

NARRATIVE, LITERACY AND THE QUEST FOR SELF

TANGO THROUGH THE DARK

by

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This research explores the development of a manuscript of poetry (a creative text within text) titled *Tango Through the Dark*, considering lived experiences through qualitative, autobiographical methodology. The manuscript's autobiographical approach is based on the conviction that the understanding of self is a precondition of and essential to the understanding of others. Therefore, the process of education lies not in the observer, but in the articulation of lived experience. As teacher and writer, the process of divestment or self-reflection allows an enrichment of experience in the reconstruction of the writer's world. It is my conviction that pedagogical endeavours, in particular the teaching of literature and the quest for literacy, need to be grounded in the personal as a starting point in the reconstructing process that is essential between students, teachers and written texts.

The discourses in this text, post-modern in their play with traditional scholarly writing, are informed by and interwoven with imaginative writings of authors in the fields of literature, curriculum and literary theory, post-structuralism, phenomenology, existentialism, and feminist thought. The narrative constructions become modes of writing that challenge established classifications and separations of disciplines and discourses, enhancing the understanding of the texture of lived experience. Texts create meaning in the world, not fixed meaning but new meanings, responding to Barthes' *challenge: "étonne-moi."* The interconnection of texts becomes a passage to the teaching self as the particularities of writing, teaching, and knowing the self, and the tensions between public and private persona are explored. In my writing and in my considerations of texts, I am inspired by Barthes' comparisons of "teaching to play, reading to eros, writing to seduction" (quoted in Sontag, 1982, pp. xvi - xvii). The quest is to discover scholarship that exemplifies difference, emerging from "an ethos of eros and empathy" (Christ, 1987, p.58) .

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Narrative, Literacy and the Quest for Self

Tango Through the Dark

All my writing--and yours--is autobiographical.

Donald M. Murray

Introduction

This research explores the development of a manuscript of poetry (a creative text within text) titled *Tango Through the Dark*, which considers lived experiences through qualitative, autobiographical methodology. The manuscript's autobiographical approach is based on the conviction that the understanding of self is a precondition of and essential to the understanding of others. Therefore, the process of education lies not in the observer, but in the articulation of the lived experience. As teacher and writer, the process of divestment or self-reflection allows an enrichment of experience in the reconstruction of the writer's world. Similarly, it is my conviction that pedagogical endeavours, in particular, the teaching of literature and the quest for literacy, need to be grounded in the personal as a starting point in the reconstructing process that is essential between students, teachers and written texts.

This research seeks to address curriculum in the sense of the expression *currere*, the Latin root referred to in the research of William Pinar (1992). Pinar has written extensively about the role of the self in educational experience. *Currere* becomes a method for the study of curriculum which explores the role of the self in educational experience. In this method, students and teachers engage simultaneously

in developing their individual selves through autobiography. In the development of this method, Pinar explores the stages of *currere*: the regressive, the progressive, the analytical and the synthetical (1976). The race, or course, as metaphor for curriculum/lifeworld asks us to consider the runners, how the race is run, and the nature of the race itself. Informed by phenomenology and existentialism, the effort to explore an authentic self, on the part of the educator or the student, requires the investigation of lived experience, of educational experience through autobiography.

As an example of qualitative research, this manuscript, through the genre of poetry, will attempt to demonstrate an epistemological approach that searches for understanding of human experience by cultivating the specificity of self and the particularity of situation. Autobiographical work allows for increased understanding through the stopping of moments lifted from life. In this way, the meta-focus slows down movement and history, making the self more visible and discernible in detail.

Writing the Self and the Quest for Voice

Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) in her book, *Writing a Woman's Life*, discusses patriarchal culture that has defined the limits of women's lives over the centuries, determining the narratives that are told about women. In so many cases, the "written life" conforms to society's perceptions of what this life should be. In discussions with colleagues and students, I am constantly struck by the comments of female students who attempt to write from a personal perspective, in particular in the genre of poetry; these students are constantly questioning whether or not they dare write the truth; whether they will offend someone; should they avoid using "I" in order to distance themselves from the speaker? This tension between public and private persona is a particularly strong concern of female students. It is interesting to note that our male

students do not seem to be conditioned to agonize over this question of voice and social acceptability. In my roles as woman, scholar and educator, I have struggled with these same questions. My response to my students is that they must have the courage and the convictions to write their own narratives, to find the words to articulate experience in as true a representation and evocation of feeling as possible. We must be willing to take risks in order to learn and to teach.

The central questions to be addressed in this autobiographical research are: What are the difficulties inherent in autobiographical writing? Is it possible to discover and express an authentic self through written language? Are there particular difficulties involved with the attempt to express the female voice and its various facets of experience? How is it possible to render the immediacy of lived experience through writing? What determines the choices of words and language to express experience? How is autobiographical writing epistemologically sound as an approach to understanding curriculum and how does it affect my teaching world? How is it linked to educational experience and the teaching of language and literature?

Discourses: Writing Autobiographically

In "Existential and Phenomenological Foundations of Autobiographical Writing" Madeleine Grumet (1992) discusses autobiography as a way to reconceptualize the ways in which we know the world, asserting Sartre's conviction that to name something is to change the world. In this sense, the use of language to reconceptualize becomes an act of reforming the world .

When ascribing to the post-structuralist view of Jacques Daignault, curriculum is envisioned as pedagogy itself: the quest for a dialogue or common language among researchers, teachers, students, all participants in the educational process who may have different modes of discourse. Curriculum itself becomes that dialogue, aiming at unleashing thinking. Daignault states: "I am writing at Nietzsche's dictation: to translate life in joyful wisdom, gay knowledge. Thinking, maybe" (Daignault, 1992, p. 202).

Merleau Ponty's view is that the ways in which we construct knowledge are not based on an object of perception but on our worldviews and physical realities that are brought into play in the perception (1962). Therefore, education itself becomes a person's experience in the world. Despite this unique specificity of individual perspective that always exists in different contexts, educators must seek ways to diminish the distance between public persona and private experience. Educational experience is found through the dialogues of individual persons with the world, dialogues that include perceptions of specific histories/narratives and discourses.

Julia Kristeva (1981) responds in her writing to the dichotomy inherent in the female voice, expressing an ever-present tension between the private and the public self. Despite her advocacy of free voice about sensuality and intimacy, she warns feminists of the danger of diminishing or ignoring public and political convictions in favour of the private and familial voice.

Also of interest to the exploration of the writing voice is Kristeva's discussion of two elements of the signifying process, the semiotic and the symbolic, how we attach meaning to our world. The symbolic is predominantly evident in everyday discourse, therefore associated with the masculine (phallic), and the semiotic is found in the underlayers of human experience. The semiotic is pre-oedipal, associated with primal drives, pulses and rhythms. These drives are energy charges orienting the human body towards the mother, continually seeking a replacement of her. The semiotic is predominantly repressed as a consequence of socio-symbolic order.

The symbolic is a superimposed order, regulating, ordering, and stabilising the fragmentary energies of semiotic flows in order to produce meaning, coherence, identity in language.

(Gross, 1986a, p. 130)

This tension between the symbolic and the semiotic seems to me to be particularly relevant to the paradoxical nature of human existence and to the social conditioning of women to suppress expression and clear articulation of the semiotic. The inherent tensions and the variable relationships between semiotic and symbolic imply the fluidity, changeability and constant process of human life and the attachment of meaning to that lifeworld.

Kristeva's theory denies identity of any kind, even sexual identity. She insists upon initial bi-sexuality, concentrating on the pre-oedipal (1981, p. 138). Although Kristeva does not categorize *l'écriture féminine* as writing specific to women, she does see it as writing in which the pleasure of the semiotic shines through, a *jouissance* (1987b, p. 112).

In a marvellous essay, *Me and My Shadow*, Jane Tompkins (1987) eloquently expresses her struggle against the public-private dichotomy, or the public-private hierarchy. Her thoughts on the expectations and conditioning of women, especially in the academic professional world, speak to the tension and fear that women often encounter within themselves in the effort to express the true nature of their experiences. Tompkins sees this as "a founding condition of female oppression". She continues, "I say to hell with it. The reason I feel embarrassed at my own attempts to speak personally in a professional context is that I have been conditioned to feel that way" (p. 169).

Tompkins also laments this inability to explore personal experience in the context of readers and writers. Indeed, in the educational process, the most significant experiences for readers may be found in texts of writers who allow an entering into, eliciting pleasure and dialogue through a matching of experience or a recognition of feeling .

Yet, Tompkins' questions seem particularly urgent in my mind as teacher and writer and to my students : "How can we speak personally to each other and yet not be self-centred? How can we be part of the great world and yet remain loyal to ourselves?...How can I talk about such things in public? How can I *not*?" (p. 176)

In her essay, *Bodyreading*, Grumet (1988) comments on autobiographical reflection as a concept that can convey reading as embodied activity. I would extend this definition to writing, given its inextricable link with the response of the reader. Grumet talks of reading as "contingent, tangled up with world...The act of reading requires...both what we know and how we live" (Grumet, 1988, p. 453).

This idea of the body subject, Merleau-Ponty's term for human consciousness, is the idea that we can capture our politics, literature, science, history and idealism, bringing them all into a central place, a place where we live (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This body reading, although not traditionally the focus of educational endeavours, seems to me to be a relevant approach to writing and reading and expressing lived experience.

