

**WRITING AND REWRITING FEMINIST AND IRREVERENT TEXTS:
POETRY, NARRATIVE, PEDAGOGY AND LIFE**

by

RENEE ADELLE NORMAN

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Department of Language Education

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This narrative thesis presents a collection of creative writing that autobiographically traces a story about coming to writing and transforming through writing. The creative writing is structured so that the themes are re-worked through additional sections of writing which contribute to the research. This research approach is adapted from the two-step process of narrative interpretive inquiry described by curricular theorist Dr. Ted Aoki. Such a process builds upon a phenomenological revisitation of lived experience with a post-structural consideration of the possible meanings within experience as it is written and re-written. The inquiry within this thesis is also framed in feminist thought, interweaving the writings of French feminists Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, British writer/feminist Virginia Woolf, and several North American feminist writers and theorists. Such thought advocates autobiographical and creative life writing and journalizing. Further, the resultant, storied texts contribute to our knowledge of the particularities of feminine experience. This knowledge shifts and changes as the signs and signifiers of the texts are destabilized in the intertextual relationship between writers, texts and readers. Through the powerful process of writing and storying, the writer comes to examine and understand the selves while simultaneously writing these selves into text. Such learning parallels the recursive nature of writing in a back and forth movement that emphasizes how we learn to write as

we write to learn. Such learning becomes the means to reflect upon the significance of the pedagogical selves, bringing a more "thoughtful and tactful praxis" (van Manen 1990, 124-133) into our teaching, as well as a fuller understanding of the writing and reflecting process for students.

The approach of this thesis consists not only of writing in various genres, but selecting them and shaping them into a text. The thesis identifies and discusses an egocentric story that specifies how a woman writer and teacher became through writing, and how this becoming begins to transform to a subjectivity which is decentered in relationship to other subjects and other texts. The pedagogical implications of this story for curriculum practice are situated within the empowering teaching strategies which encourage the writing and which serve as a model for teaching practice.

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FOREWORD

The following poems were published in **English Quarterly**, Volume 26 #1, Fall, 1993, and included in an essay, **Rivers and Tree Roots: Two Writers on a Journey**. The essay was co-authored with Dr. Carl Leggo.

Journey Song
A Lullaby of Voices
Stories Not to Live By
Warning
Metaphorical Madness
On Second Thought
Awakening
Virginia Woolf's Alive and Well and
Living in a Co-op in False Creek

The following poem and narratives were published in **The Vancouver Sun newspaper**:

Power Games (August 28, 1993)
Conversations with My Children (August 7, 1993)
The Politics of Fear (December 18, 1993) and reprinted in **Herspectives**, Volume 6 #1, April, 1994.
Air Supplies (July 16, 1994)
Noisy, Noiseless Noise (October 13, 1994)

The following poems and narrative were published in **Common Ground**:

Judgement Day
Two Ghosts (September, 1993, Volume 12 #4)
In Celebration of Women
Firsts and Lasts (August/September, Volume 13 #4, 1994)

The following poems were published in **Prairie Journal of Canadian Literature**:

Shadow (Volume #21, 1993/1994)
First Love
Oxen on the Roof (Volume #22, 1994)

The following poems were published in **Contemporary Verse 2**:

If I Call Myself (Volume 16 #3, Winter, 1994)
This Is How It's Going (Volume 17 #2, Fall, 1994)

The following narrative and poems were published in **Inkshed Newsletter**, Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning:

Knowing Virginia (Volume 12 #2, December, 1993)
Toeing In
Twirling (Volume 12 #3, February, 1994)
Post-modern-What-Did-You-Call-It (Volume 12 #5, June, 1994)

Faces was published in *in/versions*, Winter, 1994.

Crazed Cookies was published in *Writing for Our Lives*,
Volume 3 #2, Winter, 1995.

The following poems are in press:

Everywomen in *Northern Woman Journal*

Language in His Foot

Post-modern Feminist Film in Room of One's Own

PRELOG

This text encompasses a series of logs which work in a way that differs from conventional narrative unity. These logs weave intertextual threads between and among the poetry, non-fiction, fiction, metafiction and drama within them.

The **Prolog** discusses the importance of writing and storying within a narrative, feminist and post-structural framework. The Prolog reviews the work of many theorists in order to offer a literary and pedagogical context for the thesis. The Prolog is layered into six parts, each of which considers different facets of feminist, autobiographical and post-modern writing and teaching.

The **Interlogs** which occur throughout the thesis interrupt the logs to remind the reader to re-consider the layers of textual and textural meaning, or to offer strategies and content for alternate readings. These interlogs vary in nature from poetry to anecdote to fiction.

The last four interlogs in the thesis play upon the theme of metaphoric writing which is an integral part of Julia Kristeva's theory about poetic text, which Kristeva characterizes as revolutionary, that is, operating within a political, historical and cultural context (Kristeva 1984). These four interlogs demonstrate how various forms of poetic text can "revolutionize" how we think about writing. The fourth interlog, *Re-fusing: Carnival*, relates the metaphoric and poetic world to the teaching world through the dramatic and literary conception of mask.

The **Polylog** is the longest log, the varied collection of creative writing which explores my life: family, scholarship, curriculum and pedagogy, feminism, the public and the private, truth and fiction, the writer's subjectivity and the selves. The Polylog consists of nine sections, which begin with a breaking of silence and continue with a progression of writing voices. These sections re-visit the experiences of my woman and teacher's life, moving through the transformation to writer and to a less egocentric writing subject.

Re-awakening is about the unravelling of the many layers of identity which have buried the writing selves. The realization that writing practice is vital occurs through the act of writing and through reading feminist texts.

Re-joy/sing is a celebration of home, family, joy, laughter and women, peppered with love, humour, earthiness and feminist awareness.

Re-traversing travels former ground but takes a deeper look at motherhood and what it means to be a woman-mother-writer-teacher.

Re-membering re-calls past pain, sadness and memories, particularly about miscarriage. This section depicts the welling up of pain and sorrow as more layers of the selves are peeled back and re-membered through writing. It is a longer section to re-produce the difficulty of such an endeavour. The several poems and the scene about miscarriage illustrate how a writer can write about the same event many ways and from

different angles, working and re-working the themes through writing about them.

Re-feminizing is an angry, hard-edged segment that makes no attempt to hide bitterness or rage or fear, drawing upon the more demanding aspects of being a woman and a teacher.

Re-visioning focuses on the inspiration and influence of Virginia Woolf, and begins to revolve away from selves-consideration into the realm of other subjects.

Re-configuring is a transitional section whose pieces shift in and out of egocentricity. This section is pivotal to the polylog, including the landscape of our selves, our world and the curriculum landscape. Here a link is made between the writing selves and the teaching selves; between the writing landscape and the teaching landscape. *Re-configuring* concludes with a poem that gazes outward again by re-connecting to others.

Re-constructing considers post-modernism in light of education, feminism and writing, coming to terms with some of the contradictions and ambiguities.

Finally, *Re-constructing* signifies the first stage of a transformation which is never complete, another beginning in a movement towards de-centeredness.

The **Monolog** steps back chronologically, and in the consolidated voice of the writer, re-tells parts of the polylog, particularly the story about coming into writing.

Dialog One works through some of the themes and features

of the Polylog. Here an interview with an "unknown poet" conveys other sides of the selves in conversation about the writing and about egocentricity.

Dialog Two works through some of the feminist aspects of women writers' texts and lives by placing journal entries and poems in between the words of other women authors.

Dialog Three works through some of the cultural, poetic and post-modern aspects of text and theory in a polyphony of voices and texts.

The **Analog** re-counts what is unsaid in the poetic language of the thesis by articulating how some of the writing came about. Journal entries and memories and narrative re-writing re-constitute some of the emotions and meanings of the polylog.

The **Illog** brings the thesis to a temporary pause through the semiotic and the unconscious, followed by the **Epilog**, a poem whose dwindling echoes symbolize that the poetic, creative text and the writing and teaching selves who live and re-live the text are without end.

Throughout the logs, the creative textual forms are connected with gerunds that begin with the prefix "**re,**" threading the thesis with a series of subtitles which color the intentionality and meaning in the layers of words. The use of the prefix "**re,**" followed by a hyphen, is a deliberate attempt to accent the movement, flux and multiplicity which characterize the material of this text.

The meaning of the prefix "re" shifts throughout the thesis, either suggesting a further exploration of the same elements or evoking an exploration of new material. This process dis/places the meanings of words and emphasizes that what is signified in the writing is without closure. The "re" signifies a non-linear back and forth movement in the writing that grows and multiplies with possibilities, producing offshoots of even more possibilities.

PROLOG

Re-germinating

Journey Song

Barefoot on the jagged silver stones and rooted twigs
of my landmarked journey
curious, unafraid, without a lanterned map
I twist and turn
following my own inaccurate sense of desolate direction
down a path where present love and laughter
line my way

I rest in watery brooks
(child-dappled gleams of starlit bubbles)
drinking rainwater drops of innocent uncomplicated nectar
which quenches my thirst
to be held and regarded with unwavering eyes

Then knowing I have stayed too long
have hidden in the soothing sight
of small bodies pressed close
to my unknown destination
must voyage on to other faded signposts
I navigate the sidewalk cracks
of a daring detour
into crossroads I am terrified to travel
that lure me there
with the ghosts of other wanderers
well-known travellers
whose gaze explained my untold need

Now alone in body
skin-dried from unwatered weather
I break the barrier reef of present time
and traverse the double highway
of a pain-prismed past

Barefoot still I split and fracture
into deadend ditches
darting first
to lush landscapes evergreen with murky memories
backtracking next
to darkened scenery concave with exorcised emotion
emerging at last
with the bloodsoaked toes of another weary wayfarer
unable to continue
my fractions dissembled across the miles of rainbowed roaming

Until the birdsong of my many voices
calls the treasured past
to count my present sense of jewelled losses

and briefly sings my journey song into a ghostly ear
I conjure up to bodily appear

Momentary peace then lulls the tempest
on my endless journey
and fleeting
checks desire
that overwhelms my fear

Rejuvenated
I travel on from here

*I feel myself slipping, falling, pitching down, down into the blackness
as I write and I can't help myself, I just keep falling down the black hole.
Down, down, past where Alice went.*

*And yet, and yet. How can I be a poet without passion, when that
passion is the part of me that gives rise to the poetry? How can I stop
from feeling or reacting? How can I avoid the tension when I did not
even want it or see it coming and it is the very thing that feeds my
writing?*

*I write my way out of the chaos of the tension and all the emotions
underlying the tension. So many words. I no longer hold the words back.
Reflective, soul-searching, repairing, understanding words. Searing words.
I don't want to overwhelm with my words, but I am sometimes in danger
of being overwhelmed myself. By words: mine, which spill out of me now,
connected to the deepest parts of me that feel everything so intensely.
Words without which I am lost, so dependent am I on those words to write
myself out of despair, confusion, unhappiness, perplexity. I am sometimes
in danger of being overwhelmed by others' words: words I don't always
understand; words I try to place in my new perspective as a writer; words
I always have to fight not to misinterpret. The memory of words from the
past resonating in my inner ear destroys any vestige of confidence in myself.
I return again and again to the words I write; let them take me out of any
pain or hurt or despondency; let them soar out of any jubilation or joy or
contentment. The words are my solace and my source and my stability. I*

drown in my words, too, even as I swim with them, and I know with certainty, every time I turn to a fresh, clean page and scratch the words there, that I have found both my salvation and my sorrow. The words pour forth unchecked, drowning me, drowning others. The words wash over me and my desires and fill me with longing, with satisfaction, with hope, with sadness, with security, with contradiction. I return to the words I write as if I had never abandoned them, as if they had not lain dormant for years and years, and I sigh as I write these words, knowing they are with me forever, but knowing, too, all the strife and stridency that they can cause, the pain as well as the pleasure...

