecting her father/Descartes/the Cardinal's words to her rule, since his words do not encompass the same unruly quality as her mother's language. The narrator observes that she "lassoed the man like a rowdy character at the back of her memory, has sentenced him to suffer her every writer's whim" (23). One of the ways she manipulates him is by putting different languages in his mouth. She makes him speak Latin when he is the Cardinal, Swedish when he misses his mother, French or English when he is the paternal figure, exposing the deficiencies in his own monolingual voice and drawing attention to the power associated with imperial languages.

[79] The last quote is particularly interesting, referring as it does to new discoveries in familiar texts. It is a Latin proverb generally taken to mean "not new but new to me" within the context of scriptural or textual studies.

Carla further "ropes" her paternal figures with a language she invents as a child in response to her parents' interdictions. As a young girl Carla is taught that "screaming is disagreeable to others but also that it's a sign of weakness" (50). In response to her parents' instructions not to make disagreeable noises, she developed a method of throwing her voice that produces a language she called "humanistest" (50). This language allowed her "to scream so that it doesn't show, something like a ventriloquist. I scream but nobody knows where the horrible sound, the noisy tumult, originates" (50). It is intriguing that her language of defiance can be pronounced either "humanist-test" or "human-is-test" depending on how one chooses to stress the syllables. The language is distinctly embodied, described as a "a round grainy thunder rising up inside me and suddenly it all balls up, batters and bitches hard and strong, then it vibrates sudden sudden suddenly like the anxiety of drum-beating with hands and feet in order to attract love" (50). She "modulate[s] [her] voice with slow, deep, curious aah's that make me look strange ... until my artist mouth spews *hush, gosh, rush,* and great outcry (*in Swedish in the text*)" (50). The noise is associated with the (m)other's language by the insistence that it will be "in Swedish in the text." Like a volcanic rumbling her voice spews and overflows her bodily limits and her father's constraints, making it indeed a challenge to humanist principles of bodily coherence. That all human bodies exceed such ego-ideals explains the meaning of the other interpretation as well: human is the test. This is because the human body is not an

object like other objects in space. The thresholds between inside and outside have proven impossible to define given the porous nature of the skin and the ways in which sensory data are incorporated not only in order to be processed into knowledge but to form the subjectivity of the being. As has been elaborated by Freud, Lacan and others, the space of the body cannot be elucidated by Euclidean geometry, which structures the relations between natural objects, its main dictate being that no two things can occupy the same space at the same time. The body's orifices complicate this idea by existing as points of exchange "where the limits of the body are most obscure" (Shepherdson 4). The difficulty of even containing the body within its own skin leads to the impossibility of determining what is inside and outside the body. As Charles Shepherdson argues, "the body is not easily closed within itself as a circle is closed with respect to the outside" (4). The body is not extended substance as in Descartes's formulation nor can the space of the body be delimited in the same way as natural objects. The relations of interior and exterior are more complex. Given the impossibility of governing such thresholds, Cartesian humanism, then, fails the test by failing to account for the subject of the young girl whose voice is laden with bodily rushes and the demand to be acknowledged. Staring at the back door of her house Carla unleashes a scream that is "theatrical and undeniably tragic" but also unlocatable by virtue of her voice throwing. She hurls this bodily language at her father and once he is out of the house, unsettled and searching for the source of the disturbance, she "take[s]

advantage of the moment to lasso him up good" (50) with a reassuring wave, which leaves him no option but to admit his defeat; "[f]urious, for he knows he's roped now, it's his turn to caw loudly" (50). Three times a week after school she does this: runs to the end of the field behind her house and makes these untraceable vocal modulations, which draw her father out "with gestures I declare paternal and worried" (50). She declares that in these moments, "I know at last that I exist deep in his pupils like his mother existed with her whole being the night of her mad race through Stockholm" (50). This moment of her father's disturbance also "is where my mother's story enters the picture" (50). In these moments she is aligning herself with a feminine presence that is only acknowledged as a deep and disturbing loss but that she wishes to reclaim from patriarchal definitions. As with Moure, whose work reclaims her mother's dying body and her own mourning from stigmatization, Brossard's young Carla is adamant that "[a]bove all it mustn't give the impression of a chasm of melancholy and rebellion" (50). She taunts her father on a weekly basis with her wailing ventriloquist language, through which she is expressing something before or within language, nonverbal and alarming like the sounds that also rise to the surface released from under her mother's tongue.

For Brossard, the possibilities in language are no less than the reshaping of reality to dispel "the incredible fraud ... in the accumulated layers of lies told about women through centuries of male versions of reality" (32) and to reclaim

"the very heart of our imagination by providing images of happiness" (36). Translation is not aimed at capturing the real or something essential but producing other iterations of humanity, especially those forced under the tongue and submerged deep within the body; interlingualism as the language of translation opens the space for these alternative iterations. The narrator of *Fences* notices that when talking to the chateaux's owner, Tatiana -- a publisher "from another time" (17) -- "the fact that she is all at once Jewish and Russian, a Québécoise and a New Yorker, helps me to compose in the foreign tongue" (17). That Tatiana is in between these subjectivities locates her also in the space of interlingualism, the space that exists between languages. The narrator is able to draw from this space and gleans a greater ability to write in the less restricted tongue represented by the foreign language. Similarly, in *Mauve Desert* Maude Laures searches between the *auther*'s language and her own to "find the fault line, the tiny place where meaning calls for some daring moves" (55). As she works on her translation she "[i]ndirectly highlight[s] the passage into her language, accelerate[s] the feeling, with glittering effects, the slippage" (*Mauve* 59) and between the languages emerges "the drift like a cultural shock, a grave emotion sown with mirrors and mirages" (57). Here, the space between languages refracts meaning allowing the slippage to avail itself to her "with glittering effects" (59). According to Godard, the boundary between texts serves as a point of constant exchange of the signs producing cultural value (*Writing* 55). At this point of contact between texts

discourse is exposed to reveal the ways woman is circulated as sign and symbol to support the structure of patriarchal society. Irigaray claims that "all the social regimes of 'History' are based upon the exploitation of one 'class' of producers, namely women. Whose reproductive use value (reproductive of children and of the labour force) and whose constitution as exchange value underwrite the symbolic order as such, without any compensation in kind going to them for that 'work'" (Irigaray *This Sex* 173). To be sure, "as soon as the father-man was assured of his reproductive power and had marked his products with his name, that is, from the very origin of private property and the patriarchal family, social exploitation occurred" (173). Women's intrinsic value is converted into "a mirror value of and for man" (177) thereby producing and sustaining society as a network of homosocial relations between men. Patriarchal society is established based on the circulation of women among men as commodities within the context of other patriarchal presuppositions that include: "the appropriation of nature by man; the transformation of nature according to 'human' criteria, defined by men alone; the submission of nature to labour and technology; the reduction of its material, corporeal, perceptible qualities to man's practical concrete activity; the equality of women among themselves, but in terms of laws of equivalence that remain external to them; the constitution of women as 'objects' that emblematize the materialization of relations among men, and so on" (184-185). In order to serve as such, "they give up their bodies to men as the supporting material of

specularization, of speculation" (177).[80] In order to transform these relations, so that women will no longer be "objects of use and exchange among men," will no longer "be rivals in the marketplace," it is necessary to explore women's relationships in the plural through the singularity of women's love for other women (Godard, "Translating" 94). The "order of the same" would be replaced by an order of heterogeneity -- "an economy of abundance" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 197) -- as when the narrator of *Fences* encourages burning words like money, with no care for the expense. She advises to "repeat the same words often and not be afraid of burning like money in your pocket and that nobody would complain because the more we are able to catch new expression in another language the more it becomes legible and beautiful in new sounds" (*Fences* 51). The erotics of Brossard's texts enacts a relationship of possibility as texts are taken on body to body and woman to woman. Mothers, daughters and lovers are put in touch with one another through foreign languages, opening up alternate spaces and futures by opening up the language in between languages in transition.