I would concur with Grumet (1988, p. 455) who applauds contemporary feminist theories linked to textual response and literary criticism within the realms of poststructuralism and deconstruction. These theories have challenged the idealism that imposes meaning upon words and texts that may be distinct and apart from the "actual and possible worlds of their readers" (p. 455). Grumet refreshingly advocates the seeking of ways to establish dialogue between teachers and students that "honor them," permitting "the sorrow and celebration that Yeats seeks in the poetry of the mortal condition" (p.455). The encounter with the world, therefore true education, becomes a generative act and education becomes a metaphor for a person's dialogue with the world of experience (Grumet, 1992, p. 29). From my perspective, this movement represents the quest for literacy in our classrooms.

In the attempt to encourage teachers to explore and investigate understandings and experiences in their relationships to texts, the image of text as

fabric is especially meaningful to me. The idea of text/world as living fabric has often informed my own writing:

We touch the text instead of each other and make our marks on it, rather than each other. The text is material, it is woven, we pull and tug at it, it winds around us, we are tangled up in it.

(Grumet, 1988, p. 466)

The writing and research in this manuscript, and also my approach to teaching language and literature, seem to be aligned with the deconstructionist approach to text. For example, Derrida advocates the search to find where text says what it does not mean, means what it does not say. I have encountered this often in the writing of poetry, searching for the proper irony or reference to allow the writer and reader multiple possibilities of meaning. Similarly, this approach is especially vital in encouraging our students to respond to texts and to find richness and significance.

This view is also supported by Lacan and the French feminists in their support for deconstructionism which exposes imposed meaning as a false identity, disguising all the possible meanings of text. Therefore, the provisional nature of text implies that meaning is constantly changing and provisional. This is what allows us as readers, writers, students and teachers to transform text into multiple meanings. This act of transformation becomes, to me, essential to the educational process.

In the search for transformation, it seems possible to take our cue from curriculum theorists whose vast store of commingled and constantly converging approaches attempt to link notions from philosophy, educational theory and practice, human science, literary theory and even physics and the traditional pure sciences. In

his essay "*Curriculum Beyond Stability: Schon, Prigogine, Piaget*," curriculum theorist William Doll, Jr., links Schwab's idea of the practical with Donald Schon's concept of the reflective professional who regards practice as an art (Doll, 1988, p. 114).

Doll considers Schon's reflection-in-action model, which calls for a curriculum model which moves away from the traditional Newtonian paradigm. This model would acknowledge that human reality contains "zones of uncertainty and irrational processes," more closely resembling our modern reality. In Schon's model, the educator creates knowledge of how one works in practice, not solely by applying knowledge that has been generalized and formalized by others. This knowledge does not stem from prior intellectual activity but is created by problems at hand--"created knowing" which occurs continually in practice. Just as life is not a copy or generalization of textbooks or generalized theories, this model would reflect life/reality as a series of existential situations linked by personal associations.

In the Piagetian sense, this model does not view knowledge as a copy or mirroring of reality; rather, it is a personal and active construction of reality. Schon calls for the educator to look intuitively, metaphorically, personally at the situation at hand, searching for anomalies and reflecting on actions in process. In addition, a reflective practitioner needs to recognize, accept, and perhaps appreciate that reality is chaotic, without pre-determined order.

William Doll also advocates a rejection of the Newtonian paradigm, replacing the "measured curriculum with a transformative curriculum." This curriculum is not defined as a preset order which precedes instruction, but as the process we engage in when we teach and learn with our students. Essentially, a transformative curriculum is based on change, focusing on qualitative changes in the participants--educators

and students—as they engage in the curriculum. Curriculum is not simply a course to be delivered. Unlike the traditional, stable, linear model, a transformative curriculum is considered as an active process of change, moving from one structure to another.

This curriculum is also informed by the Piagetian concept of life as auto-regulation; that is, that a living organism does not simply submit to exchanges with the environment; rather, it channels and directs it. Doll links this with transformation as inspiration for the concepts of self-regulation and finding directions for development. In addition, the structural reorganization that is central to transformation can occur through internal or external forces.

In order to achieve transformation in the curriculum field, movement beyond the Newtonian model which has dominated curriculum thought is needed. Doll posits that major attitudinal changes are required. At the practical level, this would imply a willingness to open curriculum to public scrutiny and critical debate. The curriculum must undergo change in its active processes; ends must be envisioned ends, not absolutes. Most importantly, teacher-student relationships must undergo major changes. Participants must move towards increased understanding of each other and the educator's role needs to move towards Schon's vision of the reflective practitioner. This goal seems well served by the self-reflective process of autobiographical writing.

A further consideration of autobiographical method as a means to acknowledge and explore the paradoxes inherent to human experience is explored in William Pinar's (1988c, pp. 134-153) discussion of issues in qualitative research which takes its title, "Whole, Bright, Deep With Understanding" from Virginia Woolf's *The Years*:

There must be another life, here and now, she repeated. This is too short, too broken. We know nothing, even about ourselves. We're only just beginning, she thought, to understand, here and there....She held her hands hollowed; she felt that she wanted to enclose the present moment; ...to fill it fuller and fuller, with the past, the present and the future, until it shone, whole, bright, deep with understanding.

(Woolf, 1937, pp. 427 - 428)

With this aim for understanding in mind, Pinar acknowledges the value of qualitative research as a means of achieving human understanding. The qualitative perspective, which includes Pinar's advocacy of autobiographical method, is described as "epistemologically sound and politically progressive," understanding that "human life is movement, conflict, resolution, each thesis and anti-thesis opposing each other in ways which give birth to a new order of understanding" (Pinar, 1988c, p. 151).

Autobiographical method may result in a common language for pedagogy found between educational research and teachers. The constant tension and questions of subjectivity and objectivity are central to those of us involved in educational endeavours. Autobiographical method acknowledges the paradoxical nature of human existence, and this concept was central to Edmund Husserl's idea of the *époché* to explore experience. This method requires that we distance ourselves from the experience in order to come closer to it. Simone de Beauvoir uses the *époché*, or phenomenological reduction, to advocate the necessity of close scrutiny in the reading of our own autobiographical explorations of educational experience. De Beauvoir praises the existence of paradox:

The antimonies that exist between means and ends, present and future, they must be lived in a permanent tension....In setting up its ends, freedom must put them in parentheses, confront them at each moment with that absolute end which itself constitutes and contests in its name and means to win itself.

(1948, pp. 133-134)

Focusing on Pinar's notion of wholeness as deep understanding, we might explore the paradoxical possibilities of achieving "whole sight" within the context of a post-modern world. In his essay, "Imaginary Homelands," Salman Rushdie claims that human beings do not perceive things whole. Rather, meaning is perceived through fractured lenses, broken mirrors, and fragmented perceptions/ fragmented selves and identities (Rushdie, 1991, p. 12).

Expanding on this view, I would suggest that perhaps it is more valuable to have the multiple lenses, responding to multiple selves; perhaps, the inability to look at the world as it is, in its realness/fragmentation, leads to paralysis and loss of meaning. Just as we may consider the provisional nature of all truths and certainties as signals of modernism, we must also accept the fragmented, paradoxical nature of our world. Perhaps the acceptance of vision through these fragments, these bits and pieces of human life, are what move us towards the light of understanding. Perhaps this is our paradoxical hope; that by seeing through the multitude of lenses that are the fabric of human life, we may become "whole, bright, deep with understanding."

Bodywriting: Creating Dialogue Through Narrative

...writing should become music and penetrate the senses directly. For this poetry is necessary...it is not the writing of emotion and the senses, which I seek. I want meaning to enter the body by some other route, not the mind....I like it best when I am submerged in symphony, and when the world in my head becomes a world of images and music. Writing has for too long been without magical power. In me, everything was married, love and body, heaven and hell, dream and action....As a woman, I shall put together all that was divided and give birth to everything that was killed.

(Nin, 1971, pp. 40-41)

This example of autobiographical, action research is written in the genre of poetry, a genre that seems to challenge and respond to the difficulties often encountered in the expression of an authentic female voice. I define this work as action research, applying the premises of Clermont Gauthier in his essay "Between Crystal and Smoke: Or, How to Miss the Point in the Debate About Action Research" (1992). Among his "Ten Daring Statements Concerning Action Research" are two which seem particularly relevant: "Action research is not in the least concerned with a physical place in particular. It can take place anywhere--in one's office, in one's mind...." and secondly, "Action research is above all a matter of language" (p. 193).

As an educator striving to make sense of my teaching world and my world of human experience, it seems essential to remember that phenomenological reflection is a process that both discovers and constructs meaning. "Meaning does not *lie* in experience. Rather, those experiences are meaningful which are grasped reflectively" (Schutz, quoted in Chamberlin, 1974, p. 131).

Autobiographical writing provides the space for critical reflection, learning and transformation of experience, the re-invention of the self. The validity of personal writing as research is supported by my belief that in order to teach well, we need to start the understanding and "knowing" process within ourselves in order to be able to participate in "indwellings," the term used by Aoki to describe meaningful dialogue between people. As Peter Abbs states: "we can only teach from our own being, there is nowhere else to teach from" (1981, p. 495).

Aoki (1992) speaks eloquently of the necessity to uncover the layers of teaching. The first layer is the "black box," primarily concerned with the outcomes of teaching rather than understanding teaching itself. Here, teaching is understood as behavior. In this first layer, the lived world is "willfully ignored" (p. 18).

The middle layer, according to Aoki, can be perceived as understanding teaching theoretically and scientifically. Ethnography, anthropological, and psychological studies fall into this layer. Although these approaches have a "seductive appeal" in their pragmatism, they still largely ignore "the preconceptual, pretheoretical fleshy, familiar, very concrete world of teachers and students" (Aoki, 1992, p. 19).