Like the ocean, my writing is full of waves, at times tossing those caught in the movement of the water, as when a ship passes by close to the shore and heightens the thrust of the waves for a swimmer.

Like the ocean, my writing is full of life forms in various stages of growth or decay, but all contributing to the ecosystem, and needing to come to some balance in order to exist.

Like the ocean, my writing resonates with the sound of the water slapping against piles of rock--sometimes loud and powerful, sometimes gentle and quiet, sometimes so muted one must imagine the symphony of humanity in the sandy water.

Like the ocean, my writing can rage in a storm, strike out as if it were the end of the world, then spent, contrite, the water flowing rhythmically and calm once more, hold the wisdom of the world in the debris floating above the surface of the waves.

Like the ocean, my writing re-presents humanity and life and all that is entailed in the living...

Re-tracing

I am not the inventor of the telephone, nor did I swim across the English channel. I did not discover the Dead Sea Scrolls or write the Great Canadian Novel (maybe next year). I did not give birth to quintuplets or quell riots in an east end high school, rob trains or marry more than one man at the same time while commuting back and forth between families. There is no upcoming made-for-TV movie about my time in jail, or my murder of a daughter's schoolmate's mother, and I have never been unjustly accused of a crime, hijacked on an airplane, or detained in some foreign country (knock on wood).

I am relatively unknown, undistinguished and unremarkable, an ordinary citizen leading another ordinary life.

But something compels me to write of my woman's life. Something calls me to speak of my experiences as a woman, creatively, in the poetic and reflective and narrative forms that have become a vital part of my life over the last few years. Something burns inside me, smouldering until it bursts into a flame of words, the smoke circling my stories and poems, bleeding them into the air, the stories and poems giving off smoke signals I want others to pick up and read and remember. Like Ursula LeGuin who writes of stories told round the campfire (LeGuin 1981), I want to offer my words up to the flames of the metaphoric fire. I want to hear the written hush of a listening silence fall across the flickering firelight of the print before my story or poem is about to begin. I want to offer my words up

to this hushed silence, to the intensity of the fire, to the blood of the telling...

But by remembering it he had made the story his; and insofar as I have remembered it, it is mine; and now, if you like it, it's yours. In the tale, in the telling, we are all one blood. Take the tale in your teeth, then, and bite till the blood runs, hoping it's not poison; and we will all come to the end together, and even to the beginning: living, as we do, in the middle. (LeGuin 1981, 195)

Like Clarissa Estes (1992) who believes in the power of stories and the feminine spirit, the Wild Woman archetype, I want to write the stories and poetry of my feminine experience with emotion and integrity. I want to embody the events of the day and the moments of my life.

Moments of being, Virginia Woolf called them (Woolf 1976, 87). Those times when we see something familiar with such clarity that the world stands still; those times when we notice for the first time something in our world that is heart-rending or wonderfully funny or terribly sad or silly or unbelievably beautiful. And we write these experiences into words, giving them shape and substance. Giving them an afterlife. *"I make it real by putting it into words," wrote Virginia Woolf (1976, 72). "It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole..." (72).*

What drives me to write is as age-old as the story itself: a need to reach out and connect; a way to achieve recognition and some immortality; the hope of finding something I suspect may have been lost...

Re-legitimizing

Virginia Woolf wrote that ordinary women must write of their experiences so we know the details of their lives:

She never writes her own life and scarcely keeps a diary; there are only a handful of her letters in existence. She left no plays or poems by which we can judge her. What one wants...is a mass of information; At what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like; had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant? All these facts lie somewhere....
(Woolf 1992/1929, 58)

I am convinced that Carolyn Heilbrun's book, **Writing a Woman's Life** (1988), takes its title from Virginia Woolf's writing. Heilbrun profiles how many biographic accounts of women writers' lives were constructed and burdened by patriarchal interpretations imposed upon them. She discusses how many of these biographies, written by men, obscure and distort the women's lives, the unacknowledged anger, the details. Heilbrun analyzes how some women writers in years past revealed only certain parts of their selves, without reference to the hardships, the pain, the societal expectations (Heilbrun 1988).

In her essay, **Curriculum and the Art of Daily Life** (1991), Madeleine Grumet celebrates the ordinary, the everyday, the domestic, the home, calling upon everyday experience to be included in the curriculum as a vital source of knowledge, meaning and aesthetics:

But here is our dilemma: When these accounts [stories of home] are omitted from our scholarship, when we look elsewhere, anywhere for our sources, our reasons

and motives, we perpetuate and exaggerate our exile.
(Grumet 1991,84)

...woman's standpoint is one which honors the connection and intimacy between those who share the actual time and space of everyday life. The power of those who bear the babies and nurture them, who order the provision of food, decide what is clean and dirty, who wash the sheets and care for the aged is palpable.
(Grumet 1991, 84)

Hélène Cixous called to women: Write yourself (cited in Conley 1991, 52).

I can hear William Gass entering this exchange, commenting on autobiography in an age of narcissism and questioning the many autobiographical tracts which self-indulgently reveal all--the all being rather dull or overdone (Gass 1994). Enough with self-confessional personal histories that record the color of our new dress or our most recent transgressions or our whining wails about how many times we had the flu in any one rainy season, Gass might cry. But Gass' essay is written from the patriarchal point of view of those members of the population who have dominated the literary canon for years. Many women, Virginia Woolf included, might write that those so-called trivial details about women have been missing from the canon--or miss/represented--for years (Grumet 1991; Heilbrun 1988 & 1991; Showalter 1985; Spender 1989). Marlene Kadar rejects the term "autobiography" and favours "life writing," precisely because the former term has excluded important forms of writing written by women that tell of women's lives: diaries, letters, journals (Kadar 1992):

...life writing is the playground for new relationships both within and without the text...the site of new language and new grammars...the site of the other, and this other is "autobiographical" in one sense, and not at all in another. Autobiography proper requires too much unity of the narrative, and too much "objective" or reasoned thinking, too much author/ity of the author to be as irreverent as life writing can be. (Kadar 1992,153)

Carolyn Heilbrun even illustrates how poetry can write a woman's life (1988, 66).

Many feminist literary journals are committed to publishing the life writing of women in order to redress the imbalance which exists in the literary canon and to feature issues and images central to women's lives: **Common Ground**, **Room of One's Own**, **Contemporary Verse 2**, and others.

All writing is autobiographical, Donald Murray reminds us (Murray 1991). Hélène Cixous would agree (Conley 1991). Yet poet Di Brandt writes in the preface to her confessional book of poems, **Questions I Asked My Mother**: "Some of this is autobiographical and some is not" (Brandt 1987, n.pag.). Is Brandt excusing herself from any of the responsibility? I don't think so. My own experience at the outset of my own writing adventures confirms that all writing is indeed autobiographical, but that the "lies" in fiction are truths of their own and the "truths" in non-fiction can lie...

I noticed my husband, Don, eyeing my papers on the computer desk the other day, curious about their contents.

Then one day I read him a bit from my "Power Games" piece, the part about his playing basketball. His rib really was broken and we were laughing at all the catastrophes which occur at his weekly basketball

game, as regularly as the Thursday comes and goes. I was depressed at M.'s heart attack, he commented, but I never drove a friend to the emergency ward, he corrected precisely.

You have now, I muttered. And of course, I knew when I wrote that line that it was fictitious. And I understood instantly that preface that Brandt had written, and why, and moreover, I think she is very astute in this regard about the way some of us "write a life," with husbands/wives/partners/lovers/friends/mothers/fathers/children/hamsters peering over our shoulders, ready to check for accuracy, and who-knows-what-else. (Renee Norman's journal)

nothing you will ever do or say, she told me once, can hurt me as much as the writing of that book, questions i asked my mother. i'm so ashamed, i can't go out in public any more, everybody's asking me about it & about you: do you still love this daughter, why did she write that book? (Brandt 1990, 56-57)

letting the poet in me out: the wild, confused, angry, hurt woman child who had so many words swirling around in her head, & none of them her own. it took a long time, digging myself out...holding my life together while the stories exploded around, inside me...discovering women's writing, finding other women writers, finding myself, writing....(Brandt 1990, 54)

What we put into words, what we attempt to make "real" and "whole," in Virginia Woolf's words, what we chronicle can be viewed and re-viewed. When we turn a reflective telescope onto our world, what we put into words can have re-verberating ramifications. Telling the stories and poems of our selves and our lives also means that others can take a look through the telescope.

The ethics of such writing can be difficult to define. Is anything, any occurrence, there ready and waiting to be plucked off the idea vine and re-worked through the writer's gardening pen? If so, writers don't necessarily make good friends or

relatives. Poet Susan Zimmerman writes: *"Consider the selfishness of poets/their ruthless naming of lovers/the way they tell the truth..."* (cited in Leggo 1989, 105).

No fact, no detail, no anecdote is beyond the writer's hand and reach. Anything can be laundry for the word-processing wash. Writers take facts and fancy, embroider them, mend them, patch them together, and hang them out in the midday sun to dry. The final product's fictional aspects can seem the most natural, and the truthful bits can appear more bizarre than the red underwear on Great Aunt Fanny's clothesline. But still, within that finished product are fragments of something recognizable that reflect and refract bits of emotion and experience. And fragments that can border on invasion of privacy.

When I first began writing, I was very naive about the public and the private. Although I was certainly reluctant to share my writing with others, I wrote without considering all the ramifications of recording lives in print. I'd occasionally read some of my pieces to my family for their reaction. Mostly they paid little attention, the way a busy parent can sometimes distractedly comment to a child, "that's nice, dear," in reply to the child's excited exclamation that the cat is on top of the cupboard eating that night's dinner. When everyone eventually comes to, alert, sits up and takes notice, all hell breaks loose.

When I began seeking publication, it seemed the natural outgrowth of putting my thoughts and feelings into words. A way

to connect and be remembered. But it isn't easy to have a writer in the family. Just ask my daughters, whose names and antics have appeared several times in print. The first time one of my daughters saw an article where her name appeared, she commented with characteristic eight-year-old enthusiasm for my writing endeavour: "That's nice, Mommy." The second time received an "oh." But the third time. Well, by that time the thrill was definitely wearing off. "Couldn't you be a basketball player?" my daughter asked me sternly.