(M)other Tongues and Lesbian Planes

[80] Mother, virgin, prostitute: these are the social roles imposed on women. The characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them: the valorization of reproduction and nursing; faithfulness; modesty, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure; a passive acceptance of men's "activity"; seductiveness, in order to arouse the consumers' desire while offering herself as its material support without getting pleasure herself.. . Neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has woman any right to her own pleasure (Irigaray, *This Sex* 186-187)

In a conversation between the four women-characters in *Yesterday*, Simone argues that "[m]others have forever transmitted, often unbeknownst to themselves, a kind of future" (191). This future is implicated in the text's multilingualism, which includes the insertion of individual words in Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Swedish and a scene written in Latin. In particular, daughters speak in non-English languages associated with their mothers even if not their mother's native language as a way of accessing forbidden spaces and futures. This is the case for Axelle, who though technically Francophone feels close to her mother when she speaks Spanish. When she crosses Parc de la francophonie she pauses over "the suspenseful effect of the word francophonie" (*Yesterday* 126). Instead of triggering French associations, she remembers a time when her native French language was displaced by living in a foreign country and the strange accent that she and her mother developed as a result of inhabiting a space between the two languages. Axelle remembers the way their neighbours, the Morelos family, used to "affectionately tease her about her funny estraño accent" (126). Then, "[o]ver the years the funny accent had become second nature and her mother tongue ... now has nothing in common with the firm choppy intonations" (126) typical of the French exchanges she grew up listening to between her mother and grandmother, "when, using the words of everyday struggle and of life's pleasures, they blasted politicians' spinelessness" (126). Spanish is connected with a place deep inside her body, by virtue of being the language

spoken when she lived with her mother as a child. For Axelle, Spanish comes from a "strong energy operating at the navel level" (62). As she walks naked around the living room she is "borne" (62) by this energy that exits "through the mouth in short, choppy phrases peppered with Spanish words" (62). The image of Axelle naked expelling quick breaths and Spanish words conveys a sense of sexual arousal that connects the language with a sexual charge and in particular, here, with autoeroticism or masturbation. The image of self-touching also characterizes multilingualism for the ways translation puts one in touch with the foreign text in an act similar to the sexual caress. The connection between language and self-caressing is made explicit when Axelle recalls masturbating to a "little pink edition of Therese and Isabelle" (74), especially pausing on "certain words. A lot of body. Something alive that operates slyly to project the body into a better more carnal world" (75). Axelle also remembers masturbating with other girls at Princeton before exams, once "laughing and masturbating" (192) when living with the Moreloses and she frequently masturbates in her office or in the car on the way home from work. Her tendency to masturbate positions her as a character who enjoys the pleasures of the flesh. Her love of slippery words such as puns suggests that word play triggers similar bodily responses. She explains to another character that masturbating is "an action verb that puts you back in touch with yourself and with the faculty of imagining improbably, unmentionable scenes, sometimes grotesque" (192). Her mother's language, then, recalled in

moments of autoeroticism and triggered by contact with other languages, is a source of pleasure rooted in the erotics of translation, which opens up the space of desire in both language and the body.

For Carla the future is "always composed of what we're given to toy with as children" (191), which for her includes non-English languages spoken by her mother and neighbours, as well as classical languages taught in school and church. As a child Carla remembers inventing "playful scripts while thinking of ... the wide world slumbering inside me like a volcano" (211). This slumbering future she senses in childhood is found in the French and Latin words the Anglophone child learns from her neighbours, the Laramée sisters, though she eventually buries the Latin book they give her in the spot where she likes to lasso her father when playing. It is telling, then, that she likes to write her novels in a place where her own language is decentred and she is surrounded by unfamiliar words and sounds. She finds this slumbering future also in her mother's thick Swedish accent. This is juxtaposed against the language that her school offered her and that was found in "names like Sir John Macdonald and General Middleton" that she "never knew what to do with" (191). Instead, Carla seeks and locates new material under her mother's tongue. This material is used to awaken her own slumbering future but also awakens senses and memories that the Cardinal has suppressed. In the play that constitutes the book's second half, Carla acts the role of the Cardinal. In the novel the Cardinal speaks in Latin quoting

biblical references or those of ancient philosophy, but when played by Carla he notices "some strange unknown that creates a sweet flavour under my tongue" (*Yesterday* 209). He tells "dear René [Descartes]" that he can access this sweet spot only "if I put aside my soutane and my rank" then "I sink" into this strange unknown located under the tongue that reminds him of "mother's hair whenever she leaned over to kiss my forehead" (209). Once reminded of this strange unknown under his tongue, the Cardinal realizes that in order to access this tender place he must shed his authority or rank and the vestments that cloak his authority -- this soutane being the languages of history and religion with which he and Descartes are associated throughout the text: Latin, French and English. To activate this space, Carla writes the dialogue between Descartes and Hiljina "in Swedish in the text" (68) because "[t]he effect is better, I think. The syllables vibrate better" (68). Descartes complains that Swedish words "thicken in my mouth" (68). Even the narrator of *Fences* admits that she "choke[s] on this tongue that nonetheless intrigues me and keeps me alert" (30) but she likes the way that in the foreign language she finds a "solution to the questions of meaning that do not come up in [her] language" and is able to "juggle with their anguish" (30) noticing elsewhere the ways that characters "take off into the foreign language to indulge their fiercest fantasies" (71). The narrator of *Fences*, too, notices that the foreign language operates at the bodily level and because of this stimulation enables new sensations. The more frequently she speaks the foreign language, the

more she is "able to express with precision feelings I am experiencing for the first time" (108). The foreign language also encourages her to tune into sounds, which she needs "in order for childhood words to resurface ... " (108). Throughout the texts, foreign languages and lovemaking are the two ways characters like the narrator of *Fences* access "honey flavoured words under the tongue" (38-39). She explains, "[t]his is how sentences moved forward into the night, carrying with them a quaking of the heart, a taste of the eternity that recommences at the edge of the void, as fascinating as dawn in any mother tongue, in any foreign language" (*Fences* 93). Lovemaking and foreign languages both provide the conditions through which a quiet void is accessed, releasing desire in language.