The innermost layer is perceived as understanding teaching techniques, strategies, and skills, the idea of "effective" teaching that we are often promised as an ability easily absorbed at teaching workshops. Aoki advocates the peeling back of these three layers of understanding teaching, "all uncannily correct" in their own ways. Aoki calls for a moving away from mere correctness, reorienting ourselves towards the finding of the "essence" or true nature of teaching. "This search calls for a break from the orientation that may blind us" (Aoki, 1992, p. 20).

Aoki's phenomenological approach seems inextricably linked with autobiographical approaches that seek to explore lived experience through narrative texts. The "storying" and reflection that may be encountered in the writing process seem integral to the discovery of the "essence" of teaching and of the world of lived, felt experience, allowing "the unsaid to shine through the said" (Aoki, 1992, p. 27).

In the collection of poetry *Tango Through the Dark*, the moments stopped are lifted from my life or multiple lives. The stopping and recognition of moments are found in my multiple lives as a woman: mother, lover, wife, daughter, sister, friend and teacher/scholar. The conflicts of the inner self are reflected in the struggles between creation and maternal love; between realism and romanticism; between past, present and future; in the Socratic dialogues and tensions between teacher and students; between educators and colleagues, and through the attempt to find significance through the articulation and reconstruction of the writer's world. It is an attempt to let "the unsaid shine through the said."

Through this exploration and evolution, the physical is perceived, in a sense, as symbolic of a spiritual world. The poems attempt to convey the immediacy of felt experience, using imagery that writes through the body, implying the constant, inextricable force of the sensual that informs human experience, specifically the female experience.

Throughout the manuscript, the metaphors of dance and music, particularly meaningful and evocative to the writer, represent bindings of language, sound, poetry and memory in ways that resonate, evoking recognition of the strength and power of music and sensuality to define and colour the reliving of experience. In the writing of

this manuscript, my *currere* is symbolized by the metaphor of the dance as signifying the course of life and educational process.

As a reader, writer and educator, my work is informed not only by music and dance, feminist writers, post-structuralism, literature and curriculum theory, but also by women writers and educators, some of whom took great risks to express their convictions within the constraints of their social frameworks.

Echoing Barthes' idea of the "radical exploration of writing" as a tenet of modernism (Sontag, 1982, p. xxi), Robert Kroetsch refers to literary history as "radically storymaking" (1982, p. 196). In considering literary texts, fictions and narratives are forms of storymaking which may provide means to make sense of our world. Narratives may help us construct meaning. Similarly, if we consider curriculum and life itself as texts, our self-reflective attempts at autobiography or reflective, thoughtful living and practice in the phenomenological sense, provide other forms of storymaking. The engagement in self-reference that uses the past within self reference seems crucial to this post-modern sense-making. By situating ourselves within a particular history, we may engage in discourses which are meaningful.

In his book of essays titled *Hopes and Impediments*, Chinua Achebe expresses the liberating power of literature:

The fiction which imaginative literature offers us...does not enslave us; it liberates the mind of man. Its truth is not like the canons of an orthodoxy or the irrationality of prejudice and superstition. It begins as an adventure in self-discovery and ends in wisdom and humane conscience.

(Achebe, 1988, p. 153)

Consequently, this manuscript is a personal attempt to create imaginative literature in narratives of self-discovery which respond to the problem of expressing the feminine voice in a true written representation of experience. By taking this risk and meeting the challenge myself, as a teacher of writing, I hope that the disclosing of my world will enrich my teaching of students who attempt to script their own worlds through narratives.

In writing autobiographically, creating links between my world of experience and language through imaginative writing, the considerations of texts include Barthes' notion of subverting established classifications and the separation of genres (Sontag, 1982, p. xi). This research moves back and forth between creative texts of poetry and other forms of scholarly discourse in ways that perceive text and textuality as placing meaning into the world. This does not imply any fixed meaning ; rather, it is the search for new meanings that may astonish us: *étonne-moi*, as Barthes expresses it (quoted in Sontag, 1982, p. xi).

My quest is to discover and exemplify scholarship with a difference, as C. Christ defines it, scholarship that " emerges from an ethos of eros and empathy" (1987, p.58). The quest to develop this essence of scholarship is explored through my written text, a text that attempts to voice Barthes' comparisons of "teaching to play, reading to eros, writing to seduction" (quoted in Sontag, 1982, pp. xvi-xvii).

TANGO THROUGH THE DARK

Poetry

by

Rishma Dunlop

Tango Through the Dark

*And she danced; she danced with the music and
with the rhythm of earth's circles; she turned with
the earth turning, like a disk, turning all faces to light
and to darkness evenly, dancing toward daylight.*

Anaïs Nin, *Cities of the Interior*

Tango Through the Dark

PART ONE:

THE WALTZES OF EROS

*the mind dances with itself,
taking you by the hand,
your lover follows
there are always two,*

William Carlos Williams, "The Dance"

Tango Through the Dark

Tango Through the Dark

Our dance draws breath,
as we seek the gasp of light.
It sustains us, pulsing in
the bent neck of history.

It leans into
the curved arm of life,
shouldered on our
dark tangoed embrace.

It anchors me through
the small of my back,
as we clench our faith
between our teeth.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Tango Through the Dark"

Since movement is basic to men and women, its artistic expression is a ready-made vehicle for the poetic mind, and particularly for the mind escaping into a world of imaginary reality, the most private province of the self.

(Sorell, 1981, p. 342)

The dance, the tango, provides me with an aptly sensual metaphor for the course of life, my *carrera*. For my voice, the sensual, the love relationship, and the semiotic are known entities of my experience, providing me with an anchoring needed through the uncertainties and unknowns that form my reality.

This poem begins my exploration and questioning of what expresses the feminine voice in writing that attempts to write the body as text. Like the French feminist writing of Luce Irigaray, I am convinced of the integral link between language and sexuality, opposed to the traditional psychoanalytic discourse. "In opposition to the logic of 'phallic' discourse--characterized by linearity, self-possession, the affirmation of mastery, authority, and above all unity--feminine discourse must struggle to speak otherwise" (Sulieman, 1985, p. 49).

In terms of educational experience, moving forward in the dance towards knowledge and self, towards light, demands courage and the willingness to take risks; often, it is the "clenching of faith between teeth" that opens us to experience and learning.

Tango Through the Dark

Isolde

She is scripted, aloof,
composed
in a properly bridled score,
but the aria begins and
he kisses the nape
of her neck,
the hollow of her back,
the inner curves of her knees
and she is undone.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Isolde"

In "Isolde" the metaphor of adultery is also analogous to the seductive power of newness of experience, the acquisition of new knowledge. It is the excitement of the unfamiliar that can weaken us at the knees, stunning us with the recognition of the paradoxes of desire. This is the sensation of *étonnement* that Barthes seeks. Acknowledged here is the strength of eros as desire that has an astonishing power to appear to the self with urgency and force. Often, it has the fearsome power to remain beyond the reach of social order and conventional morality.

This poem also explores the idea of the social roles of women, their scripted, written score, metaphorically placed notes set into place on the musical manuscript. Ultimately, the music of seduction, the promise of new knowledge of the opera, provides the "undoing" in a departure from the written life.

Tango Through the Dark

*Love--bittersweet, irrepressible--
loosens my limbs and I tremble.*

Sappho

Tango Through the Dark

Carrefour

His touch makes her bones electric,
infusing her body
with a slow-brandied heat.
She is loosened by the imagining,
the aesthetic knowing
of new hands on her skin.

Suddenly, she is jolted,
muscles and limbs numb.
She detaches herself, warm-lipped, from the web.
Fingerprints freeze her flesh
as she drives home,
hands white-knuckled
on the wheel.

She undresses in the dark,
peeling silken layers,
wedding her body into his familiar curve.
In the alchemic moonlight,
she is cool-faceted glint,
diamond-banded, love-knotted,
and warmed to the difficult knowing,
of patterned heart and nerve.

She is laced through with duplicity;
she is pulled, tendon-tight.
The night is sinewed and scented
by dreams of another.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Carrefour"

In this poem, the human dilemma of the *carrefour*, reaching the crossroads, is represented within the metaphorical framework of adulterous temptation. The paradoxical nature of desire, indeed the acknowledgement of the ever-present existence of desire; social constructs of male-female relationships; the concepts of will and conscious choice, and the seductive appeal of the unfamiliar are explored. These are the forces of eros that shake our careful constructions of familial life and the marriage bed, the tests of desire to the endurance of love.

The perspectives of three major French feminist writers, Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva, differ widely in specific theoretical approaches to the body and the notion of desire. However, their shared intellectual bond lies in their exploration of the psychoanalytic basis in Lacan's rewriting of Freud and their interest in the work of Derrida. All three writers agree that *l'écriture féminine* is closely connected to the body, its rhythms and drives. In the emancipatory process that is writing, the body ceases to remain purely biological; it is written and socially constructed from an early age:

[Kristeva and Irigaray] have shown that some concept of the body is essential to understanding social production, oppression and resistance; and that the body need not, indeed must not be considered merely a biological entity, but can be seen as a socially inscribed, historically marked, psychically and interpersonally significant product.
(Gross, 1986a, p. 140)

Tango Through the Dark

The term crossroads appears also in Taubman's consideration of Lacanian and Socratic discourse:

The teacher who takes a position at the midpoint , at the point between Plato's Socrates and Lacan, at a point where he or she is the midwife or engages in midspeak, where she or he subverts her or his own position as the one who knows, assumes an identity that is at the crossroads. The teacher who takes a position at the midpoint assumes an identity that can always be drawn in one of two directions-up toward the eidoi from which the master returns or down to the unconscious from which it returns as the master or in another profession....The pull is always there. And yet it is the midpoint that seems most attractive, most rich. How, then, can we maintain it without being pulled irrevocably in directions that are dangerous?...I suspect the answer lies in moving in both directions at once, in a dialectical operation that takes into account the very real world that we teachers inhabit.