But some things need to, beg to be said and written. Because writing about our ordinary lives is a kind of writing that is important. Because I believe I should open my own many selves to the sort of scrutiny that writing brings. Because I believe I can attempt to examine my selves through what is written. Perhaps I can come to interpret my selves and my world a little better, a little differently, through my eyes and pen, reflected back to me in words. Writing the stories--and poems--of my life reminds me I am human.

Re-deciphering

There is a tension between the feminist desire to retrieve and reveal our life stories, and post-modern thought which acknowledges both how we construct these stories and how the words within them continually shift and fracture. What can ever be "real" and "whole" in such a context? What chronicle is ever completely "authentic"? I cannot resolve this tension, but I

have come to believe that perhaps this very tension is what prevents me from disappearing into a totality which consumes my lived experience as a woman. As a writer and a woman, I seek to write what will resonate with emotion, but I am also aware of the "trap of words" which Hélène Cixous locates (cited in Conley 1991, 133).

In writing autobiographically, the writing creates and constructs the autobiography, or as Kadar would say, the life writing. *"The woman of accomplishment," Heilbrun writes, "may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously, and without recognizing or naming the process" (1988, 11).* What we reveal, what we omit, how we choose to reveal...the omissions often say as much (or more) than the revelations. Ted Aoki calls this the said and the unsaid, commenting that this is where the poets play their part (Aoki 1994).

He said he writes the truth, and I think he also said he is not afraid of it. Nor am I afraid of my own truths. But I am not always certain that the truth I am writing about is the complete story, just small parts of it revealed momentarily and reflected briefly, and I worry that this distorts the truth. Sometimes the form and language of my words also seem to alter this truth so that it is even difficult for me to recognize. Yet if I were asked to acknowledge that this truth must be mine since it comes from deep within me, however I have stretched it out, turned it upside down, or destroyed it by conflicting images, I would accept this truth as mine, willingly. I only hope that some of these truths will at least be forgiven, if not understood. (Renee Norman's journal)

What is truth?

Breaking the Truth

To be true to my self
I am learning to try to write the truth
 But there are many truths to unlearn
 I have tried to learn the truth
The truth is trying
 I will try to learn true
I am encouraged to write my personal truth
(But I don't always tell it)
 The truth be told
 the truth told hurts me
 In truth
 the truthful words written truthfully trounce me
I shouldn't just write the truth
 I should tell it
 To tell the truth
 the truth tells me
 there is truth in silence, too
 (I write the truth
 and regret it hourly
 I don't tell the truth
 and regard it sourly)

The truth is
the truth hurts
 I don't like to face
 the
 truth
 I avoid truth if it hurts
 (Being true to your self can be
 relative to how much that self
 really wants to face.)

The truth is
 hard
 passionate, too
Do the lines of truth reflect back what is
 truth told
 truth full
 truth un-folded
 un-truth folded
The words of truth flow out of my pencil
 They feel true
 I re-read the words
 strong
 passionate
 true
 Is strong and true too hard?
 Does true passion hurt?

The truth is
the truth hurts me
 Should I stop writing the truth
 if others hurt, too?

I should remember
while truth reveals
it can never be recalled
 I wish the truth I broke
 didn't always break

James Clifford referred to how any truth can only ever be partial (1986).

"What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open," wrote Muriel Rukeyser (cited in Greene 1978, 223).

*"Do you know who (among us) was loyal, who was betrayed, who was a traitor, who saw the doors of the sky open? Will this be visible later in our poems? Has the history of truth begun?" asks Hélène Cixous in her play **Akhmatova** (cited in Conley 1991, xviii).*

"Tell all the Truth, but tell it slant," advised Emily Dickinson (cited in Moi 1985, 59).

The truth is...I write because I must.

The truth is...I write because I have a thesis to complete.

The truth is...I write to make known my woman's life.

The truth is...I write because I have a captive audience.

The truth is...in the writing and the re-writing and in-between the spaces, words, silences.

The truth is in the life.

Who cares? What's the point? Where's the value?

I care. That's the point. There's the value.

Re-defining

Yet another question beckons. What is pedagogic about writing a woman's life? I am, after all, a pedagogue. Not only do I teach my own children, but I teach other children in the public school system. My interest in writing and feminism intersects with my educational concerns, my life as an educator and a parent. Max van Manen eloquently describes our pedagogic undertaking as parents and teachers (1990). Within the phenomenological undertaking of writing and re-writing lived experience, writing serves pedagogy (van Manen 1990, 111). Writing is a method of thinking and reflecting, a means of understanding the significance of the lifeworld, an exercise of self-consciousness that brings us to a more thoughtful and tactful praxis (van Manen 1990, 124-33).

William Pinar believes that writing autobiographically is a process that is highly significant to education. In a lecture delivered at the University of British Columbia, Pinar described this process as one which makes us aware of a past that is influenced by psychological, social, religious and gender forces (1993). Such awareness is an opportunity to see the world a different way, a reconfiguration of ego that alters our perspective of the world. Pinar believes this alteration is important to education since he conceptualizes teaching as an instrument of self-expression that is highly personal.

David Jardine writes how interpretive inquiry begins with a sense of the significance of familiar instances of our lives,

our "being in the world" (Jardine 1992a, 55). These particular instances, these "texts," "must be read and re-read for the possibilities of understanding" that they call forth, a playful process that depends as much on exploration and "happenstance" as on the meanings in these texts (57). Such interpretive inquiry is pedagogic because it involves "the transformation of self-understanding" (60), "understanding who we are differently, more deeply, more richly" (60), or according to Gadamer's philosophy, understanding which "always must be renewed in the effort of our living" (cited in Jardine 1992a, 60).

Writing a woman's life is pedagogic through the transformation that such writing makes possible. I came late to writing but like Natalie Goldberg, writing became for me "the tool I used to digest my life and to understand" (1993, 19). "Writing became my vehicle for transformation, a way to travel out of...nowhere land...", author Natalie Goldberg explains in her autobiographical book, **Long Quiet Highway** (1993, 31). For me, this transformation is inextricably linked to feminist texts by and about women. Like Goldberg, I responded to feminism which stirred me to write. "Writing is a way to connect with our own minds, to discover what we really think, see, and feel..." (Goldberg 1993, 71).

In the effort of our living, we can live by the stories (and poems) that we write: past, present, future. "We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts," suggests Carolyn Heilbrun (1988, 37).

We can also live our lives through our own texts.

A million hands stitch, raise hods with bricks. The activity is endless. And to-morrow it begins again; to-morrow we make Saturday. Some take train for France; others ship for India. Some will never come into this room again. One may die to-night. Another will beget a child. From us every sort of building, policy, venture, picture, poem, child, factory, will spring. Life comes; Life goes; we make life.
(Woolf 1931, 150)

And Hélène Cixous writes: "Life becomes text starting out from my body. I am already text" (1991, 52).

Julia Kristeva suggests that we are produced in our texts as we produce them (Lechte 1990, 58), an eternal subject-in-process of a text-in-progress. When this text is a poetic rendering, it is full of jouissance, the life and bliss and joy and fullness of l'écriture féminine, a semiotic writing and a bodily reading whose materiality is realized in the musicality of language. I would add that this jouissance and this music resonate with the darker, stormier sensations and chords, all part of a woman's being-in-the-world. I concur with Kristeva, though, that writing produces forgiveness (Lechte 1990, 192). Writing also produces understanding.

Writing and re-writing a woman's life is a pedagogic "being-in-the-world" which generates and re-generates understandings important to the lives of all women. In her address about women and fiction which became part of the book, **A Room of One's Own**, Virginia Woolf conjured up an imaginary poet, Shakespeare's sister, who never wrote a word, who "lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here to-

night, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed" (Woolf 1992/1929, 148). Writing a woman's life brings to life this poet, one of Shakespeare's sisters, her lyrical and poetic words echoing endlessly and profoundly within the context of many texts.

What is the connection for me between such poetic writing, feminism and the teaching/parenting that I do? In confronting and facing parts of my selves as I write and in considering what this meeting holds for me, I am once more remembering, as British drama educator Dorothy Heathcote writes in **Of These Seeds Becoming** (1978), that the struggle is the journey. I am once more recognizing not just what it means to be human, but also what it means to be a woman. It seems to me this discussion is something important that all teaching and parenting could centrally consider.

In **Composing a Life**, Mary Bateson states that women should live their lives without daydreaming all the time; that it is creative pursuits which keep daydreams from becoming overwhelmingly unbearable (1990). Writing poetically enables us to daydream, recognize the realities of living a life, and construct a woman's life creatively, courageously.

I write them all there at Penelope's loom:
Carolyn Heilbrun
Hamlet's Mother
Virginia Woolf
Shakespeare's sister
Mary Daly
Dale Spender
my husband's cousin
who built an airy room for Penelope's loom
filled with shelves of glorious wool

and binder books of shared patterns from women
all over the world
and a computer, too
and many other women
whose creased faces I do not yet recognize or know
whose creased stories I am just beginning to unfold
and mine
reading writing designing weaving lives
with cosmic heavy metal soft or brilliant wool
weaving shawls
with colors some of which I've seen before
some that look very new and different
some I want to throw away
a color I think should dominate the fabric
another that should be muted on the border
interlaced with reflective threads of self and joy and pain
shawls decorated with story lives
to drape upon and warm my inner wall

However, interpretive inquiry as Jardine discusses it entails dialogue with many others, presumably whole, real bodies of others, in addition to one's reflexive process. How can personal and poetic life writing--the account of some of the instances of one's life--involve such conversations? How can such life writing avoid sinking into the mire of self-absorbed self-reflection and narcissistic whining?

I wish to stretch the boundaries of interpretive inquiry as Jardine discusses it in **The Fecundity of the Individual Case: considerations of the pedagogic heart of interpretive work** (1992) to include the Kristevan intertextual notion that no text exists alone. Rather, each text, each voice, each life, if you will, swims in a sea replete with many other voices, texts, lives, a swarming sea of humanity salty with the dialogue of other tongues. Sometimes these tongues have been silent and still many leagues beneath this sea. Sometimes these tongues have reverberated loudly as they dominated the turbulent waters.

Like the waves that lick the shore with each new rush of water, these tongues lap at the text of any life written anew. Such inter-textual inter-weaving invests life writing with the lives of many others. If we open the conversation to these many textual others, the dialogue provides a means of holding up one's own text in a mirrored sea which reflects all texts which have come before and all those to follow. In this way no text remains isolated and alone, one voice in the wild sea, absorbed only with its own murky reflection in the water. In this way a text, building upon all other texts, re-forms the way experience is shaped. No sooner do the words inscribe experience, another experience comes along and re-writes a life, the already written text be/coming a record of words subject to the multi-faceted subject who recorded them, subject to the multi-faceted subject who read them. And always, subject to the multi-faceted texts reflected in that mirrored sea of texts.