Throughout the texts the foreign language is used whenever there is a need to portray feelings that are dense and multifaceted. Swedish is the language Carla uses for inexpressible grief. When the father is at a loss for words to convey his anguish over the disappearance of his mother, she will write it in "Swedish in the text" (38). Carla notices that there is a similar kind of "silence available ... after loving or mourning" (210). This uncanny silence is accessed by using the foreign language. As Spivak explains, using a language that is unfamiliar opens up "a spacey emptiness" (Spivak "Politics" 180) that contains something uncanny. The narrator of *Fences* senses that "something silent goes through me when I think of the foreign language" (10) and embarks upon writing a whole book in a language she does not know in order to suspend herself in the time and space created by the

silence opened up between the languages. She tells a fellow writer, "I want only to write a book in a foreign language in order to accurately measure the impasse of my own language and not see my own limits" (47). She is compelled into this project by an earlier revelation that occurs when "I think about the words I'd like to use but cannot be said in my language" (12). She reflects that "in my language I have exhausted the vocabulary ... I need other words for this darkness of nature and civilization now encroaching" (9). Working in a foreign language provides the opportunity to work at the threshold between languages. The task, as she describes it, is not to find the truth in the other language but "to imagine how pleasures and joys, fears and frights can be built in a language not at all familiar" (7). The important sentiment here is that such experiences are not expressed but built in language, leading the narrator to ask, "who am I becoming in the other tongue?" (43-44). Later, she finds that she has forgotten "who I am from too much digging in between words" (83) and "how to make use of myself in the foreign language" (68). Translation, then, is not an act but a space of becoming. The politics of translation are located not in the rebinding of a message from one language into another form but in the unbinding right before being reconstituted and the fact that the message is inevitably repeated with a difference. Therefore, the alterity of the speaking subject is maintained within the becoming that characterizes the moves made by the translating subject. A new thought is formed as the idea is reconstituted differently from what was sayable in the previous

language. This is a new thought shattered and re-formed using material under the tongue and the breath between words.

As indicated by the title of the book, in *Mauve Desert* Brossard constructs a lesbian landscape by painting both the horizon and desert as mauve; even more significantly the action of the text is mauve as well pointing not only to a lesbian plane of existence but also to lesbian knowledge as the animating force in the text. In her annotations Maude Laures marks all polysemy blue, the soundtrack as green, must checks in red, incomprehensible in black, familiar in yellow, gender in pink and verb tense in mauve (153). According to Godard, what "lives on" in a text when it is changed or subjected to doubling is difference or heterogeneity itself ("Translating" 88). The difference or source of heterogeneity that enlivens Maude Laures's translation is associated with lesbian specificity by virtue of the verbs being colour-coded mauve. Brossard herself explains that although motherhood shaped her solidarity with women and gave her a feminine consciousness, "lesbianism opened new mental space to explore" (*Fluid* 31); "new words, new metaphors merged within this new frame of reference" (32). Lorna is the character most explicitly associated with lesbian existence and the lesbian knowledge animating the text. Lorna is wary of all language, any form of text -- only accessing the printed word when Mélanie's mother reads her the news headlines out loud. She has a distrust of words and so has avoided learning to read. Fighting with Mélanie's mother over her self-imposed illiteracy she

exclaims, "You still can't accept me as I really am. I'm a body" (124). Not caring as Lorna's mother does that "everyone around us knows how to read and write" (124), she responds that "[e]veryone around us doesn't do, doesn't think, doesn't bite their shelove's ear like we do. No one does what we do. No one feels what we feel" (124). In this, she is expressing the irrelevance of a language that cannot account for her experiences and that would perhaps rob her of her own pleasures by making hers invisible within it. She continues, "[h]ave you never thought that my body would disintegrate if ever it entered the twisted stuff of words? .... I prefer my own nimble fingers a thousand times over all those fragile lines a thousand times twisted which men write, which your daughter writes" (124). Later she proclaims, "I don't wait for the twisted lines to make my body breathless and unfit ..." (124). Mélanie notices that instead Lorna has a way of "making herself intelligible between two twisted sentences" (186). The space between sentences that Lorna inhabits is another dimension of language like the space of interlingualism opened up in translation; it is the space where rhetoric is formed. This space that exists inside language to make rhetoric and translation possible is an interlinguistic space. Lorna's existence here suggests that interlingualism operates as both a refusal to be contained and a survival tactic for lesbian subjects.

Lorna's exclusion from language and Mélanie's sense of the same, as well as the ability of both the narrator of *Fences* and *Yesterday*'s Carla Carson to escape into interlingualism by experimenting with foreign languages suggests that

a gap in symbolic language is created by their exclusion. This gap shows the limits of the structure of language or the Law of the Father to use the terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The limits of the Law are shown through what escapes it: the breath, the spacey silence between words and the uncanny experience of moving between languages in translation. By occupying the space between breaths, Lorna comes to represent "the real" in language - a Lacanian term that designates an "interior exclusion" (Shepherdson 2) a place of nothingness, a void contained by the structure that excludes it. The place is not simply outside or unrelated and foreign but quite the opposite. It is *extimité* an intimate interior.[81] Lorna is furthermore imbued with an uncanny quality that Mélanie also associates with a girl she herself longs for. Mélanie has an oddly familiar sensation when she is alone with Grazie -- a family friend with whom she was raised as "distant sisters" (*Mauve* 19) by virtue of the fact that their mothers bore them together as lovers while pregnant and about whom she now fantasizes. They were "daughters hoped-for in the night of our mothers being lovers" (19) and now with "sentences between us" (20). As she talks to Grazie, trying to seduce her to bed she thinks of Lorna; "I know not why but between every one of her sentences I thought of Lorna..." (186). Lorna is present in her coming of age and a constant presence in

[81] Jacques-Alain Miller has developed a full account of Lacan's term *extimité* (or extimacy) in his chapter of the same name: "Extimité" in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure and Society,* eds. Mark Bracher, Marshall Alcorn, Jr., Ronald J. Cortel, and Françoise Massardier-Kenney, New York: NYU Press, 1994, p. 74-87.

Mélanie's childhood, to the point that "before her everything is vague" (20) but this presence is an uncanny one; she recalls "upon her lips the strange alphabet which seemed to constitute a dream in her gaze" (20). Lorna's gaze is linked with Mélanie's "first years of school and especially with learning to read and write" (19) to the extent that she doesn't remember reading "otherwise than in Lorna's presence" (19). Though Lorna does not read or write herself, she is always nearby in Mélanie's memories of reading. Furthermore, instead of teaching Mélanie literacy as a parent might, she teaches her "the names of plants, rocks, minerals" that constitute their desert landscape. Lorna's sustained illiteracy combined with her first-hand knowledge of the desert's territories suggests a supralinguistic knowledge associated with a lesbian plane of existence that like interlingualism is accessible between words and breaths.