(Taubman, 1992, p. 230)

Barthes uses the term crossroads in his definition of the writer as "the watcher who stands at the crossroads of all other discourses" (quoted in Sontag, 1982, p. xxi). This still leaves us, of course, with the promise of the eternal dilemma, the constant crossroads and the ongoing search for the midpoint among the multiple contradictions and pulls in different directions in our lives.

Tango Through the Dark

Lady Murasaki

She offers him the scroll
of her disquiet heart and
they drum
the intricate rhythms
of a thousand disparate truths.

They unmask the faces of hunger,
soaring through
salted pools of gold epiphanies
to the light-hot shudder of being.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Lady Murasaki"

The title of this poem alludes to Murasaki Shikibu (b. 978?) author of *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*). Lady Murasaki's novel was written in the early eleventh century in Heian Buddhist Japan. The narrative explores ancient court life, love, marriage and desire with a subtle eroticism, clothed in poetic language. In the stories of Murasaki and her clansman Genji, the quest for self and fixed identity is ultimately illusory.

This poem is the narrative of a post-modern Lady Murasaki, writing self-reflectively about her life, informed by an acceptance of her "disparate truths" with their various rhythms, desires, and satisfactions.

Tango Through the Dark

Interlude

Tonight, you made tea
and we sip slowly,
dipping biscuits
through the strains of opera.
I trace the skin of your hand
and our fingers tangle together,
savouring the soft, sweet
taste of dusk.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Interlude"

We write to heighten our awareness of life....We write to serenade our lovers. We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in the retrospection.

(Nin, 1966, p. 13)

This is a moment captured, remembered, tasted, never forgotten. It is written and felt through the sensuality of the body and through the ever-present beauty of music that colours and evokes memories in my life. It is an acknowledgement of human experience that is felt and remembered in a multiplicity of ways, registered through the senses.

Tango Through the Dark

PART TWO:

BODYREADING: MAPPING THE HEART

*I've stitched my dress with continents,
bound to the equator round my waist.
I waltz to a steady rhythm, bending slightly.*

Nina Cassian, "Knowledge"

Tango Through the Dark

Bodyreading

Your hands are a gift
to me.
They have mapped me,
explored in books
with terrains
of luminous manuscripts,
honeyed narratives,
pages turned in my lap.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Bodyreading"

*Everything is language, and the body is always a
written, never a "natural body."*

(Conley, 1984, p. 57)

This poem takes its title from an essay by Madeleine Grumet (1988, pp. 453-472). The writing in this poem expresses its narrative through the imagery of body as country, terrain to be charted and mapped, and body envisioned as book, a text of lived experience. During the history of human experience between youth and death, we search for a geography of the soul, an internal landscape that will slip us into place in its contours.

This poem is my expression of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body subject: all the elements of historical, social, political influences contained in the self are brought together into the body, a country or place where we live in felt experience. These metaphors express the acquisition of knowledge in all its multi-hued facets as pages of the book are turned. It is an experience of pleasure, felt through the body of the woman-scholar.

Tango Through the Dark

Lunar Eros

Her heart
jolts against
the bony cage of her ribs
on the long nights
wet with the moon.
Her locked soul
is keyed in his mouth
in the cadence of breath.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Lunar Eros"

This poem provides a metaphor, through the sexual body imagery, for the acquisition of knowledge. The ribcage becomes analogous to prison, imprisoning the heart and the mind. The search for the internal geography to house the soul is satisfied by the imprint of another. The speaker is released by the lover or teacher in finding the key to new knowledge. This learning is erotic, seductive, capturing the breath in the unlocking and the slipping into place.

Tango Through the Dark

Elegy for Sarajevo 1993

Your land dismembers itself,
limb by limb.

Your maimed children
stare at me
from the late night news
on the television screen.
I am haunted
by the dim lights
of their gouged eyes.
I am salted
by the blistering tears
of the sightless
in your decaying realm,
longing to soothe their wounds
with my touch.

May you taste the bitter stain
in the place that cradled you.
May your carnage heal your dust,
cleanse the skin of your earth.
May your breath be resurrected
by the human cantos of radiance.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Elegy for Sarajevo 1993"

*In the desert of the heart
Let the healing fountain start.*

W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats"

This poem is a prayer for the finding of mercy in the midst of the horrors of "ethnic cleansing" that rage between the people of Bosnia. It is an expression of the helplessness and powerlessness that I feel as I watch the misery as a North American, distantly connected by the media.

The poem expresses my need to mother, to hold those children, as if somehow my mother's touch could provide a magic healing. It is a poem of anguish that uses the metaphor of the dismembered body to stand for country and maimed land. It is an appropriately powerful metaphor for the embodiment of horror and senseless bloodshed that manifests itself to me through images of limbless children.

Hope lies in the discovery of mercy, the capacity for feeling in the human heart, the promise of a new generation of newborn hope, unjaded by the past of unthinking violence, in the music of hope, luminous songs of rebirth.

Tango Through the Dark

PART THREE:

DANCING GIRLS: MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

The institution of motherhood cannot be touched or seen: in art only Käthe Kollwitz has come close to evoking it. It must go on being evoked, so that women never again forget that our many fragments of lived experience belong to a whole which is not our creation.

Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, p. 276

*Mother
I write home
I am alone and
give me my body back,*

Susan Griffin, Epigraph, "Mother and Child"

Tango Through the Dark

Aubade to a Newborn for Cara

I hold you close,
trying to inhale the pink gleam of dawn
in your sweet flesh.

You are tender-grasped, yet bruised
by my intensity.
I strain to absorb you.

Where is the link
of the twist of sheets,
mouth-kissed skin,
to this glimmer of genes?
Through chasms of pain
the unseeing eye has laboured
to whole sight.

You are sensuous, strange,
cradled in the shining
golden embrace of new morning.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Aubade to a Newborn"

My poem "Aubade to a Newborn" was written as a response to the birth of my first child, my daughter Cara, in 1982. The intentional play on the traditional aubade, or morning song to a lover, provides inspiration for the paradoxical elements of childbirth which seem some of life's most intriguing, gripping mysteries to me. The sometimes contradictory perceptions of sexual life, conception, birth, tenderness, yet fierceness of new motherhood and the separateness and strangeness of the new infant are all explored. The poem attempts to convey the often overwhelming multiplicity of tensions and voices that assail a mother after childbirth.

In "Stabat Mater; The Paradox: Mother or Primary Narcissism," Kristeva's text acknowledges the experience of the mother. Kristeva reflects the continuing exploration with forms and representations of language in text, exposing new kinds of discourse and possibilities for articulation of the woman's experience. Kristeva writes her text in columns, with personal, associative writing on one side, and more traditional academic discourse on the other, creating an interplay of texts that accepts the paradoxes of the mother's felt experiences:

FLASH-instant of time or
of dream without time; in-
ordinately swollen atoms of a
bond, a vision, a shiver, a yet
formless, unnamable embryo.
Epiphanies. Photos of what
is not yet visible, and that lang-
uage necessarily skims over
from afar, allusively. Words
that are always too distant,

Tango Through the Dark

too abstract for this underground swarming of seconds, folding in unimaginable spaces. Writing them down is an ordeal of discourse, like love. What is loving for a woman, the same thing as writing.

(Kristeva, 1987a, pp. 234-235)

Tango Through the Dark

Child

In my baby's eyes,
I am locked
in self-extension.

I do not know
where I finish
and she begins;
she is my pact
with life and death
and I must dance for her,
so she will know the uncommon
steps.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Child"

"Child" expresses Lacan's idea, in the rewriting of Freud's psychoanalytic discourses, of identity established in the mirror of the other. Here, the child is mirrored in the gaze of the mother, from whom she begins to form her identity. As mother, I am locked in the prisms of her eyes, inextricable from her gaze.

The teaching of the dance, the uncommon steps, becomes analogous with my teaching self, extending to my students. I want them to step in new directions, estranging the familiar in order to dance towards knowledge and richness of experience in their lives. This notion of estrangement from the familiar calls to mind Kristeva's idea of the link between exile and intellectual work: "Writing is impossible without some kind of exile." Exile, in this sense, represents a *dépaysement* enabling "a ruthless and irreverent dismantling of the workings of discourse, thought, and existence..."(Kristeva, quoted in Lechte, 1990, p. 299). In this way, exile becomes a means to open up to possibilities and challenges, "coming to terms with difference and the other--not destroying them..."(Lechte, 1990, p. 80).

Kristeva's expression, "*étrangers a nous-mêmes*," strangers to ourselves, becomes synonymous with foreigners, others, the unconscious, difference, feminine, becoming a dynamic of innovative intellectual thought (Lechte, p.81).

Tango Through the Dark

Sanctuary

My children smile,
encircling me with their laughter
a pealing sonic radiance,
and the jaded mantle of my day
falls as
I gather them to me like
armfuls of flowers.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Sanctuary"

"Sanctuary" is a poem that acknowledges the sudden, astonishing moments in the relationships between parents and children. It explores the genuine moments of refuge from the contradictions and pressures of everyday life that exist and are keenly felt within the recognition of the unconditional love of a child. The moments when I am struck by these realizations are moments of purity and pleasure, fragrant flowers amidst complex, hectic days. These moments are my sanctuary.