Verena Conley's deliberation of Hélène Cixous' writing and philosophy captures this "guilt" of intertextuality, this re-writing which occurs through re-reading, this re-reading which occurs through re-writing, an inter-textual inter-connectedness which is never innocent of the words and interpretations of others.

Reading then is writing, in an endless movement of giving and receiving: each reading reinscribes something of a text; each reading reconstitutes the web it tries to decipher, but by adding another web.
(Conley 1991, 7)

A text is always guilty, in an Althusserian sense. A text is a rereading, not only because we must reread

in order not to consume but also because it has already been read. We approach it with the memory of other texts, and there is no innocent reading as there is no innocent writing. (Conley 1991, 12)

These words, these texts, realize what Ted Aoki describes as a two-step process in narrative interpretive inquiry (1994): re/covering the meaning (writing a life), and constituting and re-constituting the meanings (re-writing a life). This re/covery and re-exploration of meanings can connect us to others on the earth, to other earth-dwellers, another profoundly pedagogic undertaking. For if, as pedagogues, we do not live deeply and consider this living, how do we reach those we teach? those we love? David Smith reminds us of a "*narrative phenomenological sensibility*," *the complexity and the importance of the lived condition, the "attention to life as it is lived..."* (1993, 11). I wish to broaden this consideration of lived life (always already in flux) to embody emotion as well as meaning.

Like Ted Aoki, I am an earth-dweller (Aoki 1991). I seek the ground beneath my feet, the smell of fresh soil when it is damp, put out the tip of my tongue to catch a drop or two of rainwater before it falls upon the earth and is lovingly absorbed. I also hear and see the way the horizon extends far beyond where I dwell, see and hear the distant songs I imagine are sung beyond that horizon.

As I am an earth-dweller, I live among other earth-dwellers, and I feel that dwelling, feel that living. I live and feel and know through my emotions as well as my intellect, my heart as well as my head, through affect as well as cognition, my senses as well as my mind, through artistic as well as scientific modes of knowledge. I know that the rainwater which dampens the earth I live upon is caused by water that is condensed from the aqueous vapour in the atmosphere and falls in drops from the sky to the earth, but it is the taste of this rainwater upon my tongue and my hair dripping in my eyes and the poetic words I

attempt to inscribe which give the factual knowledge life and depth and meaning. Emotion has left its trace upon my learning, and when I have felt its absence in my life, bereft, I have searched for it anew.

We can all dwell upon the earth, catch the rainwater upon our tongues, and touch, taste, smell, hear, see, feel the earth beneath our feet, the earth extending beyond where we dwell, the earth beyond the horizon. Our tears can replenish us the way the rainwater replenishes the earth, fall coursing down our cheeks until they reach the tips of our tongues, and mingling with the rainwater caught there, become one liquid, the earth's elixir, the earth-dweller's potion.

I believe the embodiment of emotion and meaning is important to re-writing subject/object dualism, an overreliance on scientific empiricism, and the denial of ambiguity, contradiction and multi-vocality. Writing is a practice for living deeply and considering our lives; re-writing is a means to explore the ambiguities and contradictions, to play poetically with the possibilities and so open up our many skins, our many selves and others, to the commingled blood pulsing through our beating hearts: the blood freshly drawn, or seeping in wounds, or dried in scars, or congealing on the blank pages of women's time...

re-nee in the poem's pores

the poem
a breathing space: Cixous' *souffle*
trace the
mythico-poetico-theoretico
take a
 breath
in between the lines
être:
 to BrEathe
re-breathing the space
re-producing the re-adings
to live is to write

naitre:

re-born through writing: **re-née**
re-inscribing the theory
re-forming the poem
exhaling short gasps between airless words
deepening the gift: *le souffle*
a hot wind blowing on the neck
of my respiratory voice

"renee"

invoking
sibilant puffs of air
(renee)
bREathing the silences
that drift by
like cottonwood in spring
asthmatic matter
collected on the white page

--renee--

an inhalator
the poem's pores opened
EXPLODING fire & air
re-flecting earth & water

suck the lips of muted mouths
until they bleed theory
shrieking words & silences
dripping the poem

Re-viewing

I occupy and balance many roles: teacher, mother, wife, feminist, scholar, poet and writer. My heart beats strongest when I can write of these many roles, out of these many roles...The song I hear that keeps me writing is full of the harmonious chords, melodic notes, discordant counterpoint and minor and major keys of my everyday life in this world.

Often I write of my everyday experience trying to make sense of what I think and feel and wonder. I write about past joys and pains, present hopes and concerns, future visions and

sorrows. I write about what moves me, stirs me, shakes me, makes me cry or laugh, what I see or notice or wish I could change, what is buried deep inside that has risen to the surface, clamouring to be released and swirling upward in those puffs of smoke circling overhead: details, images, memories, feelings, stories...

Under the blows of love I catch fire, I take to the air, I burst into letters. (Cixous 1991, 44)

I once wrote in my journal that each time something I write is made public, I feel as if I have just given away some part of me that I still need. Yet the compulsion to write continues, a terrible commitment and obsession. The drive to share that writing continues unabated, as if I must give away all of myself before I can be myself.

*Woman, as Cixous defines her, is a whole--'whole composed of parts that are wholes'--through which language is born over and over again.
(Minh-ha 1989, 38)*

*Writing is born when the writer is no longer.
(Minh-ha 1989, 35)*

Perhaps I seek such oblivion, re-born, as my own name, Renee, suggests, in the writing. No longer composed of the same parts I slowly gave up, but missing them, I am an apparition apportioned into poems and stories and other written matter: eyes replaced by words, images instead of ears, a nose of metaphors, ink to taste pieces of life-sustaining nurturance, and memories that probe like fingertips...

In the logs which follow, I feel as if I give away

everything and I am re-born in the writing. Re-born and re-written again and again. But wait. That is the beginning of no end. Let me begin at the beginning of the beginning.

endings of beginnings
fill me with misgivings
leaving me a sense of what is gone

I always hate beginnings
--dread the middle when it's ending
I cannot seem to cope with some aplomb

I think it must be harder
to accept the middle ending
when beginnings were so tentative yet tender

But I just know that when it's ended
and I move to more beginnings
I'll always feel it's part of me that's gone

There is no true beginning; writing is always already there, as Derrida said.... (Conley 1991, 8)

INTERLOG

Re-reading

When You Read My Words

When you read my words
remember they just light a moment
and the feeling's fleeting

When you read my words
remember words can lie
and I am playing

When you read my words
remember memories die
and facts are fading

When you read my words
remember that I measure
what you're weighing

POLYLOG: Re-awakening

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Renee's Rhetoric Re-velations

Re-call:

Was I re-born
after my daughters were born?
Renee--re-born--what did my mother know
when she named me?
Or did I die drifting down drugged
on noxious nitrous oxide?
Renee re-surrected and re-born
this re-velation re-vealed
in the rhetoric of reality.

Re-collect:

Running to re-write
running to ruin
writing about the running
the re-writing sometimes ruined
by the running.
The reality of my re-born rhe-toric.

Reflections on Writing

I realized, as I sat writing the exam all alone in a cold room in December, my six sharpened pencils spread out before me on the table, that I roleplay when I write, digging into my writing in much the same way that an actor tries to absorb a role--feeling the part, identifying with the characters, imagining a life.

As I wrote with the particular audience in mind suggested by my task, my pencil sped across the page. I felt as if I were speeding along some highway, my thoughts only slightly ahead of my pencil, and sometimes the pencil overtook my thinking. I had no idea what the writing sounded like and I did not reread at all as I wrote. There was not enough time, and this time the pencil wouldn't let me.

I also realized that if I care passionately about a matter, I write with abandon, and roleplay my way into my writing full of emotion. Sometimes I even cry when I write, my feeling so close to the surface that the tears spill over. It seems so maudlin, but as I have always cried easily, tears welling in my eyes at even a thought I find especially tragic or upsetting or filled with joy, I understand it.

This awareness--that I write much the same way as I roleplay, transcending present time and present place to a more temporal plane of existence where a whole new set of circumstances rule--came to me as a crystal clear piece of self-actualized knowledge rising up and out of my consciousness as I wrote. I can still recall the moment, and perhaps the coldness of the room, the unearthly quiet, the time of night, the clock ticking by on the wall as I continually checked it, contributed to the existential, disembodied feeling that accompanied this knowledge. I felt so alone with myself, and while very tired, connected to my head (full of all its thoughts) by a line which ran all the way to my pencil.

Sometimes my writing takes over from the thinking me that begins the process. But I often read, reread, revise, reread, agonize over words or phrases after the initial writing.

Writing my first poem for the graduate writing course was different. It was slower. I read and reread often. I crossed out and substituted words, came back to parts much later. (Although sometimes not by choice, as my three daughters continually interrupted me, until finally, I am ashamed to admit, I jumped up and down screaming tantrum-like--my own fourth child--for everyone to leave me alone, my work was important to me. Then I stared back at six wide little eyes, first amused by my tantrum, next horrified at my upset.) I dreamed much of the poem the night before I wrote it, but only used some of what I remembered. But the kernel of feeling was there. I think I write mostly from feeling--not image, or even memory, although they play their part.

I read my first poem to my daughters--the eldest, Sara, said she thought it was about my writing. Rebecca said she

thought it meant I was a very caring person. Erin, the youngest, was singularly unimpressed, and much more interested in climbing on my knee for a hug and coming between me and my pencil, as young children are wont to do.

I have learned how to write at the kitchen sink and use any fifteen minutes where everybody is happy and occupied to do snatches of writing (or reading). Snatch-writing. Snatch-reading.

Despite the erratic nature of finding time for writing, what I like best about it is rediscovering myself, independent at least for a while--sometimes as fleetingly as five minutes--from wife-mother-teacher. I really do have things to say, and say them. I really can think about more than what to make for supper that will hit at least three out of five on the person-to-person likes and dislikes list, and best of all, a different me is developing, different from the one who spent the decade of the 70's working on her career, and the decade of the 80's nauseous, breastfeeding or washing clothes. I still wash clothes, but now I throw them in the machine quickly between phrases, or stand staring out at the rhododendron bush in a reverie, trying to work out some problem, Spray and Wash in hand. Process-washing. Process-writing.

I am watching this me to see how she develops with considerable interest.

A Lullaby of Voices

Who will listen to
My voices
Hoarse as they are
Some a mere whisper
Silenced as they are
Beneath the layers of
Wife, mother, teacher, student, woman, me

I would shout my words to the ocean
If it listened
If it didn't take the words and rake them over barnacles
Washing them away like grains of sand
Lost
Are my voices already lost?
Drowned out by the cries of small children
Joyous but unrelenting
The words spinning round and round inside my head
Waiting to be
Released
Given sanction
Unburdened by the constraints of time
Time the drifter
Time the excuser
Sad the words lay
unspoken, unshapen, unbidden, underneath my tongue

I would sing those words to the ocean
if it sang them back to me

Who will sing back my words?
A lullaby of voices
Humming in my head
Rocking me to speak.