This intimate interior that characterizes the excluded real is accessible in the conjunction of languages at their point of contact in translation and so is always present in Carla's mother's thick accent, a combination of her native Swedish and her acquired English. Carla explains, "[i]t is through the space created by my mother's silence that I view the world, that I learned that another world exists which I could dive into, laugh all I want and exit victorious from an ordeal" (*Yesterday* 29). Carla is afraid of lassoing her mother in the way that she readily ropes her father, preferring instead to allow space for the indiscernible quality of her mother's voice to flourish. Her mother's accent holds within it a

productive silence signalling things that cannot or will not be said, or at least that will not be discernible in the ways expected. This opens up an ethical or perhaps *herethical* space where rhetoric and not logic is the dominant method of relating. As Spivak explains, "[t]he jagged relationship between rhetoric and logic ... is a relationship by which a world is made for the agent. Logic allows us to jump from word to word by means of clearly indicated connections. Rhetoric must work in the silence between and around words in order to see what works and how much" (Spivak, "Politics" 181). Spivak contends that this relationship conditions the agent's ability to "act in an ethical way, a political way, a day-to-day way; so that the agent can be alive, in a human way, in the world" (181). Seemingly in accordance with Spivak, the narrator of *Yesterday* tells the others "[w]ithout my mother's silence I am left wide open to that static noise that amplifies the coward in each one of us" (195). In other words, a world that does not allow space for the breath, the spacey emptiness and the indiscernible in language is fearful, leaving one inclined to retreat. This indicates that the characters do not express a fear of words, per se, but anxiety about the noisy interference -- like static -- produced by monolingual contexts. On the contrary, Simone describes her mother's mouth as "a misleading setting ... a silence known to shelter verbs" (217). The misconception Simone alludes to is the belief that silence is passive rather than pregnant. Through its association with the activity of verbs the mother's mouth here instead harbours a productive silence like that produced in a conversation by

the necessary breaths that must be taken between words, without which the subject would ultimately become dizzy and faint. Simone Lambert explains, "[t]he other isn't hiding. She's feeding the first one. She's constantly manufacturing silence and it's up to each and every one of us to make the most of it" (196). She goes on to explain that there are densities of silence. The "density of silence" depends on "whether it penetrates the mouth directly or if it carefully dispenses the few words still living it up under the tongue before night falls forever" (217). In other words, there is the silence that silences and there is the silence that releases or makes room for bounded words to bubble up from where they lie buried under the tongue.

Similar to Carla and Simone's reflections on the productive silences in each mother's accent and solitude, the narrator of *Fences* holds to the value of the indiscernible when writing in a foreign language. She concludes, "[i]ndiscernible, that's the adjective I was looking for to describe the ponds of meaning strewn without logic throughout the foreign language" (41); furthermore, "[i]t's a word I use to keep from falling into the abyss" (41). She explains that once pinpointed, the word "allows [her] to all at once better define my fear, compress it and project it into the vast darkness of silence until it changes into a desirable enigma" (41). She admits that before this revelation she "did not know that fear was nomadic and that it could be transmitted via vocabulary and characters" but she takes heart that through her awareness of the indiscernible, which she gains in conversation

with Tatiana Beaujeu as Simone and Carla do with their mothers, she now knows that "in our mother tongues, we have enough words to learn to change ourselves into wolves or sirens, depending on our anxieties, our questions, and this craze for exchanging kisses at the slightest provocation..." (41). Here, the mother tongue is associated with an 'other' tongue, a language for transforming subjects and transferring desire. This explains Carla's excitation when confronting her mother's thick accent and her desire to avoid the pretense of literature that would have her write of "dew and fine rains" (112). Instead, she loses patience, gets carried away and lets herself "fall, bound and gagged into the Wound (*see dictionary under* wound)" rather than be kept "from my mother's strong accent" (112).[82] Thus, she embraces the semiotic violence in her mother's accent -- the rupture -- and is amazed that she is not carried away by this violence when she gives herself over to the "strange process" of writing without pretense wherein "pages are flowing from one another and there's no resistance" (112). Carla's mother's accent provides a hotspot in language, where meaning proliferates allowing pages to flow without resistance. Yuri Lotman proposes that the boundary between languages is the "hottest" site of the semiotizing process because it exposes the naturally occurring heteroglossia, or excesses of meaning, within a given text (136). Carla seeks out the hot spot at the fusion point between languages that

[82] The narrated directions to find the definition of the word wound affirm the association of her mother's accent with rupture, injury, damage and breaking of membrane due to external violence. See the *Oxford Dictionary*.

congeals in her mother's mouth. For Carla it is "out of the question to pretend" (*Yesterday* 112) as is encouraged in literature, "where that's all there is, pretense in the midst of a great blur" (112); however, writing without pretense is a fraught process. She admits, "when things just flow, I worry. And when words resist, I worry too that things are resisting so much, that words are putting up barricades and setting terrifying fires as if to keep me from rediscovering the perfection of July evening and my mother's strong accent" (112). For Carla, writing without limits is terrifying because of the potential violence while writing with limits is scary because of the loss, the ways in which literature typically bars access to her mother's voice. The indiscernible quality produced by her mother's accent is posited as a safeguard against oblivion that also maintains access to the real.

In each text, there are things that cannot be expressed in one language alone. In *Fences* the narrator looks for words in another language once her stock is exhausted. In *Yesterday*, the foreign language is the only one for expressing darkness: "the *buio* of night" (36). Likewise in *Mauve Desert* lesbian landscapes emerge in translation. Thus, the fear of words experienced by all the women writers in Brossard's texts refers to a fear of simplification and explains their recourse to multilingualism and acts of translation. As Marina Camboni explains, "simplification not only betrays actual experience but, allied with power, can become mortal" (42). The focus of multilingual textual practices is "to convey the complexity of life, memory, history, and personal engagement with the present"

and to enact, according to Anne Blonstein, "acute responsibility --an ethics -- towards the ways in which [we] cultivate and transmit words" (Blonstein qtd. in Camboni 42). The interlingualism produced in multilingualism, then, creates a translating subject that enables women to speak in ways that defy definition and containment.

The Translating Subject

The question of what language "makes of us and what we become through it" (Brossard *Fluid* 191) arises repeatedly in Brossard's work. Seeing this power and potential, Brossard believes that "words are exciting because they echo in us the realm of the possible" (25). Translation, then, is a fruitful field for feminist discovery. According to Marti Sale, “translation creates a living thing that goes both ways” (IFOA). This sentiment is repeated by Oana Avasilichioaei in the same conversation when she explains that translations produce a “sequence of reverberations; possibilities that never end up on the page” but are all there (IFOA). Possibilities and reverberations remain suspended because it is impossible to precisely translate the forms of figuration that constitute language, especially in fiction and poetry. Spivak adds: "[t]he relationship between logic and rhetoric, between grammar and rhetoric, is also a relationship between social logic, social reasonableness and the disruptiveness of figuration in social practice" ("Politics" 187). The translating subject produced by Brossard's texts is always aware of this negotiation of figuration at the threshold of languages. Being both

real and unreal, the pseudonym emerges in Brossard's work as a fitting trope to represent the translating subject and to elaborate the political value of this figure.

The pseudonym in *Mauve Desert*, much like the heteronym in *Yesterday* and Moure's heteronym ES, exposes the incompleteness of the symbolic order as a system of naming. [83] Throughout *Mauve Desert*, Maude Laures struggles with the necessity to name various characters and situations. She asserts, "[s]omeday I will exit reality, find a lode, a vein, the little opening ... until then I must give meaning to everything by which I exist" (144). Meaning begins with the proper name and act of naming. Drawing on Hegel, Lacan goes as far as to say that man's slavery begins with his inscription in discourse at his birth "in the form of his proper name" (Lacan 414). In order to put herself in the world of the characters Maude Laures must invent details that exist only in the mind of the *auther* - parameters of a room, location of television set, license plate of Mélanie's car and also full names of various characters including the protagonist's mother whom she names Kathy Kerouac and Lorna, to whom she gives the last name Myher.[84] The proper name is the ultimate signifier in that it does not point to anything but itself. According to Lacan, "its statement is equal to its signification" (693). However,

[83] For more on divine naming and linguistic being see Walter Benjamin's "On Language as Such and On the Language of Man" in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings, Vol. 1 1913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, Cambridge; London, 1996, pp. 62-74.