"Sanctuary" is also a recognition of the spontaneity of joy in a child's laughter, that Wordsworthian "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" that can cut through the often conventional *sang-froid* of our adult world. Childrens' laughter has the power to open up the universe, reminding us in our quests for knowledge, to remain seekers of innocence and joy (Dault, 1990, p. 70).

Tango Through the Dark

*Every lip against my lips
conceived a star
and floated on the night river of my memories.*

Forugh Farrokhzad , "On Earth"

Tango Through the Dark

Nocturne

*Darkness, darkness, be my pillow
Take my hand and let me sleep.
In the coolness of your shadow,
in the silence of your deep.*

Jesse Colin Young

I nurse the baby,
her body tightly curled between us.
In the pillowed warmth of our bed,
we breathe to the seething rhythms
of summer-scented night.

I escape into the cool of midnight
to the water's edge.
I bathe in the music, whispers
of grasses and trees,
and the sighing fragrance of lilies.

I invite the blackness in,
sucking pleasure,
mouth to velvet sky.
I am seeded by whole, deep night.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Nocturne"

Poetry is...the language of our night-self, in which are imbedded the seeds of all we do and are in the day.

Anaïs Nin

Nocturne is a return to the primal, the semiotic and the sensual in the framework of womblike imagery. The nursing mother welcomes the night as a lover who satisfies the needs for primal intimacy, for constantly converging multiple selves, and in the bodywriting process, for beauty and creativity.

...The seeds of many lives, places, of many women in herself were fecundated by the moonrays because they came from that limitless night life which we usually perceive only in our dreams, containing roots reaching for all the magnificence of the past, transmitting the rich sediments into the present, projecting them into the future.

(Nin, 1966, p. 44)

Tango Through the Dark

Cradlesong for Rachel

Her easy smile
never needs coaxing;
it is everpresent
on her child-woman's face.

I drift back
through the ebb of time,
to the rocking of the cradle,
smooth pine against my thigh.
Her eyes, shining black crystals,
are incandescent truths,
loomed across the
articulate white silence
of moonlit nursery.

I give her to the tidal pulls
of sleep and dreams,
my hand curved beneath her heart.
I wonder at her seamless,ness,
searching for the blue-skinned grips
of iron hands
in the tearing out.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Cradlesong"

This poem marvels at the easygoing nature of my youngest daughter. Her steadfast pleasantness and the smile that rarely leaves her face are constant sources of amazement to me.

In the writing of this poem, I express the wonder at the sweetness of this child and compare it to the paradoxical contrast of her birth. It is a mother's reflection on the pain and violence of childbirth, and on the nature of the child created, who is untouched by this "tearing out."

Flash on the un-
namable, weavings of ab-
stractions to be torn. Let a
body venture at last out of its
shelter, take a chance with
meaning under a veil of
words. WORD FLESH.
From one to the other, eter-
nally, broken up visions,
metaphors of the invisible.

(Kristeva, 1987a, pp. 234-235)

Tango Through the Dark

Slow Dancing 1972

*Layla, you've got me on my knees, Layla
I beg you darling please, Layla*

Eric Clapton

The basement party is permeated
with smoke and beer.
Sweet sixteens slow dance
to "Colour My World"
coupled and cleaved
to each other in
moist sweat.

We wear angora sweaters
in pastel shades of infants,
fingernail pinks, powder blues and sweet creams.
We are scented with innocence, musk and fruit
Love's Baby Soft, Eau de Love, Love's Fresh Lemon.

"Stairway to Heaven" sends
thrill notes down our spines
into our tight blue Levis.
Suburbia fades into lush oblivion
as the electric guitar strokes
us into desperate need.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Slow Dancing 1972"

This poem returns to adolescence, memories of the parties in suburban, West Island Montreal. It is a return to the body of youth, of the female adolescent, now remembered with clarity and a sense of reconciliation with that youth, unclouded by the inner conflicts, uncertainties, torments of adolescent emotion. It is a recognition of what this time was, shaded and coloured by the influences of popular culture and the pervasive music of the day which constantly revive memory.

Any text that may teach us something about our pedagogic nature is bound to aim for a certain hermeneutic: restoring a forgotten or broken wholeness by recollecting something lost, past, or eroded by reconciling it in our experience of the present with a vision of what should be. This kind of text cannot be summarized. To present research by way of narrative text is not to present findings, but to do a reading (as a poet would) of a text that shows what it teaches. One must meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and, as well, be consumed by it.

(Van Manen, 1992, p. 451)

Tango Through the Dark

Soja, Raj Kumari, Soja

for Kartar Singh (1928 - 1990)

"Sleep, princess, sleep."
My father's voice is hushed
and my mother steps
from the ashes
through the wreckage.

From the flames,
his voice flows into
the sirdar's daughter.
I am his liquid narrative,
tongued in our lullabies.

I am cradled by
memories and words,
silk and saffron threads
love-woven, tangled
through the burnished sheen.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Soja, Raj Kumari, Soja"

...the greatest confluence of all is that which makes up human memory--the individual human memory....The memory is a living thing--it too is in transit. But during its moment, all that is remembered joins, and lives--the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead.

(Welty, 1984, pp. 113-114)

This poem is an elegy for my father, Kartar Singh, who died suddenly in 1990. I never imagined being without him.

This poem represents a pedagogy of death, a finding of a dialogue with myself and others that looks through death and sorrow, discovering that in the journey through, I find life. I find my father living in me through his words, his song that is passed on to my children, through a living, rich tapestry of memories that forms the fabric of my life.

Tango Through the Dark

PART FOUR:

THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF MARRIAGE

*Fifty years he has devoted his brain
to this one design
and his body to hers.*

*She wants to know,
when did marriage begin, then?
He cannot answer.*

Nancy Holmes, "Changing Your Profession, 1882"

*And in his heart my heart is locked,
And in his life my life.*

Christina Rossetti

Tango Through the Dark

*Will he always love me?
I cannot read his heart.
This morning my thoughts
Are as disordered
As my black hair.*

Lady Horikawa (12th century Japanese poet)

Tango Through the Dark

The Wedding

I am submissive today,
swathed in a sari of shimmered pink
with borders of deepest purple
dipped in gold brocade.
Not the usual bridal red.

I am submissive today.
I could not even dress myself
not knowing how to wrap the miles
of silk around me.
My "aunties" dress me, pleating and
tucking me into an illusion
of exotic grace.
Auntie Leena and Auntie Sarla kiss me,
telling me that I am beautiful
but the reflection in the mirror
seems a stranger.

I am submissive today.
My hands have been painted,
decorated by women who have the art,
in paisley swirls of henna
that have dried, orange-red
on my palms.
I am encased in necklace and bracelets
of gold and I wear violet orchids
against the black of my hair.

I am submissive today,
searching desperately for you.
I cannot see your white face,
incongruous
for the sake of my parents.
You were submissive today and
in that moment, I loved you for it.

I am submissive today.
I cannot see your face because
the ceremony has begun and

Tango Through the Dark

my head is covered and bowed
before the book.
And I must follow you as you
lead me, around the book.
I must follow you, paced, guided
and directed by men: father, uncle, cousin,
Paul,
held and moved lightly by the elbows
as if, fragile,
I might not find my way
to you.

I am submissive today.
I am married the first time in a language
I cannot understand.

I find your face and
the book is replaced by another scripture.
We are married again by the United Church
and I can feel the ease in your mother's
heart at the Christian ministry.
I find your eyes as we are double-ringed
in gold and our hands entwine,
relaxing into the familiar language.

Down the aisle, we are garlanded
in neck-ropes of marigolds
by my mother, my Aunty Jit, Kaye,
in a blur of embraces.
We emerge through kisses to sunbeams,
air fragrant with showers of rose-petals
blinding us.
My parents sweep the petals from my face
and in your eyes
their smiles are mirrored.

Later, in my gossamer-flesh dress
my father twirls me, laughing, on the dance floor.
I toss the clutch of orchids and freesia
ribbons streaming across a sea of virgins
into my sister's uplifted hand.
And I spin into your arms.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "The Wedding"

"The Wedding" tells the story of my wedding as a retrospective memory. I came to Canada at the age of one and a half. My father, a Sikh from Punjab, was a biochemist who came to this country in 1958 on a post-doctoral research fellowship with the National Research Council. In those early years in Ottawa, my mother, a former school teacher, and my father and I lived in an intellectual community, an atmosphere of international, multilingual friends of many different faiths. In those days, as a child, I never thought much about race or difference.

Later, we moved to Montreal, to the West Island suburb of Beaconsfield. At that time, this was predominantly a white, Anglo-Saxon community. However, possessing the privilege of education and upper middle class economy, I lived the life of the suburban teenager, never brought up in strict observations of faith or cultural tradition, rarely concerned with the problematic considerations of race, culture or faith.

In 1979, I married a man who came from a New Brunswick family, with a mother of Scottish heritage and a United Church tradition. My husband and I tried hard to satisfy both families in the upholding of tradition, feeling that it was appeasement for our untraditional living style and feeling that this was how things should be done--for our parents.

In the remembrance, these snapshots of the wedding provide me with a recognition of the submissiveness of the bride and the patriarchal nature of the Sikh

Tango Through the Dark

wedding ceremony; indeed, this is true of most traditional wedding ceremonies across cultures. In this context, the irony is especially striking as the Sikh faith and scriptures claim equality of the sexes.