I Am a Feminist

I am a feminist
with a husband.

I am a feminist
with three daughters.

I am a feminist
who cooks and washes clothes.

I am a feminist
who hasn't had time to read the feminist tracts.

I am a feminist
who hasn't attended consciousness-raising sessions in the 60's.

I am a feminist
who lets her daughters play with Barbies.

BUT--

My husband encouraged me
to return to university
and cares for our children
while I attend
and washes our daughters' hair on Sunday night
while I struggle to finish
at the computer.

AND--

My oldest daughter, Sara
wants to be a doctor
and an artist
Rebecca
in the middle
wants to be a farmer
and write books
and Erin
little Erin
wants badly to be a white horse
galloping in the wind

FURTHERMORE--

I am being drawn into
the writing world of women
the reading world of women
Making my way through
a journey I should have taken
long before this.

PLUS--

I have never stopped

talking to other women
listening to their pain and pleasure
trading stories now and then between floors

AND BESIDES--

Now I share my stories
with our three small women
no, Sara,
you don't need to marry a rich man
to get a swimming pool
you can get that
all by yourself
yes, Sara,
you can do it together
that's a fine way
to envision it.
Rebecca, it is you again
roleplaying
the king
Superman
the monster
Peter Pan
Rumpelstiltskin
you can play
any adventure roles you choose
and those are some
of the exciting ones.

Erin
yes, I will carry your ten pound Book of Horses
up the stairs for you
and lay it across your bed as you sleep
turned to the page
with the white horse
dotted with black stars.

SO--

when Rebecca
sends another Barbie sailing
over the balcony to land
with a thud near the front door
and Ken is tied up with pink ribbons
and when Erin
points to Barbie's chest and asks
what are those?
when Sara
wears my hat and gloves and lipstick
the day I teach
and goes to the motorcycle show with Don
when on New Year's Eve
Don plays the Barbie game
(a gift I hate
from my sister

but haven't the heart to take away)
saying instead
just remember women
aren't that stupid
or insipid
and Don wins
becomes Prom Queen
all of us laughing on the last day of the year
and when Don and I
are stuck to the labels of Barbie's new house
laughing and cursing
and we throw
45 Barbies into their new abode
covering all available floor space
and stealthily file away
15 labels that inexplicably are left
when I call the psychologist
who explains Sara's discomfort at school
as nine-year-old hormones
sexist
and never go back to his office again
deciding to home school
my daydreaming daughter

I am a feminist with a husband and three daughters who cooks
and washes clothes and lets her daughters play with Barbies.

Revelations about Writing

Knots and Shadows:

I was astounded to read what Jane Tompkins has to say about learning to forgive and understand the critical me inside us (Tompkins 1987, 178). I wonder if I, too, am a woman filled with anger, and if so, from where it emanates. I know that as I began my journey into writing and introspection, I was somewhat taken aback at what was coming out of my pencil, and somewhat reluctant to share it. I feel as if I am slowly but painfully unravelling myself. It feels right, but as I turn over and over and the knots are revealed or untied or tightened and I can view them from close-up or from afar, it is taking my breath away. Tompkins has taken off her straitjacket (178) in order to examine her own anger and emotion. I think I am going to take some slow, deep breaths, then plunge on.

For the Four F's:

It will take me a lifetime to understand **For the Etruscans** (Duplessis 1990, 1-19).

I shut myself in my room to read it, only getting interrupted once by my oldest daughter, who poked her head in to see what I was doing and why I needed to shut the door.

I shut the door so I could read, could think, could take in the words as I think they were probably meant to be read--in chunks of text that didn't always necessarily seem clear but still gave a sense of where the author was going, had been, wanted to be...

The part I loved the best was near the end where Sara Lennox's words are constantly interposed with Duplessis' words (in the brackets), Duplessis taking much of what she has already said and weaving it in and out of this other woman's thoughts, strikingly similar.

I also felt a strong kinship to the two intrusions of reality that interrupted the essay? poem? story? One, her child, complaining that Duplessis never buys what the child likes to eat. The other, Duplessis, wanting to cook something nice for her companion, but also hoping it would last, so she wouldn't have to cook for a few days.

Yes, I thought, this is true, I have been there, I am there. The female aesthetic brought down to earth by the mundane of everyday life. The conflict of ambiguous womanhood--wanting, needing to nurture (nourished ourselves for a while on the words and thoughts), but also wishing that this food of our love could last, spread out, for a little longer, so we could take time to bite off some more words to chew and digest.

Duplessis' writing and the essay? piece? song? interludes? is/are at once both deeply intellectual and compellingly complicated, making many references which (as I checked footnote after footnote) were foreign to me.

Still, I think I understand some of what she is saying. (I have even had some of my babies without fuss between semesters.) That our language, that is, the female language of our lives and experiences, is not extinct, but rather, not yet fully formed but forming.

And if we can continually accept that this language breaks many of the old barriers, that this language has to find new ways of saying what has yet never been said, because all that has not been said needs to be spoken, then as this female language forms, flounders, flourishes (the four f's), we will, unlike the Etruscans, create a language that lasts, however strange it seems, or however paradoxically it seems to turn back on itself.

Fields of Feeling, Windows of Wonder:

I am beginning to believe that somewhere scripts of my life exist over which I have little control, but in which I somehow play a central role. I am beginning to believe that there is some sort of centrifugal force which revolves around me in ever-widening circles of experience. I am beginning to believe that I may be slightly psychic, but because this intuition has never been finely tuned or developed--and to be honest, because it frightens me--such clairvoyance only enters my life in small, undisturbing clouds of smoke.

Once I phoned my next-door-neighbour to inquire after her mother, who was very ill and dying. This neighbour took time off work to care for her mother at home. I had not talked to her for weeks. This was typical of both our busy lives and our neighbourly relationship, my days filled with diapers and part-time dabbling, hers filled with a full-time career. But that day, inexplicably, I wanted to phone and ask about both her and her mother. How was her mother doing? Was there anything she needed? It must be hard, and so on. We talked, and her mother died not much later that same day.

I know that such occurrences can be common phenomena, but when they occur with alarming repetition and frequency over the years, they are difficult to shrug away and ignore. When I am at the centre of what is happening, it seems so strong and significant.

I have always had a vivid sense that another friend and neighbour (with one daughter the same age as my oldest) would one day have another child. She had been trying to conceive again for years, beset with various problems that made this apparently next-to-impossible. One day, after walking home from accompanying my daughters to school, I passed her house and realized I had not seen or spoken to her for weeks. I knew with a clarity and certainty, then, which I could not explain, standing outside her house in the cool morning air, that she must be pregnant. I imagined how she and her family would be planning their days, since they had wanted this for so long, but had adjusted to life as it seemed destined so far. As I looked

out at her house, I projected a whole scenario through the curtained windows and solid front door. I did not go up to her door. Somehow I didn't feel right about intruding physically upon the scene that I had just played out for them. I phoned her when I arrived home, and she told me (dramatically) that she had something to tell me. I felt amazed (and a little breathless) at her announcement that she was indeed expecting another child.

Just uncomplicated co-incidence, all of it? Mystical musing on my part? Or is there a force field of feeling which follows me as I make my way through my ordinary life, and into which I sometimes step, somersaulting backwards?

Or is it just that events unfold as they do, and I feel my way into them, sometimes scoring bull's-eye with the dart, sometimes not even landing the dart anywhere near the board.

I have felt this psychic sense of revolving repercussion with my writing: opening up one little advent calendar window after another until all the pictures are displayed and all the small candies consumed, mouth agape at instantly recognizing the next picture, the shape of the candy. Writing a life, my life as a writer, the life within my writing, the writing within my life.

Another little window pops open, its little shutters just barely touched by me, seeming to open of its own accord. Life proceeds in small but significant ways, and back behind me in that field of feeling, or underneath one of those little windows, someone or something is sometimes snickering softly at my astounded awe.

WARNING:

I am a chameleon
Soaking up whatever color comes my way
What color will I be when I am done?
The color of a journey never ended.

.
.

Gyn-ick-ology
A Response to **Gyn/Ecology** by Mary Daly, 1978

Ick. I didn't make this journey.
The trouble is Daly writes some of the book like some men.

The trouble is I couldn't spin.

I'm still not sure I'd ever want to spin. I have very mixed feelings about the book, ranging from:
--wanting to duplicate parts of it to send to a few obstetrician/gynecologists I know
--keeping it out of my husband's sight
--suggesting that if Daly changed the title a bit, edited a tad here and there, she'd have a great pornographic, runaway bestseller
--to admiring Daly's way and play with language. (After a while, the new words start to make a lot of sense.)

I guess I'm just "numb, dumb and normal," a compromiser (Daly's words), and while I've found many books on the shelves put there by "cemetery librarians," and laughed wryly, I am reluctant to put Daly's book on my shelf because I didn't find any room in her book for me.

There I was, settled happily in Virginia Woolf's room, and pleausurably travelling down the paths of Oxbridge with her; identifying with her anger about exclusion, her great sensitivity; and thinking about her lapses into madness, her suicide, her husband, Leonard.

Then I picked up Daly's book, and the room became a prison, but I wasn't just the prisoner, I was the jailer, too.

While Daly's word-making is brilliant, it seems, to me at least, so stark and devoid of feeling. Is this intentional? If so, it left me cold. The book excised (for me) all the great core of FEELing from FEEmale (feel/male--a person who feels deeply).

If this book was her anger and rage, I didn't FEEL it. Moreover, I could not feel her deep sorrow for the suffering she records so widely and clinically in these pages. For me, this made the suffering by women at the hands of men and sometimes women, too, pornographic patriarchy and unmitigated mockery. When I read some of the woman-hating histories, I could hear the screaming in my head. Did Daly hear it when she wrote?

As a woman, I squirmed when I read some of the atrocities. Who needs to spend time with this? I gave birth, I miscarried, I'm Jewish, I've visited male doctors who I secretly thought were former Nazi perpetrators. If the men Daly castrates in these pages were to get ahold of these stories, what different use some of them would make of these annals.

I am reminded of a former friend from my 30's, whose husband owned an expensive, graphic book about the terrible trials and terrors conducted with accused witches. Whatever use

he made of the book during his marriage--the mind boggles--he burned my friend at the stake once he graduated from law school, and she was never the same, nor was our friendship.

Having said all that, I think this book documents for posterity all the historical and current incidents of misogyny which like the Jews, we women should never forget.

There were passages in the book that I felt myself sinking into (quicksand) with my mind firmly fixed on the ideology, on a slow, downward path of discovery, my emotions buried for once beneath the quagmire.