[84] The offhandedness of the name, Myher (My her), to describe the mother's girlfriend perhaps points to her resentment around this necessary operation in writing.

there is no one-to-one correspondence between words and things, even in the act of naming, despite "the role of the index finger" (Lacan 414). Bruce Fink points out that because of this, "the process of naming shows that the set of all signifiers is missing something" (133). The pseudonym emerges as a way around this foreclosure, exposing the process concealed in the supposed reality of the proper name.

The translator, Maude Laures, is destabilized when she realizes, after much searching for some trace of the author, that Laure Angstelle is likely a pseudonym. She must concede that in the end she "had uncovered nothing" (*Mauve* 57). She has no idea if Laure Angstelle is "young or old, free and proud, having perhaps known a great love or a disaster, having been a geometrist or a physicist, still living somewhere isolated between Globe and Gila. Or dead, such was the other perspective" (57). As a pseudonym, the author is a fiction but also has a reality in that some enunciating subject exists. Though she cannot be represented by any "I" or "she," or even "they;" there is someone who speaks. The pseudonym, Laure Angstelle, exists as a nodal point, elaborating the relation between the real and the symbolic in language. She cannot be located in real space and time but exists within the space and time of language and of the text. She is in the place of interlingualism or language itself. The revelation of the pseudonym leads the translator to imagine "a voice which could, at equal distance from origins and death ... regulate the alternating movement of fiction and truth"

(*Mauve* 160). In the move to symbolize, "something is lost but something also materializes" (36). This is significant because as Foucault has argued persuasively, there is no access to a non-discursive realm or what Lacan calls the pre-Symbolic real. There is only the post-Symbolic real. As a result, "all language allows us to speak of is the 'reality' constituted by the system of the symbolic ... because there is no meta-language the real perpetually eludes our discourse" (Shepherdson 30). Lacan's conclusions lead us to ask not so much about the real itself, then, but about the relation between the real and the order of representation.

There is, Lacan explains, "often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream - thoughts which cannot be unraveled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown" (Lacan 525). He continues, "we have here precisely the relation between the symbolic and the real" (525). Like the analyst who must face "this absent centre" (525), which risks leaving her analysis inconclusive, Maude Laures when confronted with the pseudonym must accept that it will tell her nothing. This aporetic point is described by Freud as well, as a nodal point that resists symbolization and adds nothing (Shepherdson 19). At this point of resistance, Lacan locates "object a" - a point of identification that is opposed to symbolic identity. This is the conjunction point between subjectivity

and the part of the body that is irreducible to the symbolic order -- that escapes signification and is beyond the symbolic order. Even Spivak admits, "language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the subject loses its boundaries" (Spivak, "Politics" 180). It becomes clear that the view of the real "as prediscursive reality is not entirely precise since the real only acquires its unfamiliar and disruptive status in relation to the symbolic and imaginary [ego]" (Shepherdson 36). Naming is the symbolic operation that excludes the real. The pseudonym, as a name, creates a void, a nothingness but also points to some reality in the subject who speaks and whose subjectivity is contained by the sentences, this subject being alternately author, translator, fictional "I" and reader. Maude Laures "progressively got accustomed to the idea of becoming a voice both other and alike in the world derived from Laure Angstelle" (*Mauve* 160). This is the world derived from the pseudonym and it is the subject with the potential to write new possibilities: the translating subject.

Like the pseudonym, the translating subject is the incarnation of the *object a* and indicates a point of non-integration or malfunction (the bar), something of the being of the subject remains excluded, "absent" or "barred" (Shepherdson 12) but nonetheless real and not without a certain force and ability to create effects. The "posture" (*Fluid* 23) that Brossard adopts in her writing (aside from the

perspective, theme, style) is that of the translating subject.[85] Brossard's general project -- most explicitly in the trilogy *Aerial Letters*, *Lovhers and Picture Theory* -- is "to translate the un-thought part of women's solidarities as well as a loving enthusiasm for the other woman" (191). This manifests in an innovative style that she attributes to an awakened lesbian consciousness. She recalls that her writing changed as her bodily sensations, emotions and ideas changed (32). Specifically, "[n]ew words, new metaphors emerged with this new frame of reference" (32). She now had "carnal knowledge of what she was investing in words" (32). As a result, she found herself confronting "contradictions, paradoxes, double binds, tautology in order to understand patriarchy" (32). She became aware of form differently, too, explaining that the form of the text is like body language, which says more about you and how you want to relate with someone than your words do: "structure itself is a statement, no matter what the text says" (32). Within this context questions started to flow for her "about identity, imagination, history and more and more about language" (32). This project to translate the un-thought of women's lives and loves is paired also with her Québécois consciousness.

Brossard explains that Québécois literature occupies a unique position in relation to both national and supranational politics. She describes always "feeling

[85] In Brossard's lexicon "posture" refers to a special attitude of body and mind, "perspective" refers to the way we look at things, at the world and how we project ourselves in it, also the angle of the text (*Fluid* 23;33). Her themes include sexuality, eroticism, homosexuality, lesbianism - themes with troubling effects because they deal with "limits, morals and the unavowable" (33).

a strangeness in my own language" (*Fluid* 158). This estrangement results both from English linguistic dominance within the nation and a French imperial language, devised over centuries by masculine subjectivity that excludes her as a woman, as a Québécoise, and as a lesbian. Brossard explains that "tension exists within minority and minoritized people when two referential systems meet" (199-200). Borrowing from Simone de Beauvoir she proclaims, "one is not born, but becomes bilingual" (199). She continues, "[t]hrough juxtaposition or superimposition, through exposure or intimidation, through pleasure or obligation -- in short, we become bilingual by speaking an *other* language or by speaking the language of the other" (199). The bilingual context produces an experience in which the minoritized subject is plunged "into a game of appearance and disappearance where [she] alternately annul[s] and validate[s] [her] difference by passing from one language to the other ... from one subject to the other" (200). However, Brossard makes clear that this language use is not characterized by clean transitions. The bilingual subject does not pass indifferently from one language to the other, "as though narratives, concepts and emotions could be stowed away without leaving a mark, a catch, a tension" (200). The "perfect bilingual" knows the code perfectly: "the referents, the connotative nuances or each language" (200) and because all this is known to her she cannot pass indifferently. She argues that because of this linguistic position it is a mistake to refer to Québécois literature as literature of the province de Québec, French-

Canadian literature or French literature of the Americas as some are tempted to do. She contends that "even though we have the good fortune to write in the major language that French still is, Québécoise literature is still on a plane with Finnish, Greek or Hungarian literature in that its diffusion will succeed and its reputation will be made perhaps more through translation than in the francophone world," arguing that the French-language literature of Québéc is not even as popular as one might think with French people or other Francophones (102). The significance of this lies in the fact that according to Brossard, "words are magic; they can make people appear or disappear" (25) and so Québécois literature has much in common with other post-colonial literatures. According to Spivak, "where meaning hops into the spacey emptiness between two named historical languages" we get perilously close to dissemination, though it can never be under our control (Spivak, "Politics" 180). Québécois writing occupies this spacey emptiness between two named historical languages which enables a productive space that remains subversively within and having effects upon the order of the same that characterizes the discourse of the entwined oppressive regimes of patriarchy, heterosexism and colonialism.[86]