It is through the regressing back autobiographically and in the explorations of academic scholarship that the curious questions of language, culture, tradition, and a consideration of life as racial and gendered text become more apparent and problematic. Particularly vivid in these memories is the sense of how distant from myself I felt-- as if watching another passive self, like an actor in a meta-cinematic film. Yet, in the end, there is reconciliation of these memories as the ceremonies were encircled by enduring familial love and affection, forging rich unions in the differences.

...I found the world out there revealing, because...memory had become attached to seeing, love had added itself to discovery, and because I recognized in my own continuing longing to keep going, the need I carried inside myself to know--the apprehension, first, then the passion, to connect myself to it.

(Welty, 1965, p. 52)

Tango Through the Dark

*If they grew now in a forbidden garden
Princes would covet what they could not buy.*

Yu Hsu an-chi (ca. 843-868)
"Selling Ruined Peonies"

Tango Through the Dark

Ornaments of the Heart

*She is more precious than rubies,
And all the things you may desire cannot
compare with her.*

Proverbs 3:15

He clasps the pearls
at her nape as
she drifts along
the edges of truth.

She unbuttons the sheath
of artifice
and the inner flesh
is unveiled.

She unpins the brooch
of destiny
and steps away
from the sedate minuet.

She unchains her ruby heart,
craving
the fierce grip
of a dark erotic psalm.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Ornaments of the Heart"

This poem explores the sometimes superficial surfaces, the outwardly projected personas and veils which represent social constraints and expected roles for women. The reflections are framed in the images of the gifts of love, adornments and jewels, as symbols of artifice that belie the living breathing desires and true voices that simmer under the surface of social behaviours and conformity, obscuring true dialogue with the "other."

Irigaray urges a reconceptualization of male-female relationships in which the tensions accept attraction, difference, autonomy, but not the objectification of the other. This perception moves towards the validating of separateness of each sex as well as its connectedness to the other (1987, p. 124).

Beyond the classic opposites of love and hate, liquid and ice lies this perpetually half-open threshold, consisting of lips that are strangers to dichotomy. Pressed against one another, but without any possibility of suture, at least of a real kind, they do not absorb the world either into themselves or through themselves, provided they are not abused or reduced to a mere consummating or consuming structure. Instead their shape welcomes without assimilating or reducing or devouring.

(Irigaray, 1987, p. 128)

Tango Through the Dark

Sweet Talk

My voice cuts through
the house
with the honed edges
of my words.

You say nothing.
I need a surface, elastic,
passionate,
to rage against,
not your stolid, wordless wall.

My venomous syllables
spill through
the silence.

I should kiss you
tender-sweet
in a familiar waltz,
but I ache;
my mouth is bitter,
acid-tongued.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "Sweet Talk"

*It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to
judge where you are.*

Eudora Welty

This poem explores the inability to converse, to find the "in-dwelling" (Aoki, 1988) of meaningful conversation with another. It also explores the expression of anger, the need for language, for communication and response and it is a recognition of the ability to use language with power.

My anger is never manifested in physical, violent ways; those elements are always finely controlled, within the social constructs of accepted, calm behaviour. Rather, it is manifested in an ability to use words with skill and strength, sometimes with the ability to cut to the bone, to wound. It is a recognition of where I sometimes stand in relation to others.

Tango Through the Dark

*Upon what instrument are
we two spanned?
And what player has us
in his hand?
O sweet song.*

Rainer Marie Rilke, "Lovesong"

Tango Through the Dark

You and I

You and I
have known the chase,
the blood's wild fever
to inhabit each other's skins
in the hunt that seeds the soul.

You and I
have known this yet
faceless child,
the third embodied
in our embrace.

You and I
are makers
and the made grows
in reply against my bone,
seeking light along the blade.

This is the strength
of our tangle of flesh,
you and I.
Hold me
tight
against the fear.

Tango Through the Dark

Notes: "You and I"

This poem is a dialogue, wife to husband, woman to man, that explores the mysterious connections of sexual life, creation, and birth. The fear of parenthood, of "the third" in the embrace of the married couple, and the overwhelming feeling of powerlessness and fear of the forces of natural life are expressed.

As with all pedagogical dialogue, in the learning through exploring lived experience, I am constantly struck by the fact that it is the unknown, the feeling that we are somehow not in control of our bodies or our destinies that elicits the sensation of fear. The risk takings and explorations necessary for richness of educational and lived experience seem to challenge our instinctual pull towards the easier routes of familiarity, comfort and security.

Tango Through the Dark

PART FIVE:

SOCRATIC CAESURA

*I want to learn the way
of writing poems
as a way to you.*

*If you love me,
come. The road
I live on
is not forbidden by impetuous gods.*

Izumi Shikibu (10th-11th century) *The Diary of Izumi Shikibu*

*...there are ways of thinking that we don't know
about. Nothing could be more important or precious
than that knowledge, however unborn. The sense of
urgency, the spiritual restlessness it engenders,
cannot be appeased...*

Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*

Tango Through the Dark

On Teaching Poetry

I am crisp,
my voice staccato
against the walls of the classroom.
Under my tailored flesh,
the images of morning
rattle in my brain--the chattering of children,
the clatter of breakfast dishes,
the winding drive along Highway 97
to campus.

I focus on my students,
listen to the rustling and shuffling of papers.
The Basketball Boys sprawl, lean-limbed,
spilling out of their desks,
their sneakers constantly fidgeting.
There is an audible groan
when I mention poetry.
The 40 something woman in the second row says,
"I can't **do** poetry."

I take a long drag
of my coffee,
feel it flow warm,
deep in my throat,
filling the hollows of my body.
And I begin.

Teaching, I am calm,
my voice soothed into lyric hum
as I try to **do** poetry, speaking of
language, passion, sorrow, love,
moments keenly remembered and recorded,
trying to uncover the breathing tissue
in the walls of the classroom.

I rivet them with my eyes,
wrap them in my voice,
willing them to

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peel back their skins,
pellucid over the paradoxes,
the metaphors, the metaphysical,
the rhythms and meters
of transcribed heartbeats.

And we begin, my students and I,
the difficult task
of **doing** poetry,
living with each other.

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Notes: "On Teaching Poetry"

Wit is the only wall between us and the dark.

Mark Van Doren (quoted in Thomas, 1993, p. 875)

It seems to me that the appeal of self-reflection in our texts lies in the openness to irony, parody and the paradoxical use of self-conscious art or art-as-art as it engages with the historical, social and political, commenting on the aesthetic world and the realm of experience. Laurie Ricou indicates this self-conscious humour while acknowledging the critic's need to situate him/herself in the subtitle of his essay, "Journal Entries from a Capitalist Bourgeois Patriarchal Anglo-saxon Mainstream Critic" (1986, pp. 205-15). This sense of playfulness and the ability to challenge assumptions seem vital in order to engage our students as readers and writers to experiment with language and with established constructs.

In my poems about teaching, it becomes evident that I write in a post-modern vein from a perspective of wit and self-parodying reflection. I see wit as invaluable to self-knowledge and it is a source of strength to me to be able to draw on humour and irony as support for my enthusiasm for teaching.

In addition, what emerges in the writing is the desire to encourage students to find the poetic, the aesthetically beautiful in their own worlds of experience, under their own human skins and in their hearts. This is the quest for celebration of the mortal condition that Yeats seeks in poetry: "Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing/For every tatter in its mortal dress," (Yeats, 1955, p. 475).

Tango Through the Dark

Business English 112: Revolutionary Blues

The classroom is buzzing
in martial chorus.
They are drafting a petition,
indignant voices inform me,
against some administrative evil
that offends their rights and sensibilities.

I am pleased to see them
politicized, mobilized into
articulate expression
for a cause.
Often, it is so difficult
to draw out the threads of enthusiasm
and I exhaust myself in the pulling,
unravelling.

At last, I think,
I can put theory into practice.
Assign the collaborative writing
of an authentic document, memo format,
not some senseless example,
imaginary drivel from the textbook.

Next class, they proudly present me
with their document.
It has been eagerly sent to the Dean.
And my heart sinks at the misplaced modifiers,
the sentence fragments and the spelling errors.
The revolution has been lost in the proofing.

We begin again.

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Notes: "Business English 112: Revolutionary Blues"

This poem continues with the perspective of wit and self-parody, poking at my constant search for teaching strategies that seem relevant and of the real world. The writing explores the teacher's imposition of expectations on the students and the constant "beginning again" from new perspectives that are a reality of teaching life.

Tango Through the Dark

The Professor

He produces a book a year
cultivating the intellect,
trapped in rhythms
of restrained monotones,
netted words
and empty syllables.

He wears
the slightly rumpled look
that has become his skin,
spirit closing, shutting out
the disordered pleasures,
the laughter of body and soul,
locked in
patterns of falling language.

But there are days
when I find him.
I touch him with my eyes.
As he turns the pages
of my manuscript
flickers of hands unveil
silver flashes
of lost selves,
moments of grace.

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Notes: "The Professor"

The Professor explores the nature of university teaching life and the patterns of expectations that sometimes restrain and obliterate the very essence of the teaching self. In this poem the layers of teaching that perceive the profession as behavior and theory need to be peeled away in order to find the world of lived experience, the "fleshy, familiar, very concrete world of teachers and students" (Aoki, 1992, p. 19).

The poem's narrative also expresses the mysterious nature of aesthetic perception. What we grow to love and recognize as beauty often has little connection with social perspectives of physical beauty. This poem explores the perception of connections with the mind, the senses, the heart, the increased understanding that makes us **feel** beauty in our relationships with another.