But I'd far rather walk down the paths with Virginia Woolf and follow her into the sitting room, listening to her stitch--not a cosmic tapestry with heavy metal threads--but an earthly needlepoint of brilliant colors.

Daly may be a Revolting Hag, but I couldn't help wondering if she felt some of what she writes about. I'm not saying you have to be burned at the stake to understand, but the quality of empathy could at least be a gentle rain.

I'll never be the same again.

Stories Not to Live By

I write in my sleep
I write in my dreams

I have a whole other life
that exists
underneath the surface of my days
A life that gets written mostly in my head
while I wash the mustard off a spoon

I am like the woman in a children's novel who
my daughter says
doesn't exist in the story
but just comes in as a detail

I am a detail
existing in my own story only through these details

Do you understand that I do not love any of you less for that?
Just that all our details crowd my dreams
(I am ambiguous woman
not a shrill and strident just-a-woman's voice)

But when I tell my story
when I try to write that otherworldly life
do you understand
my love is not diminished
but strong
Growing
Dormant while the details
disappear
and like a sleepwalker
not asleep but neither fully awake
I travel through this world for a while
coming in not as a detail
but the story

It is you who make me
strong
who give me the story
I would not trade our details
for any dreams

I just want to write the story
awake

Awakening

The poem is NOT in the answers to all those questions:

I-can-find-the-red-shirt-for-you-if-that's-what-you-want-to-wear-no-you-probably-can't-wear-your-Little-Mermaid-pyjamas-to-Disneyland-I'll-let-you-have-your-pearls-back-if-you-don't-throw-them-down-the-stairs-at-me-again-you're-right-I-should-listen-to-your-answer-if-I-asked-but-you-can't-just-do-the-pictures-all-the-time-there-is-nothing-the-matter-with-me-it-was-just-an-automatic-reflex-to-close-the-garage-door-and-I'm-sorry-the-van-door-happened-to-be-in-the-way-and-no-I-don't-know-what-I-changed-in-Setup-but-I-have-screwed-up-completely-the-words-are-spread-eagled-across-a-blue-and-black-screen-and-we'll-have-to-phone-Jim-to-get-me-out-of-this

The poem is DEFINITELY NOT in the fact that I've been married so long that when I read some poetry I wrote as a young woman I was surprised to remember my parents were against our marriage

The poem ISN'T EVEN in any of that writing I found that I did as a young girl and a young woman, not in the romantic foolish girlish dreams of a girl I forgot and don't even remember, not in the saccharine words of a girl I don't recognize any more and would ignore if I saw again, not in the bad poetry of someone with the same name as me who I'm glad is gone, not even in the images of a girl to whom I now say yes, I remember you, I knew you once before

The poem is NOT in the one-word "good" at the bottom of the writing, or even the you-should-try--to-get-something-published written in such tiny handwriting that I forgot it was even there or didn't care or didn't want to see it or didn't believe it by then anyway

The poem is NOT in the carefully couched encouragement to try writing since your great sensitivity and perception towards what makes good literature prompts me to say if that's what you still want, full of hidden and unwritten maybes and sort ofs and probably not good-enoughs

The poem is NOT in the English professor who never even mentioned Virginia Woolf and what she wrote except possibly to identify the title of the play a title which Albee took off the side of a bathroom wall at some university somewhere

The poem is NOT in all the no's I had to say, no, I can't teach a summer course at University of Toronto, no, I can't do that workshop times 100, no, I don't want to be a vice-principal or principal, no, I can't come to your retirement party, no, I won't come to the staff party, no, I don't want to teach an off-campus course in Squamish, no, I can't do my master's program yet

The poem is NOT in the Cheerios I intend to serve for supper tonight nor is it in the loft window which gives a view of the outside world beyond and the poem is in the pictures all the time

The poem is NOT in the words jigsaw-puzzled and spread-eagled across the black and blue computer screen and NOT in those faint-praise little-hope large-doubt comments

and ESPECIALLY NOT in that terrible poetry and stupid girlishness and very bad writing

The poem is NOT EVEN in all the reading and the writing and the reflecting and the talking or the journey or the struggle or the women or the discussion

The poem is in me.
The poem
is
me.

POLYLOG: Re-joy/sing

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Collections of Home

Peeling potatoes after having a fight with my daughter about gloves, the peels piling up in the sink and accumulating along with our petty disagreements...

Listening to my daughter laugh deeply from her belly at how in her class she looked and looked for her eraser, which was lying on her skirt...

Hugging my youngest daughter the way she requested, high up, and feeling the lightness of her little body as I swing her up...

Listening to my youngest daughter rail at me, I-hate-you-you-dummy-you-doe-doe-you-are-so-stupid, and understanding how it feels to be belittled...

Running with my daughters to the window to see the eight blue jays they counted in our season tree in the creek, and realizing the pleasure and joy I take in delighting in the world around us through their wonder and excitement...

Watching my daughter daydream, wondering whether that wandering mind will ever light upon some hidden vista, and astonished at some nugget of wisdom that falls from her as easily as a sweater shed on a warm spring day...

Looking at my baby sleeping with her curls fanning her fine features, her forefinger (the same finger I sucked as a baby) stuck in her sucking mouth, and wanting everything to stop soaring by so quickly...

Reading and writing side by side with my daughters in the playroom as the sun streams in through the window, all of us respecting the other's need for solitude and silence, but drawn together in our work by a mutual purpose...

Listening on the monitor to my oldest daughter holding my youngest daughter on her knee, telling her a story and singing the same lullabies I sang to them, the youngest asking, "Is it over now?" in a tone that belies her words and gives rise to her hope (and mine) that the moment never ends...

Male Dancers

I have danced with a senior administrator
of schools
who smiled
and pinched me.
He has now retired.

I have danced with Evan
Marci's friend back from the BBC
who said if I ever tired of you
to give him a call.
I haven't called yet.

I have danced with your father's friend
who held my hand too long
after the music ended.
He didn't say hello at your parents' fiftieth
anniversary party.

I was younger then
and thin
My breasts devoid of mother's milk
and taut.
We used to dance together too.

But not one of those male
dancers
Dancing in my past
For all their slippery sinewy grace
and
subtle mocking movement
Could ever dance like you
...understood my jokes.

I. Snapshot: Eldest Daughter

the child in a woman's body
long legs climbing the slide
the dress bunched-up then flies
down the slide
the descent from childhood
delayed by delight
child-woman me-you you-me
blended into one blur
generational double exposure
a positive picture framed
in perfect playtime pleasure
the future sliding
negative of a film
about to be developed

I finger her photograph
over and over
bending its corners
looking at me

II. Cameo: Middle Daughter

bent head full
one more poem to write
the deep thoughtfulness
chiselled in words of black ivory
the innocence inscribed
the wisdom of her inexperience
always already the onyx profile
engraved in the shadow of her light
reflecting the in-between
where she gives everything away in her features
but stays out-of-focus

I enter her poem
& caress the gem of her face

III. Pencil Sketch: Youngest Daughter

tossed raphaelite curls circle
the watercolor of flesh
drawn upon the pillow case
pencilled in by my lead-sharp
pointed eyes
traces of baby
in the lines and folds
I use to finish the sketch
quickly I form
the brow, lashes, cherub cheeks
as they transform
in the breath of her sigh

I cherish each changing pencil stroke
etched by timeless motherhood
forever my baby

Smart Conversations with My Children about God and Superman

MOMMY, DID YOU EVER POKE YOURSELF WITH YOUR PENCIL AND THINK YOU WERE GOING TO DIE?

No, but I know that feeling of panic, like when I've done something like swallow the wrong pill because I was so tired I didn't read the label properly and picked up another bottle.

DID YOU EVER WANT TO RUN DOWN A HILL LIKE AN EAGLE?

All the time. I want to spread my wings, wear my purplest running shoes, and run, baby, run!

SHUT YOUR MOUTH DOWN!

Well, all right, it's an improvement on shut up, I guess, but the same bad-tempered sniping still seems to be there in the words.

MY BODY IS REALLY MAD, AND MY HEART, TOO.

I can see that. Especially your heart. Thanks for telling me, and I appreciate you not biting this time.

WHEN I DIE, I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT A BLANKET, BECAUSE I'LL HAVE MY THUMB WITH ME.

Yes, you will. Your thumb will always be with you. And so will I. I'll be there in your heart, listening to you suck.

DO BUTTERFLIES CRY?

I've never seen their tears, and people believe insects have no feelings, but I think when their beautiful wings get pulled off, they must somehow cry. What do you think?

WHAT COLOR ARE TEENAGER GEESE'S BEAKS?

Probably darker than the young geese's, but not as dark as the Mom and Dad geese's beaks.

DOES GOD HAVE BIRTHDAY PARTIES?

No one knows for sure, because we see God all around us and we feel God in our hearts and minds, but aren't with God in the way we live together here on earth. But I think God celebrates all our birthdays. What do you think?

THESE ARE ADULT PARKS. KID PARKS HAVE SWINGS.

You've got a point. Adults have their own ways of playing. Want to play like me for a while? All right, we'll drive to a park with swings.

DO FISHES HAVE KNEES?

Well, no.

WHY NOT?

They swim in the water, so they don't need knees.

WHY NOT?

Your knees bend as you walk, but fish don't walk.

WHY NOT?

They don't have legs.

WHY NOT?

Just an evolutionary accident.

WHAT?

God made them that way, they're water creatures.

OH.

PHEWF! I'M GLAD TO HEAR I NEED GLASSES. I THOUGHT I WAS LOSING MY SMARTNESS.

No chance of that!

Kids, nobody's perfect.

JUST GOD AND SUPERMAN!

Pedagogy

blanket
child sleeping
warms the home

child
question hanging
opens the world

Writing for Disneyland

Tell daughters how many more days till we leave for Disneyland.
Water plants.
Find a home for Fluffy.
Wash the clothes.
Pack.
Ask daughters to pack their individual toy/activity cases for the trip.
Print that last poem off the computer.
Dry the clothes.
Pack.
Calculate for daughters how many more hours till we leave for Disneyland.
Phone babysitter to see if she'll take Fluffy.
Water those plants.
Clean the fridge out.
Revise the last line of that last poem printed off the computer.
Pack.
Unpack daughters' toys and activities so there will be room for people in the van.
Phone neighbour to see if she'll take Fluffy.
Cancel the newspaper for the week.
Show daughters on calendar the day we leave.
Remember Mom's advice: do not eat at the Jack in the Box.
Remember older sister's advice: phone a doctor if they get sick.
Remember not to get advice from them any more.
Remember younger sister's advice: get antibiotic samples from your doctor.
Check. Enough for 4.
Check Disneyland weather on weather channel so you know what to pack.
Pretend not to hear questions about whether it is time to leave for Disneyland.
Add new verse to that poem.
Fold that mound of clean clothes.
Make daughters try on old summer shorts and bathing suits.
Phone sisters again to see if they'll take Fluffy.
Water those damn plants.
Think about some creative replies for answer to famous vacation question: Are we there yet?
Don't forget paper and pencil for my suitcase.
Put the clean clothes away and PACK!
Try to be less bitchy with daughters who are calling you bitchy.
Rummage through drawers and find bigger sizes for little one, pass on oldest's shorts and bathing suits to middle one, and take oldest to the mall.
Who will take Fluffy?
Write new poem.
Pack.