Brossard claims that the colonized woman can never be indifferent because "she finds the reflected matter of her alienation" in the dominant language

[86] Brossard characterizes her writing as "oppositional writing" because she writes expressly to oppose the literary establishment, English-Canada and the Catholic Church (Fluid 30).

of her education (*Fluid* 200). Herein lies the connection between the colonized Québécois woman, lesbian and translating subject. The bilingual is a liar, traditionally speaking anyways. Brossard asks, "did not the word bilingual mean 'liar' in the thirteenth century" (200)? As pointed out earlier in Chapter One, "we cannot speak of the language of the other without stunning the body and mind for an instant, without the mind having to proceed with a few adjustments, without the body being surprised by a different way of breathing, without the vocal chords striking a chord, without la menteuse [liar and also slang for tongue in French] being put to the test" (200). This bodily component of bilingual identity is akin to the real remainder in the translating subject -- the *object a*, which exists as "an unsymbolized real element within the structure of the symbolic order itself" (Shepherdson 23). The bilingual subject, like the translating subject, manifests the missing link -- a place that is marked and can be located through the symbolic but does not actually belong to the chain of signifiers (11). Brossard's lesbian posture has the same effect: while "woman" is marked and can be located through the symbolic, lesbianism or woman's erotic possibilities are not accounted for within symbolic meaning systems, based as they are on phallic logic.[87] As the translator, Maude Laures, reveals, "true landscapes loosen the tongue in us, flow over the edge of our thought-frame. They settle into us" (133). These true landscapes "pry

[87] Irigaray's thesis in *This Sex Which Is Not One*.

us from the edge and force us onto the scene" (133). Brossard's lesbian feminist Québécois writing opens up these new landscapes and forces us onto the scene of language. The scene refers to the screen in Plato's metaphorical cave on which subjectivity is projected and bodily relations are formed. In his metaphor, meaning is formed as subjects learn to agree on the names of various things that enter their worldview. Interlingualism is the space where the dissemination of meaning occurs. By taking up space in language's excluded intimate interior the translating subjects of Brossard's texts exist in another dimension of language where they more freely wield its material and fondle its internal mechanisms. This intimate relation with language creates alternate realities by opening up linguistic possibilities.

According to Brossard, poets are not merely the legislators of the world as in Percy Shelley's dictum but rather, as George Oppen declares, "poets are the legislators of the unacknowledged world" (Oppen qtd. in Brossard *Fluid* 26). Her assertion becomes more profound in that it points to the existence in her texts of unacknowledged sexual identities, feminist perspectives, modern postures in relation to technology and society and also a postcolonial imperative within French-speaking Canada. Brossard asserts that "by changing the perspective, the themes, or the style somehow you deceive the conformist reader in her or his moral or aesthetic expectations and you annoy her or him by breaking the habits of reading" (33). At the same time "you provide for a new space of emotion and

you make space for new material to be taken into account about life and its meaning" (33) -- offering the non-conformist reader a space for new experiences. These experiences are gained as the reader journeys with and becomes herself the translating subject, "travelling through meaning while simultaneously producing meaning" (33). The multilingual writer in *Fences* muses, "[i]t is through prose that the world is driven to creating assets; through poetry it changes and reconnects with the living" (22). This character echoes Brossard's own sentiments that "[a]rt, literature, feminist engagement will continue to be arenas for semantic combat, activist performance and lobbyism of ontological questioning not just of the nature of women and men but the species..." (*Fluid* 195). In line with this goal, or rather posture, Brossard engages in "creative language acts": bursts of emotion, desiring energy, semantic audacity (193). The values informing her writing are those of the ludic (playing with words), experimentalist (trying to understand the process of writing) and explorer (searching) (31). Brossard contends that it is particularly this exploration that provides for the renewal of information and knowledge (31). Brossard asserts that the body is "under the influence;" "we have so many words to make it believe that it can, must do this, endure that. So many words to increase or diminish its threshold of tolerance..." (*Fluid* 68). She implies that this influence is most tangible for Francophone women in Québec because they are engaged in a unique and express "bodily tussle with language" (155). Speaking from multiple subjectivities Brossard explains, "the cultural field of

language can provide us with energy or deprive us of it" (29). Feminism, then, is the continuation of a struggle whose origins are "bodies of fury" and "tongues of fire" (194). Brossard's work drives to speak these bodies and tongues that constitute the simultaneity of her Québécois, woman-identified, lesbian reality.

Conclusion: Tracing a Feminist Literary Avant-garde

The North American literary scene in the post-war era was largely defined by the school of New American poetry comprised of the New York School, the Black Mountain School, the San Francisco Renaissance, the Beats, and characterized by an interest in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry in general. Alessandra Capperdoni defines language poetry as "poetics that pay special attention to the work of language in the construction of subjectivity and social relations, and to the linkages between formal poetic structures and socio-political and economic structures" (par. 20). Owing to men's dominance in avant-garde circles, however, class and the workings of capitalism would more often tend to be the subjects of poetic interrogation but not gender, sexuality or language itself. Feminists on both sides of the border were, therefore, leery of following too closely in the genealogy of male avant-gardists. Canadian women writers were set apart from other language poets, however, in that they were suspicious of both masculine language and American cultural imperialism and so refused "to use language as reflexive of a Canadian cultural milieu (language as a transparent medium of representation)" (par. 6). Not only was the canon of New American poetry lacking in gender diversity but also ethnic diversity, with the seminal anthology of the movement, *New American Poetry 1945-1960*, representing only four women and one African-American out of the forty poets included. The Canadian feminist avant-garde filled this gap by adding a version of language

politics that, like other feminist poetics, challenged the limitations of masculine grammar, rhetoric and structure and like the politics of difference that were widely reshaping feminist movements, incorporated voices from ethnically and sexually diverse groups. Canadian *language writing* is distinguished, however, by its overt incorporation of translation, bilingualism and the politics of displaced languages. As a result, a nuanced linguistic politics emerged that is distinctly Canadian and most strongly influenced by Québécois women writers. Moure contends that "talking and thinking and taking writings from diverse influences is more a part of women's writing there [in Québec]" (Stannard 17). She further proclaims that "[t]he relationship between language and structures, culture, and women has been discussed in Europe and Québec for over ten years [and notes that] The *Women and Words Conference* (Vancouver 1983) opened this discussion in a Canadian context" ("Notebook"). Given the high level of exchange across the Canadian and American border between women writers throughout this period and into the present, I would argue that the discussion initiated in Canada in the 1960s by Quebecois women writers had much broader parameters and impacts than has been widely recognized.