Tango Through the Dark

The Claim of Philia

*Those who write know the process.
I thought of it as I was spitting out my heart.*

Anais Nin

In the act,
the sword scrawls of ink,
dark pools of fluid
staining uncharted sheets,
imprint the struggle,
the tip prying open
the chambers of the heart,
through the slant of tongue.

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Notes: "The Claim of Philia"

*Our teaching and our authority become transparent
in the face of the claim of philia, a claim that
demands that we let our language speak us even as
we speak it.*

(Pagano, 1992, p. 529)

Tango through the Dark is a collection of my first poems. In the poem "The Claim of Philia" I explore what it was like to write the poetry and the process I went through to find my voice as a writer. For me, the writing of the manuscript represents the type of educational process that I hope to encourage and support in my students. The writing required autobiographical research as rigorous scholarship, self-reflection and exploration of my world, the quest for articulate expression and refinement of text, and facing the "fear of the open heart."

"Fear of the open heart" is the expression used by Constance Rooke in her book of the same title, to express a condition that faces Canadian women writers. Rooke takes the phrase from Mavis Gallant's short story, "The Image in the Mirror," perceiving it as a female expression of Northrop Frye's notion of garrison mentality:

We come, then, to the question of what writing has to do with the fear of the open heart. Writers communicate, by definition, and their perennial subject is the human heart--so that it may seem they ought, again by definition, to be on the side of open-heartedness. But writers often proceed by indirection.... woman's long experience of indirection and introspection and the need to consider the feelings of others has, I suspect, been a significant factor in fiction that tells the truth at a slant.

(Rooke, 1989, pp. 21-22)

The writing of this poetry has been a journey to increased self-knowledge through a determined effort to consider the open heart in the process, or at least to realize what determines the slants to truths or things left unsaid or unexpressed. Writing autobiographically increases my understanding of others and where I stand in relation to others. It has been research and educational process that has enriched me and developed my pleasure in creating imaginative text.

The creating of this manuscript has been a dialogue of pedagogy. The writing has evoked an understanding of the feelings of my students as they undertake writing projects. In particular, I have recognized in myself the same hesitancies and conditions that women students express in my classrooms. The fear of the open heart has the power to constrain our voices.

I have found that in order to truly write the self, finding the voice that articulates clearly and most eloquently, I have had to overcome this fear of the open heart. The discoveries and articulations of voice have been encouraged by friends and colleagues, especially by poets and teachers, Nancy Holmes and Tom Wayman. In my teaching world, my students need to be encouraged and inspired in the same way if they are to become effective writers.

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*in the woods of your
own nature whatever
twig interposes, and bare twigs
have an actuality of their own*

*this flurry of the storm
that holds us,
plays with us and discards us
dancing, dancing as may be credible.*

William Carlos Williams, "The Dance"

Tango Through the Dark

In this very curious age, when we are beginning to require pictures of people, their minds and their coats, a faithful outline...may possibly have some value....For a study of history and biography convinces any right minded person that these obscure figures occupy a place not unlike that of a showman's hand in the dance of the marionettes: and the finger is laid upon the heart. It is true that our simple eyes believed for many ages that the figures danced of their own accord, and cut what steps they chose; and the partial light which novelists and historians have begun to cast upon that dark and crowded place behind the scenes has done little as yet but show us how many wires there are, held in obscure hands, upon whose jerk or twist the whole figure of the dance depends.

Virginia Woolf, "Phyllis and Rosamond," p. 17

Writing Life as Teacher and Poet

When teachers ask how close they should be to students they are not only asking "Who am I in relation to these students or this student?" and "Who are these students or who is this student in relation to me?" They are also asking questions about what they want from students and what students want from them. These are questions of identity and intention...

What does a teacher want? What is a teacher's intention? However these questions are answered, they are answered in language. Foucault, having learned from Lacan, teaches us that words ...are our intentions.

(Taubman, 1988, p. 216, 223)

...one keeps learning by teaching fiction or poetry because every reader's response to a writer's call can have its own startling, suggestive power...

(Coles, 1989, p. xix)

Where has the imaginative journeying through autobiographical text taken me? The creation of multiple texts, of text within text, has taken me to places where the postmodernists--Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva, and others, live within me, into the textuality of text. This dialogic relationship with the world becomes, for me, a way to create text in the form of my own narrative and understand it in terms of where I stand in life as an educator.

I have attempted to make my narrative texts rich in the sense of Max Van Manen's definition. Van Manen (1992, p. 450) speaks of the need for text in the dialogue of pedagogy to achieve a richness, to be concrete in its exploration of life's experiences. This richness engages us and invites dialogue and response.

In addition, Van Manen calls for text to be *deep*. Depth is seen as a notion that orients text to meaning, requiring an openness to fields of experience. Research and theorizing that simplify and reduce life can distort experience in shallowness, failing to reveal the "depthful nature" and "contours" that enrich human experience.

Consequently, informed by Van Manen's perspective, I have tried to create a text that reflects my lifeworld, imbued with *deep* experiences, fundamental ambiguities, delicious paradoxes, mysteries and richness. It is for me a text that teaches in a hermeneutic sense, something about pedagogic nature in its restorations and reconstructions of past experience and its reconciliations with the present. It is, I hope, poetry that invites dialogue and encounters with a recognition and enrichment of experience within the reader.

In searching to find the words and language to express my experiences as a woman, I realize that in the classroom and in the home, I encounter others in ways that move back and forth in the multiple tensions inherent to life: between public and private self, familial life, sensual and sexual life, and between social, political and pedagogic discourses. As I write, I know that what enriches my exploration of self is the conscious seeking out of language that is deeply centred in the sensual and the familial self. Primal intimacy seems inherent to the woman's voice and it informs my dialogues with others, colouring my teaching world. This voice, for me, does not encourage or imply sentimentality; rather, it is grounded in rigorous scholarship, the

quest for increased understanding of the constant dialectic between public and private experience.

The striving for language to express this reality becomes an educational experience for me, in the writing of poetry. The countless drafts, hundreds of hours of editing, caffeine overdoses, refining, searching for the most expressive word, the "spitting out of my heart" have revealed to me that the initial quest to describe a definitive, "authentic self" is not possible. I have multiple selves that are woven together by common threads to create a multi-hued fabric of identity that is constantly in transition.

In considering the debate about "authentic self" William Pinar's essay "Autobiography and the Architecture of Self" considers notions of authenticity, self, and autobiography itself through poststructuralist ideas. Pinar's autobiographical work has explored the idea of reclaiming the self from the false or frozen forms acquired by individuals through the process of schooling as they "educate" or are "educated." This reclamation was accomplished through the process of *currere*, the autobiographical method influenced by phenomenology, existentialism and psychoanalysis. This reclamation of the authentic self would require the investigation of educational experience through autobiography. Pinar's conclusion meets my own in this autobiographical investigation: that is, there are only fictive selves in the Nietzschean sense. "Nietzsche envisages not the destruction of the conceptual world but rather ...its deconstruction--that is, its transportation into a realm of aesthetic illusion and play" (Megill, quoted in Pinar, 1988a, p. 16).

Therefore, it is not sufficient to simply relate our stories or our biographical themes which would amount to "a false stability and unity of self for a false unity of

text" (Pinar, 1988a, p. 29). "We are not the stories we tell as much as we are the modes of relation to others our stories imply, modes of relation implied by what we delete as much as what we include"(1988a, p. 28). If we can undertake this process, discovering in ourselves what is included and excluded, we may be able, as Nietzsche states to "experience the history of humanity as a whole as [our own] history" (Pinar, 1988a, p. 30).

The struggle to express my woman's voice has been fraught with the same inarticulate fears of social conditioning that are expressed by my female writing students. If I write a poem that seems to have adultery as its central theme, will it adequately express multiple possibilities and openness to interpretation in the realms of experience and desire? How will this poem be read by others who know or do not know me? How will it be understood?

Woolf (quoted in Eagleton, 1986, p. 40) speaks of her fear of revealing "the truth about my own experiences as a body." Rich also states the anxiety of writing "about experiencing myself as a woman." For Rich, the act of writing becomes an expression of conflict between "traditional female functions" and the "subversive function of the imagination" (quoted in Eagleton, 1986, p. 40). Similarly, I am faced with these concerns. If I use the analogies of a woman's sensual experience to reflect my *currenre*/lifeworld, how will these poems be understood? Given my calm exterior, the polished persona that I present to the public world and in my professional teaching world, does the fact that I have expressed myself, exposed myself in a deeply personal way make a difference to those around me and our perceptions of each other? Does it matter? Am I not compelled to write anyway?

Rebecca Martusewicz, in her essay, "Mapping the Terrain of the Post-Modern Subject"(1992) reviews poststructuralist theory and links her considerations to the French feminist poststructuralists and curriculum theorists. In discussing the perspectives of Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Lacan, Foucault and Derrida, Martusewicz provides links to the views of the French feminists, Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. In the context of the autobiographical text I have presented in this research, Martusewicz's efforts to reclaim "woman" from male discourse, locating her in desire and difference, seem particularly relevant. The feminine is not the opposite of the masculine, rather, the concept of fixed identity (phallic principle) is denied in favour of a multiple, indeterminate feminine subject:

The interest in this work by the French feminist writers is to forge the 'antilogos weapon,' to take apart the dominant male discourses that define woman according to man's image of himself, and to articulate woman's difference in and through language.