Night Sky, Light Sky

Rebecca was seated on a Disneyland garbage can, leaning against me, and I was leaning against a railing. We were pressed together with our family and the rest of the swarming humanity waiting for Friday night's "Fantasmic" laser light show to begin.

"So, Mommy," Rebecca said to me, running her hands through my hair. "What do you think the world will be like when I'm a grown-up?"

No Mickey Mouse questions out of this child, and I want to tell her that it will be everything she wants it to be, whatever she wants it to be, and for however long she wants it to be that way. But I just comment that we'll probably be able to go out for dinner to Space anytime we like, and Rebecca replies that she doesn't like that, she is afraid of going up to Space, she just wants there to be no earthquakes.

The laser light show begins, and we watch Mickey splash across the night sky in a display of colored lights upon water, wondrous, fantastic, gold-silver streams of glitter crisscrossing sky waves of disappearing phantom shapes, up in space. And for a few moments, as Rebecca and I turn our faces together to the night sky, to the light sky, the earth quakes, and we hold on to one another.

A Celebration of Women

from my mother
I learned love
how it is tempered
with a reality that looks at life
with the clear vision
of a blind prophet
groping in the flowers

from my sisters
I learned loyalty
it is strong enough
to survive even words
that sometimes burn
right through the outer skin
of inner knowing

from my daughters
I learned forgiveness
saw its face
smile sweetly and with innocence
in the reflected water
of turbulent maternal waves
and currents

from my aunts
I learned remembrance
felt it extend
a blanket of warmth and comfort
even when the quilt
is frayed and torn

from my women friends
I learned devotion
and finally began
to let its salve
be rubbed upon the festering sores
of my eternal sadness

from my women colleagues
I learned awe
watched its aura
circle overhead
with the light of possibilities
I never let myself acknowledge

from all women
everywhere
across the underwater river room of time
any color
any place

any river
any race
I learned
the love loyalty forgiveness remembrance devotion awe
that only comes
with womanly Grace

POLYLOG: Re-traversing

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Travel

It hardly seemed worth all the bother, but still she checked the time when she woke, tired from another night of wakeful, thought-full sleep, and insisted that they all rise, dress appropriately and hurry down to another rushed, cold-cereal breakfast.

Rushed so they would be ready in good time: teeth brushed, hair brushed, lunches in hand, boots and raincoats donned, umbrellas open, rushing down the driveway past two perfectly presentable and working vehicles to walk the path in a relentless downpour.

Hurry up, please, girls! Why don't you wear pants, it's raining heavily?

Oh, do we have to? I hate wearing pants. I want to wear a dress.

Fine, but you'll have to wear tights.

Oh, I hate putting tights on! Will you do it for me?

No, I hate putting tights on, too, and I have to do the baby's.

She's not a baby anymore, you know.

She is to me and so are you.

Then put my tights on, too!

Ha! Clever! You can always wear pants like I suggested, you know.

See you downstairs in five minutes flat, dressed, please.

I don't know why we have to walk, anyway, nobody else does, it's dumb, and look at all that dumb rain.

At first such protests by the children had been vociferous and relentless on the wettest days. They were tired, they protested, couldn't they just be driven to school, there wasn't enough time to play before it was time to leave, and so on...

But she persisted, driven by some unconscious need to prove to them that there was another way to travel, that there was a whole life outside that they would never know about if they didn't walk it, see it close up, feel it in the wet downpour which threatened to soak them through their nylon coats and umbrellas.

The sunny days were never a problem. It was easier to wake in the sun-filled rooms and the children were eager to slip light shoes on their feet and bask in the comforting sunlight which countered even the most biting cold or wind. Those days they counted themselves lucky to rush past the neighbouring houses on the crescent, up the walkway to the stairs which led to the path in the woods--with thick, dense forest brush on one side, where bears were sometimes known to come foraging for food, and polite, clean-looking townhouses uniformly arranged on the other side. Leaving those townhouses far behind, they followed the trampled weeds of their favorite shortcut through the woods, the surrounding brush lush with pussywillows and hot pink salmonberry flowers in early spring. Through this forest

trail they would walk, eventually scaling a rocky, earth-filled hill which led them to the pedestrian light across a busy street, continuing up another hill where they breathed and coughed and sputtered in the exhaust fumes of cars speeding by much too fast. Then they turned past the corner gas station and car wash--which always halted their journey if there was a car being washed. They loved watching the large blue mops spitting soap suds and water in a wet dog-haired spun frenzy. Up the parking lot of a large apartment building they would continue, where they had to be cautious of the occasional car bursting unseen out of the cave of the underground garage. Then they strode across the church parking lot where the preschool teacher's maroon van was always parked, up one final street of newish, pink-stuccoed houses. Finally, they picked their way through the gravel-filled schoolmade walkway between a canopy of overgrown undergrowth and across the top field of the schoolground to their ultimate destination.

They had discovered much on these foot adventures, which she felt certain they would have missed if they joined the others barrelling past (often waving to them or offering them a ride which they declined) in familiar, popular cars. They now knew the names of many colorful flowers, found earthworms and snails and odd-shaped rocks. They lunged for and fought over lucky pennies, or nickels, and once, a quarter. They had taken home for washing the lost bounty of dropped childhood treasures: pretty hair barrettes, small, flat plastic dolls once part of some dollhouse or other, a small, red-striped doll dress, and other finds.

Look, Mommy! I found a lucky penny! That's the third one I've found so far. I'll give it to you, Mommy, for all of us to share, but you keep it in your pocket and don't take it out ever, all right?

A little plastic doll! Can I take it home and keep it, please, please? I'll make little clothes for it out of construction paper and a kleenex bed, and can I maybe use a washcloth, too, Mommy? Oh, isn't she sweet? If you look really carefully, you can see she has little eyes under all the dirt.

No, you can't have it just because you're the youngest, right, Mommy? I found it. Finders, keepers, losers, weepers. Oh, stop crying, I'll let you have a turn, but not until I have first, okay?

So it began that eventually when they reached their destination, whether their journey had been smoothly sun-warmed or intrepidly rain-pelted or even beautifully snow-drifted, they felt some inner sense of accomplishment, confirmed by the satisfied looks on their faces, the refusal to even consider some alternative mode of transport, the disappointment when

occasional illness prevented them from setting out upon their daily adventure.

One gray mist-enshrouded morning, she woke with a sense of foreboding, a presentiment that no matter what, she should change the rules and not allow any departure by foot, and she quietly mentioned this to the children.

I think we should consider scrapping our walk today, and just go by car.

The noisy protests weakened any resolve arising out of her inexplicable fears.

That's not fair! You said we had to walk, no matter what the weather. We want to do it, we'll just take umbrellas. You're the one who always says not to back down from things when they seem a little hard. We like to walk, it's fun.

"All right then," she replied, defenceless against their righteous onslaught. "Dress quickly, and come down for breakfast."

But as she poured that morning's choice of dry cereal into brightly coloured plastic bowls, she could not shake the feeling that there was something terribly wrong, that she should just insist they all stay home.

By the time everyone assembled for their usual cold-touched, warm-voiced morning meal, she felt she was powerless to prevent the day from proceeding as usual, just as she had implemented and structured it not so long ago, following instincts that at the time had been strong in her and true.

As they trooped up the street to the walkway which led to the forest, chattering happily about the purple and white crocuses, warning each other boisterously to avoid the dog poo, she tried to shake off the sense of doom and gloom which was so strong it was a presence walking nonchalantly right along with her family, sidestepping the dog droppings.

Everything seemed normal. It was another rain-encased day, and their colorful, closely held array of umbrellas accidentally bumped and brushed the water off the hanging branches of cherry blossom trees. The umbrellas seemed like little colored parachute-shaped bumper cars driving haphazardly up the roadway of plants and flowers that lined their course.

By the time they scaled the walkway stairs and arrived at the foot of the woods, her breathing was quick and panicky, and the force of the rain seemed to quicken with each new puff and pant. She scrutinized the woods through the raindrops blinding her view, dripping off her glasses. A wind blew up, and they all concentrated on holding on to the blowing umbrellas. The pelt of the rain intensified, and her children giggled, delighting in being blown along by the wind and rain.

Look, Mommy, my umbrella's turning inside outside and I can hardly hold it any--

A strong gust carried the ruined umbrella off, and the cries of delight changed to dismay, and tears.

Oh, no! Oh, no! It's blowing away!

Before she could even bend to console that disappearing umbrella's small owner, or offer the shelter of her own apparatus, the rest of all their umbrellas flipped their spokes upward like crazed flowering creatures, and an even stronger gust blew them off, one, two, three...

Now all of the children were crying, and getting very much wetter with the force of the buffeting wind and the pounding downpour. She quickly decided they should turn around and head for home, as they were all far too drenched to even consider completing the walk to school, and this time there were no noisy protests at her suggestion. But they could not find the walkway stairs, even though they had just entered the woods up those stairs only moments ago.

Panicked, she tried to seem calm, so as not to alarm the children, but they immediately sensed her concern and pinpointed its cause.

Mommy, where's the walkway? It should be here, shouldn't it?
It doesn't quite look the same. How will we get home?

She quickly allayed their fears, fighting her own rising sense of dismay, saying that they would simply find another way out of the woods, up by the end of the path toward the pedestrian light.

She turned and guided her small troop towards the direction of the busy street which signalled the end of the footworn path in the woods. They briskly quickened their pace in anticipation of the sight of the cars speeding by the road as seen through the spaces in the overhanging tree branches.

They marched on, wet and disheartened by the ceaseless rain and wind, the children soaked through and crying loudly now, and she knew that they should have reached that light by now, were walking on and on far too long, but said nothing, silent and growing more alarmed.

The children's wails grew louder, longer, siren-like, blending into one long sustained minor note whose sound was held by a foot on a loud pedal, an eerie, other-worldly sound in the pummelling rain of the forest. Suddenly the children's forms rose in the air like their blown-away umbrellas, and coats flying up like the fabric on the upside-down spokes of those broken umbrellas, their small bodies drifted upward.

Horried, she stood frozen for several seconds, rooted to the ground like one of the old trees of the forest, watching

dazed as her children seemed to float away. A flood of energy surged through her, maternal instinct maneuvering her into motion, and she desperately clutched at the little feet rising higher and higher in the air. With that chorus of high-pitched cries ringing unmistakably in her ears, she clawed at air, and her hands sliced through no substance at all, the children a hallucinatory vision of small legs and flapping coats and waving arms, dear little balloon faces recognizable from within the centre of each wafting image. As suddenly as their ascent began, the children's forms (or, what she had believed to be the children) disappeared from view, the caterwauling wails winding down to one last despondent note cut off in mid-stream.