In the spirit of the Quiet Revolution and influenced by the influx of feminist writing from France, feminist writers in Québec produced work that was declared "strangely exciting" (Forsyth 91) when first introduced to Anglophone audiences at the seminal *Women and Words Conference* held in Vancouver in

1983 -- an event that represents a watershed moment in Canadian women's literary history. According to Louise Forsyth, Québécois women were "seeing, thinking, and speaking in ways that [had] never before been known" (91). Making original use of French theoretical texts in a variety of disciplines including literature, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, psychoanalysis, semiotics and political theory, these women writers offered "a vision of the limitless feminine imaginary" (93), marking a new era of feminist poetics in Canada. These innovations did not go unnoticed across the border either, as evidenced by the wide acclaim given to Nicole Brossard who was, in Canada and abroad, "recognized since the 1980s as the foremost Canadian and Québécois feminist avant-garde writer" (Capperdoni par. 5). In fact, since the 1970s Brossard has been a mainstay at high profile feminist literary and activist events on both sides of the border, where she was often a guest speaker alongside prominent American writers including Audre Lorde and Marge Piercy at iconic venues like New York's Ear Inn and St. Mark's Poetry Project.[88]

[88] Brossard and American poet Rachel Blau Du Plessis read together at Ear Inn in 1988. Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church founded in 1966 and Ear Inn founded in 1978 are two of the longest running poetry reading series in New York; Acker considered herself a member of the Poetry Project and Moure, too, read at St. Marks throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Brossard's appearances are too numerous to mention with boxes of archives full of records of her attending, speaking at and being invited to events all over the United States, Europe and Canada, as well as requests for her books from stores in Seattle to Japan. Event records start from the 1970s onward, with 1980s marking a particularly prolific period of public engagements. See Boxes 33, 34, 36, 37 in the Nicole Brossard Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

Brossard frequently collaborated with renowned American feminists, and most notable among these is a joint talk she gave with Adrienne Rich at the Toronto Women's Bookstore circa 1973 and a relationship with Mary Daly that, according to Daly, began at a conference in New Brunswick in 1980 (Letter). In a letter Daly explains that the two would meet frequently "to discuss ideas" and reflects on the closeness of their work, ideals and motives (Letter). Browsing through the Nicole Brossard Fonds at Library and Archives Canada is a breathtaking experience. There are entire files full of letters from American feminists and poets engaged with her work in various ways -- intertextually in their own creative work, seeking contributions to special issues of journals or anthologies, or just inspired by a reading or encounter and wanting to keep in touch. The effect Brossard's work had on women, especially at a time when, in the words of Betsy Warland, "writing, publishing and reading poetry were at the visionary core of the feminist, anti-racist and anti-war activist communities" (Warland) cannot be overstated, and is well summed up in a note from American poet Kathleen Fraser: "I value so much what you have brought into language" (Note). More than thirty years after her first publication, Brossard's continued influence was confirmed when she was asked by contemporary poets Juliana Spahr and Jena Osman to contribute to a special issue of *Chain* focused on the politics of multilingualism, called "Different Languages," in the summer of 1998. This issue marked the first time non-English languages had been imagined as part

of *Chain*'s language politics -- a practice that was already well-established in Québécoise writing. A few years later, *Chain*'s volume 10, "Translucinación," was dedicated to theorizing translation as part of a new consciousness of language politics and features work co-authored by Erín Moure and Andrés Ajens.

While popular sentiment would suggest that it was only Canadian writers who have strived to see themselves published across the border, innovative American women writers often chose to publish and present their work in Canadian venues as well. One of the most highly regarded venues in the 1970s and 80s would have been *FILE Megazine*, a spoof on LIFE Magazine produced by the Toronto-based art collective, General Idea. The magazine carried heavy clout in the early punk rock movement as evidenced by covers featuring Debbie Harry (1977) and Tina Turner (1981). Acker herself was published in the Fall 1979 "Special Trangressions Issue," alongside Robert Mapplethorpe, Jean Genet, David Byrne and others, as well as in at least one other issue, "File NYC edition, " published in the spring of 1976. Acker was also known to give readings in Toronto bookstores throughout the 1980s,[89] as well as performing at the infamous

[89] I am grateful for and delighted by the anecdotes Ann Ireland shared with me at *Splash: A Night For the Arts*, October 2011, in which the Canadian author and former PEN Canada president remembers attending a reading by Acker in a small Toronto bookstore mid-1980s, "before she became Kathy Acker," referring here to Acker before her more wild punk persona took hold, characterized by intense bodybuilding, piercings, shaved head and multiple tattoos. She remembers Acker as kind of shy and awkward, and always she can recall "that voice;" by my own account a voice that is as thick as they get in New York, yet distinctive as soon as you here hear it. The reading Ann attended was one of a number of Acker readings she had heard about in Toronto over the years. See Jason McBride's article, "Kathy Goes to Toronto," in Fall 2016 issue of

club, Foufounes Électriques, in Montreal in 1986. In addition to spreading her own cachet, Acker inevitably picked up Canadian literary style and philosophy while spending time in Canada. In fact, in 1987 the editorial director of The Overlook Press, Deborah Baker, sent Acker a copy of Marie-Claire Blais's *Deaf to the City* -- as "a French-Canadian writer [Acker] may not have heard of" (Correspondences) but whom she evidently believed she should know. The resonances between Blais's work and Acker's are clear, but it is also a surety that reading Blais would have introduced Acker to particularly Quebecois sentiments and literary tropes as well. Moure, too, was and still is active on the New York literary scene, reading at St. Mark's Poetry Project and Belladonna Collective throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In addition, letters collected over the years reflect lasting friendships with a handful of American feminist poets, particularly Carla Harryman,[90] who was incidentally a dear friend of Kathy Acker's and a long- time acquaintance of Gail Scott as well. Taken together, these connections and appearances point to a transnational network of innovative women writers mutually influencing and inspiring each other in the heyday of experimental literary activity in Canada and the United States.

Canadian Art for an account of the two months Acker lived in Toronto, publishing the first edition of *Kathy Goes to Haiti* through Rumour, a small independent press and gallery formerly located at 720 Queen Street West. McBride also remarks on Acker's unforgettable sound, "intimate, incantatory, vaguely sinister."

[90] See the file, "Readings" (Box 11, File 1) in *Library and Archives Canada* for letters between Moure and Harryman that reflect the extent of their friendship.