(Martusewicz, 1992, p. 145)

Much of the criticism of the French feminist poststructuralists has been aimed at the charges that the "focus on language as the foundation of woman's oppression...is not sufficiently grounded in material reality" and the claim that *l'écriture féminine* is essentialist. However, as Martusewicz asserts, this criticism fails to acknowledge the neglect of the material reality of discursive systems and disregards the consideration of women's bodies as a "source of metaphor for multiplicity and difference"(1992, p. 145). Martusewicz concludes her essay with a question that has been explored in my research through autobiography and the reconstruction of self: What does it mean to be an educated woman?

[T]o live as feminist educators is to live a tension between a critical theoretical space and an

affirmative political space. It is within this in-between, this 'elsewhere,' that we must seek the educated woman.

(Martusewicz, 1992, p. 155)

In the end, after overcoming my own hesitancy to show drafts of my writing to colleagues, I welcomed their invaluable assistance and their support and encouragement. I realized that I have been conditioned to write in a certain way, in a traditional scholarly fashion, by professors who instilled this sense of the appropriate tone of academic writing. I was once told by an English professor that those who write well academically cannot write well in the creative fields of poetry or fiction writing. I was advised to refine one skill and to leave the other to "creative" writers, who were, by his implication, a different breed.

In July, 1992, I had the opportunity to take a wonderfully evocative course in contemporary curriculum theory at The University of British Columbia with William Pinar. Previously, I would never have dreamed of embarking on this autobiographical adventure in scholarly writing. Pinar, who has written extensively on autobiographical methods, invited and encouraged possibility, showing us by example how his own autobiographical writing was indeed an example of rigorous and epistemologically sound scholarship. By writing with us, collaborating in the learning process, he taught me to trust a deeply personal voice that informs my pedagogy and this confidence opened up doors that had always seemed closed or not quite open to me as an academic, as a teacher and as a woman.

By writing, by beginning from within, a recursive relationship with my own writing provides the space for re-invention of the self and for the transformations necessary for learning and teaching:

The ultimate power of autobiography is that we gain new insights or knowledge. By pulling us out of subjectivity a powerful story brings us to a new edge of awareness and pushes us over it. We acknowledge lived experience as complex, ambiguous, and contradictory.... Like the objectivist who desires one truth, or the subjectivist who desires an infinite number of truths, research becomes "relegated" when either view is adopted. But life is messy, educational life particularly so. And yet we need to keep close to the messiness so that it doesn't get forgotten.

(Brandau, 1988, p. 4)

Similarly, Roland Barthes' work explores autobiography and its reluctance to speak in the first person. Writing reflects new forms of stress and self-referential tensions and the writing itself becomes the record of impulses and the changing self (Sontag, 1982, p. xv). All my questions about how my writing would be perceived, in the end, were answered by my urgent drive to write, by the support and encouragement of writers and scholars whose work I respected and by a strongly evolving belief in the new directions and movement in my own development as an academic.

My paradoxes are plentiful. I bring this constantly changing self to the classroom. My students bring their selves. My colleagues bring other selves to their classrooms. Their paradoxes are plentiful. We must all situate ourselves in relation to our realities and our texts, our world/words, attempting to find a country or an imaginary homeland of common dialogue.

Linda Hutcheon, like others in the post-modern camp, states her increasing conviction in a post-modern view that in literary studies, perhaps the concept of the universal is only the creation of time, place, history, race, and gender. Therefore, there is an increasing need to situate the self in relation to text as perceived as reflective of the world. The post-modern impulse implies that meaning is created in the individual human consciousness and that all text has duality and paradox or conflict. Therefore, the idea of unity or wholeness is a difficult notion. However, as I have discovered through the process of writing text, I think that we might direct our thought in a phenomenological direction in considering world and self as inseparable, with the world perceived as woven by language, world as word-woven text.

What seems most appealing in the post-modern sensibility, as Hutcheon describes it, is the meta-sensibility or self-reflection (1988b, p. x). For teachers and students, this means an approach to text which includes an awareness that our understandings of reality are influenced by historical, social, political and human constructs. This movement towards an interrogative mode of open-ended questions with no final answers, directs our reflection to accept the inevitable paradoxes of our lives.

My own text is post-modern in that it attempts to blur the traditional borders between academic and creative writing and autobiographical writing, questioning the separateness of "theory" and "art" (Goldberg, 1987/1988; Hutcheon, 1988a; Ulmer, 1983).

This post-modern...practice interrogates and problematizes, leaving [the reader & writer] [reading & writing] position; it is in many ways a demanding [text]. It upsets learned notions of the relations between [creative/scholarly, subjective/objective,

process/product] by installing conventions of both (which are often taken for granted) and then by investigating the borders along which each can be opened, subverted, altered by the other in new ways.

(Hutcheon, 1988a, p. 299)

My *currere*/text is also a text that moves through autobiography towards literacy as explored by Giroux (1987) and Freire (1987), a literacy that enables us to be critical of our everyday lives and to recognize and accept difference in the human experience. John Willinsky, in his book *The Triumph of Literature/The Fate of Literacy*, eloquently calls for a movement in our energies as teachers to explore how literacy (as intimately connected with literature) reaches out to the world, rather than regarding the notion of literacy simply as a testable cognitive skill to be practised. Rather, Willinsky defines this new literacy as one that approaches literary work as inherently contained within language, "a representation intent on reconstituting some part of the world in its own images, and a source of pleasure in, and power over, the world." The word "pleasure" in reference to literary studies is a refreshing one; it is a word that is remarkably absent from most post-secondary literature course outlines. Willinsky continues:

This approach to literacy and literature calls for teaching students not only the specific skills of reading and writing but instructing them, as well, about how the social context of literacy operates, about how it continues to write a good part of the world we live in. We exist in a sea of texts that inform and govern our lives.... The social formation of our world/word is a matter of who writes and who is written, what counts as graffiti and what as a paid political message, whose voices are heard and how the scripts of a postliterate workplace and media are fashioned. The fate of literacy is still our future, our text, our life.

(Willinsky, 1991, p. 4)

In *Professing Literature*, Gerald Graff ends his account of the history of the professionalization of literary studies with a quote by James Kincaid:

Abandoning coverage as an impoverished ideal, we might begin by imagining an ideal course....Wouldn't it seek to define the subject matter, literature, and to discuss the various and competing assumptions about texts, language, meaning, culture, readers, and so forth that we make? Wouldn't it show these assumptions are themselves constructions, that there is considerable debate about such things as texts, about where meaning resides, about the importance of gender, about the relations of these things to historical situations? Wouldn't it also show that these assumptions were not themselves innocent, that they were value-laden, interested, ideological? You are starting to suspect that this is a course in theory. And so it is. One either smuggles it in or goes through customs with it openly.... We need to teach not texts themselves but how we situate ourselves in reference to those texts.

(quoted in Graff, 1987, p. 262)

In considering contemporary curriculum discourses, efforts to understand curriculum have ranged from divergent and sometimes convergent perspectives, as political, phenomenological, aesthetic, autobiographical and gendered texts to name just a few approaches. In addition, critical theoretical approaches to literature such as: close-reading/formalism, structuralism, deconstruction, Marxist criticism, feminist criticism, and reader-response criticism, provide frameworks for the development of teaching strategies which may provide linkings between discourse and lived experience.

Consequently, the development of teaching practice which encourages cultural and practical literacy needs to be aimed at fostering social reflection and understanding of the social, historical and political forces that affect and influence the use of language and textual practices in writing. This approach to curriculum advocates the belief that students must recognize the connectedness between past and present dilemmas and is therefore enhanced by perspectives explored in autobiographical writing.

As writers and educators and learners, the belief that the process of becoming and knowing is continuously evolving should motivate us to write our experiences without distancing ourselves from the inconsistencies or contradictions that exist. Jelinek comments on this process in *The History of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present*:

Contemporary women are more likely to view [a] sense of being unfinished more positively than earlier generations, who were more easily demoralized by their ambivalence--their divided loyalties between work and the expected female roles. Today, this struggle continues with less self-deprecation. Now it can be condoned as a constructive process in becoming a self-affirmed human being....Disjunctive narratives and discontinuous forms are more adequate for mirroring the fragmentation and multidimensionality of women's lives.

(Jelinek, 1986. pp. 187-188)

Despite the sense of different realities which may exist in texts, as a teacher of literature, it remains my conviction that it is an identification with and a recognition of self in the story of the "other" that makes a student's experience with literature one that touches, grips, resonates, holds tight to the sensory consciousness, urging a

return, a re-reading, offering a multiplicity of ways of seeing and knowing. Despite the differences in texts, in realities, and in the multitude of "imaginary homelands," our universal must still be within the realm of the human heart and its capacity for feeling. This quest for scholarship that embraces the heart in an understanding of the world and selves is eloquently expressed by Christ:

The ethos of eros and empathy reminds us that at the root of our scholarship is eros, a passion to connect, the desire to deepen our understanding of ourselves and our world, the passion to transform or preserve the world as we understand it deeply. At its best, scholarship becomes a way of loving ourselves, others, and our world more deeply.
(Christ, 1987, p. 58)

I am driven by the seeking to find language to express lived and felt experience, trying to come close to Anaïs Nin's idea of writing that enters not through the mind but the senses. This to me is fundamental to human experience, the "unsaid" shining through the "said" that Aoki speaks of, the shining through of felt experience. In the effort to find the language, we may be able to come closer to the worlds of our teaching classrooms in meaningful ways, relating to students by seeking to find a common dialogue that inspires, reaches into the heart and the senses to form connections in our minds and our written words.

Human life--indeed all life--is poetry.
We live it unconsciously, day by day,
piece by piece, but in its inviolable
wholeness it lives us.

(H. F. Peters, quoted in Nin, 1976, p. 36)

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