While not discussed in this manuscript, it is worth noting that other Montreal-based innovative writers, including Gail Scott and Anne Carson, have been deeply involved with writing communities on both sides of the border as well. Carson has lived between Montreal, New York and Ann Arbor since at least the 1990s, winning prestigious American awards including the MacArthur Award (2000), Guggenheim Award (1998) and Lannan Award (1996). Gail Scott has similarly split her time between Montreal and San Francisco. Scott has long been aligned with the San Francisco-based New Narrative writers, becoming one of the founding editors of the journal *Narrativity* along with co-editors Mary Burger, Robert Glück and Camille Roy. At the same time, Scott was also the co-founder of the Canadian journals *Tessera* (bilingual: French and English) and *Spirale* (French language). By Scott's own account, the "intense relations" between avant-garde Canadian and American poets is a subject that deserves more attention.[91] In an interview with the Canadian poet Sina Queyras, Scott ventures, "it was the radical experiments happening in québécois writing that somehow, paradoxically, meant I would end up talking to people in the US." Scott insists that "there is a network of formally radical writers across the continent that is comprised of writers from both Canada and the US," mentioning Christian Bök, Lisa

[91] In an email correspondence with me, Scott adds as a post script "And I should add ... I especially like your approach as regards the intense relations avant garde Canadian and American poets have maintained"

Robertson, Rachel Zolf, Nathalie Stephens, Steve McCaffery as some of the many Canadian writers -- including Queyras herself -- that spend "a great deal of time in the US." Scott contends that ultimately her style diverged from the Montreal style, admittedly in part because she is English-speaking but her earliest influences and so the principles that she inevitably transports with her across the border are Québécois. In particular she recalls the "energy coming out of the very radical period that followed the Quiet Revolution, and gathered in such great writing," naming Hubert Aquin's *Prochain Episode* and Brossard's *Picture Theory* as among the best. Capperdoni distills Canadian *language writing* down to five themes: translation poetics; the "poetics of re" named after Lola Lemire Tostevin's work on the interstices of bilingualism and displaced languages; poetics highlighting combinations and recombinations of languages; "half-bred poetics" such as those produced and coined so by Fred Wah; and poetics of the body (Capperdoni par. 4). The consistent thread in all of these topics is not language as a system per se but the point of contact between unique languages. This attention to languages-in-contact that is constitutive of the Canadian avant-garde is a fundamental premise of what will become the multilingual aesthetic practice that represents the avant-garde of North American *language writing* now. Furthermore, these strategies and practices can be traced back to innovations in language initiated, in particular, by Quebecois feminists writers thirty years before being integrated into the rhetoric of American literary experimentation.

All three writers discussed let their texts stand "as something requiring engagement but not stable interpretation" (Muth 102-103). In the resulting moments of suspension, they ask the reader "to imagine the possibility that the world be different" (103). Moure, Acker and Brossard's multilingual texts accentuate the disjunctive, providing the opportunity to explore spaces of linguistic difference not in terms of loss but in terms of abundance. In multilingual texts "the body takes the place of the I...because the body's more text" ("Devoured" 21). Aristotle reasoned that a disembodied intellect was ideal because to be tied to any one organ is to be tied to that organ's singular sense, believing, based on Plato's instruction, that "a material organ could not have the range and flexibility that are required for human thought" (Robinson).[92] But what if that organ is the skin? Aristotle's oversight -- like that of his mentor -- was not to consider the potential intelligence available through the largest of the body's organs: the skin. The skin is not limited to a singular sense. Through vibrations the skin hears, through touch it picks up dimensions that are lost to sight, the skin also tastes by virtue of encompassing the tongue, and as Moure shows in Chapter One, the mucosae of the tongue are capable of transmitting pictures, and so, the skin even sees; and, in the works of Moure, Acker and Brossard the libidinal skin reads. Thus, the separation believed to be necessary is actually a detriment since

[92] Plato concluded that if the intellect were located in a physical organ it would be limited to a restricted range of physical things, as a case in point the eyes are sensitive to light but not sound, and the ear to sound but not light (Robinson).

"the eye/'I' ... will frame and reproduce only what is technically set up in front of it" (Irigaray *Speculum* 183). In this statement Irigaray is referring to Descartes's assertion that "things known by the intellect have a higher reality than objects of the senses" (Robinson). Reifying the Platonic tradition, Descartes ordered that "to procure the fundamental truths of metaphysics we must withdraw the mind from the senses" (Robinson). Instead, the narrator of *Fences* realizes that "there is a way of being on the alert and letting our senses do the work. We sometimes have to think, but I've noticed that we do it only when forced to, either to solve a problem or to prepare an answer" (106). This statement elaborates the fact that although reason is the primary means for aligning oneself within dominant discourses, rationalism is an unsatisfying mode of inquiry outside of the restricted economy of western humanism.[93]

In *O Resplandor,* Moure's narrator reveals the intimacy of her encounter with the foreign language: "It was a language I could not read and it entered me. I could not turn away from it" (8). The foreign language operates at the level of the body, penetrating beyond consciousness to connect with the subject's desire or rather with the subject of desire, and so exposes the myth of the rational autonomous subject idealized by western humanism -- a subject that is out of his depth in the multilingual context. Instead, Moure, Acker and Brossard's texts

[93] Gramsci declares that "humanism is linked to previous philosophical doctrines and represents the last span of Cartesian psychologism" (*Further* 313).

reveal characters who listen with their muscles and find the freedom to articulate unspoken longings in languages that contain meanings of which they cannot be sure. Thus, multilingualism stands in opposition to the sanitizing of politics that occurs in the search for proper juridical language and the stable subjects this pursuit requires, but it opens the possibility for a new sort of pursuit: "one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and narrative prerequisite, if not a political goal" (Butler, *Gender* 5). An overreliance on reason, common language and institutionalized methods of analysis deadens the senses and limits the kinds of solutions to pressing political concerns that might otherwise be generated. In the philosopher's paranoia that "the mind must be brought back to reason at all costs lest it be tricked" (Irigaray, *Speculum* 187), he reveals the truth: humanism is driven by fear -- fear over the vulnerability of the philosopher's claim to mastery, which may be displaced by the contrary truths generated through embodied knowledges and frames of reference deriving from cultures and communities outside of the western humanist paradigm. Acker's *Empire* reflects her attempt to build a new myth. This new myth celebrates "people who are beginning to take sign-making into their own hands" (Friedman 18). The ending to the novel provides "the hint of a possibility" (Acker, "A Few" 121). The most "positive thing" (Friedman 17), according to Acker, is the possibility of finding a mode of sign-making that might translate human livability: one that is not reductionist, non-assimilationist, that maintains difference,

incommensurability, and the non-translatability of desire. A language that maintains this openness and suspension is more conducive to coalitional politics and the "often torturous process of democratization" (Butler, *Gender* 14-15). Reflecting her coherence with Susan Stanford Friedman's advocacy for politics grounded on the recognition of "interactive systems of stratification" (38), Butler sees "divergence, breakage, splinter and fragmentation" (14), and "definitional incompleteness" (16) as necessary components to a kind of political dialogue that would be relieved of coercive force. Similar to debates in feminist circles about the legitimacy of the category *woman*, which critics argue actually regulates and reifies gender relations, coalitional politics does not assume in advance what the content of any category will be. Multilingual texts are politically valuable, then, because of the way they necessarily question the meaning of given categories whether that category is *woman*, *black*, *third world* or language itself.

Articulating one of the central premises of feminist linguistic politics, Moure proclaims that "the world's structure is based on the structures of language: to change our world, our relationships to one another, we have to change the way words operate ... [and not] die doing this" ("Absolutely"). Multilingual texts draw attention to "the tenuous space between languages" (Neigh 80) and encourage a reading practice that is "open to the gaps, fissures and connections among different languages and their associated knowledge systems" (84). Languages like people are not coherent, whole and non-contradictory systems, nor are languages

discrete entities (82); like global communities they have intersecting histories. The acts of translation required as part of multilingual reading reinforce the fact that language is not precise, nor should it be, since precision equates with elimination. Multilingual texts manifest the ways that languages, texts and people embody multiple meanings. The conventional desire in literary criticism and liberal politics to shut down those meanings reflects a deeper desire to exact control over and delimit the boundless nature of social relations.

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