The rain stopped abruptly. A great silence punctuated the forest floor with its exclamation of possibility. The sun shone through the leaves of the dripping tree branches. Puffs of rising, smoky drying air rose from flattened tree-trunk stumps scattered here and there throughout the woods. She felt warmed by the sun filtering through the foliage.

It was then that she began to understand, and feeling relieved that the children were actually quite safe, warm, and dry, knowing that the ordinary morning ministrations were very likely being continued right at this very moment somehow, she relaxed somewhat and began to enjoy being by herself in the woods.

Soon her clothes began to feel less sopping wet and simply cool and soft upon her skin. She breathed in the worm-scented, pinecone air and closed her eyes, standing quite still for a few seconds, contemplating.

She sensed that her next move when she opened her eyes would bring her to some trail which led out of the woods, but stalling, she delayed, and instead, lifted her face, eyes still closed, to feel the warming air lick her face.

When she opened her eyes at last, she was not the least surprised to see the concrete walkway stairs, full of small puddles leftover from the downpour. She lingered for a minute longer, secure in the thought that these sturdy stairs descended to the walkway and eventually would lead her home when she was ready. She perceived that they would be there even if not in full view, even if she chose to descend them later, even if she decided to explore on her own some more and stroll in the forest.

Feeling confident, alive, and very much in control of herself, she walked past the walkway stairs in another direction, towards the deepest growth of the forest, eschewing the pedestrian light and busy street which was at the opposite end of the woods' path. Delighting in this unexpected turn of events, she continued her travel, walking, seeing a whole outdoor life close up, feeling it with her clearheaded senses, relishing her solitude. She did not even look backwards once at the vanishing walkway, knowing she could find it again easily when it was time, understanding and accepting her own adventure in time, her earlier sense of fear and foreboding evaporating as

hastily as the rain had stopped.

In the distance several small umbrellas lay turned inside out, ruined, their parachute colors streaked with ribbons of still-wet material.

Everywomen

For six months of the year
I am Intellectual Woman
Reading/writing/thinking/creating my work.
Winter Cycle

For another half the year
I am Earth Mother
Baking cookies, visiting parks, devoting all my time
to my Family.
Summer Solstice

In winter I resent every moment
away from my work.
In summer I celebrate every moment
away from my work.

In winter I am inspired
at odd moments in the bath,
in my bed.

In summer I am required
at all moments from the bath,
from the bed.

Divided between the women I am
or hope to become.

What do my daughters make of this matriarchal metamorphosis?
This strange shifting back and forth.

They no longer ask me if my work is done
but wait, suspended stillborn, expecting the birth
of a whole mother.

Motherhood and Feminism

I think Mary Catherine Bateson profiles mostly mothers, not childless women, for some very real and reasonable reasons. I do not write this to in any way belittle the choices of (or outcomes for) any childless woman. I have friends who have no children. (I wish they'd babysit.) I've even been there myself for a while, first by choice, then not by choice.

But I did decide that children were and still are very important to me as a woman and a person. However, I lost parts of my selves during a decade of pregnancy and birthing, and no matter how much Bateson lauds improvisational acts juggled between and amongst real living, it really hurts to lose those parts and it is a painful loss.

At the same time it was paradoxically a wonderful decade that brought me the joy of three beautiful children, a lot of good jokes cracked by my husband, and years which I will always cherish and remember and look back upon with great longing.

I made some choices, one of which was that I was not going to be one of those women like my lawyer cousin in Calgary, who never stopped working except to give birth to her two children and hire the nanny. Besides, my two miscarriages and subsequent difficulties affected all of my choices. And I didn't want to do it all, not at the same time anyway. I don't care, unlike my cousin, if my house is smaller than 5000 square feet, if I am not a patron of the symphony, and whether my sunroom (oops, sorry, Adelle, solarium) has lovely stained glass windows. In point of fact, my house is much, much smaller; I buy tickets and take my children to the symphony; and my sunroom is a playroom cluttered with too many toys.

But for all my contentment with the players of those toys, I lost a great deal:

status

self-worth

self

worth

and the continuing development of a woman I am just now trying to remember, only she's ten years older and different.

When I was a young teacher, then a consultant, and then a sessional instructor, I laughed derisively at invitations to Tupperware Parties and prided myself on never ever attending one. Who had time or cared? Well, this mother and part-time person now owns some Tupperware, and if you don't think that's frightening, try listening to one of those Tupperware presentations and playing one of those dumb games with a straight face. I needed the bellshaped cups and the sip lids.

I did feel somewhat less frightened about Tupperware when I returned to part-time teaching when my youngest daughter was six months old, but even that was painful. I was breastfeeding and my baby refused a bottle. But the Environment Club was selling Tupperware to save the earth: I could buy more bellshaped cups with sip lids, and skip the games and

presentations. I did have to run home right at 3 to feed a baby who was very, very thirsty.

I think all of these experiences have contributed to my great admiration of Virginia Woolf, who in **Room of One's Own**, writes that somebody has to have the children, but maybe a few are enough. (Virginia, if I could have arranged pregnancy and labour for my husband, I would have, believe me. With five pregnancies--two miscarriages and three children--the thrill wears off quickly.)

I think, too, these experiences and these choices made me balk at some of Mary Daly's feminism. It is difficult for me to read text that questions whether women expel their babies by spontaneously aborting them.

Mary, if you only knew what I now know that I can pass along to my children:

- how to put a plastic liner in a Playtex bottle
- how to change a crib sheet without removing the bumper pad
- how to fold and pin a diaper
- the names of all the ponies.

The list is endless, but it is changing:

- how to use TELEREG
- how to make the beds and write poetry
- how to finish the latest book while picking up supper at Mcdonald's...

Yes, it was joyful but painful to experience a decade of self-loss and other-gain. I'm ten years older! But I'm hoping the next decade will be really interesting, too, and possibly even less painful.

Noisy, Noiseless Noise

If one of the themes in feminist writing is silence, the other must surely be noise.

NOISE! Three children talk all at once: can-I-have-more-apple-juice-please-tell-me-another-story-about-when-you-were-a-little-girl-Mommy-look-at-the-elephant-I-made--in-the-centre-of-my-cheese and I answer: once-when-I-was-a-little-girl-here's-your-apple-juice-please-don't-spread-that-cheese-around-any-more-I-stole-one-doll-shoe-from-my-friend...One husband filling my other ear full of penetrating chitchat on the state of the economy and the recent election and his motorcycle maintenance hobby, all delivered into this other ear while the first ear is being filled with the sweet and busy babble of childhood needs and joys.

NOISE! The television or a video blare behind me as I sit at the kitchen table or upstairs at the computer. I hate that television, I am always going around and turning it off. My children don't answer me when it's on and have glazed, unfocused stares when I look at them. Oh, how I am beginning to hate that family on Full House. My family likes the TV on while I talk to them; their eyes wander away from mine to the screen unless I turn that television off, an abrupt and unloving gesture of frustration.

NOISE! The whisper of the whisper-quiet dishwasher, the hum of the frost-free fridge defrosting, the whir of the dryer spinning a week's worth of musty towels or juice-stained children's clothes, the silent noise of our plants begging for water, the muffled snuffles of our dog pleading for food and water, the visual noise of a whole house full of toys which have steadily been overturned and rotated and circulated in ever-widening circles of clutter and disarray.

NOISE! Trapped with three children sick with the flu for two weeks and now they are fighting almost constantly between videos, and sometimes during the videos, and increasingly before the videos they choose to watch even begin, so that I am actually looking forward to going to the dentist by the time the babysitter comes. The call for honeynut cheerios for one, wice cwispies for another a half-hour later, and finally, when the all-day mess of the kitchen is finally tidied up and put away, the third one wants something to eat, too.

NOISE! A five-year-old adolescent learning to exert her independence wailing incessantly in my ears for a half hour, interspersing this siren of sound with I-hate-you's, and dummies, and you-are-so-means. And the noise of another child sneaking out to the hall just outside our bedroom, packing up her bed roll and twenty toys and settling down for the night

closer to us because she feels someone sitting on her back and watching her at night. The noise of yet another child turning on our bathroom light, peeing, never flushing, and climbing up upon our bed between us, elbowing my ear, hitting my nose, and complaining because she doesn't have a pillow.

The most bittersweet, echoing noise of all, the knowledge that one day all too soon many of these clamorous sounds will be gone, I can talk to myself all I want, and I will miss each and every moment of this raucous, cacophonous symphony of sound just as badly as I now crave the silence.

Prodigal Mother

Sometimes when I drive away
A daughter waving smiling sadly
from the window
The others invisible until
an extra arm or head
appear behind beside her
Glass gargoyle gazing

I remember Suzanne
talk to me over our restaurant meal
Speak
about her husband and children
in England
still wondering about the day Suzanne
Left
just a toothbrush in her purse
She never went back

I see Suzanne's sensitive stricken features
Soft behind her eyes in her words
They know where I am now
If they ever need me
If they want to call

I was childless then
I didn't understand
all Suzanne could be
She gave birth at 19
too quickly in a toilet
then again a year later
She didn't like her husband

When I first drove away
for just an hour
I didn't like it
Worried
the umbilical cord that tied me to my children
Unsevered and secure

Soon I learned to leave
longer times
Worried less
needed to go
Understanding I was not my children
We were joined but
Separate too

These days I drive away
feeling freedom in my flight
Fear

Knowing all I've left behind
Return
Everyone rushes
to prodigal mother
Returned to the fold
And I am grateful
Relieved
I did not bring my toothbrush
like Suzanne

"Bitter Milk"

At the end of June every year at our neighbourhood school (a small, primary annex), a special "graduation" ceremony is held to mark a passage for the Grade 3's, who go on to several different schools in the district, sometimes leaving siblings behind at the annex school. The Grade 3's traditionally write memories which they read aloud into a microphone during an assembly for the whole school and the parents. The event is sentimental, stirring, happy for the children, bittersweet for the parents. I have cried each time I attended even though I hadn't yet had a child in Grade 3.

This year on this special graduation day, I am filled with "bitter milk" about one daughter's school experience. Bitter milk: "a mixture of milk and crushed margosa leaves, the same bitter potion that mothers apply to their nipples when they wish to wean their babies" (Grumet 1988, xi). "Bitter milk, fluid of contradictions: love and rejection, sustenance and abstinence, nurturance and denial" (xi). Like Madeleine Grumet, I want school to be a place of intimacy and nurturance for my daughters. I want school to be a place where they learn love and tolerance, not subordination.

And so on this special graduation day, I will drive all three of my daughters to a beautiful park with trees and swings. There we will run in the warm wind that blows over the Coquitlam hills in June, swing in the swings with freedom, delight, and abandonment, and I will say my final good-bye to Sara's Grade 3 year.

This year Sara will not be among those who read their memories into the microphone. If she were, she could tell how she buried a dead oriole we found on the front porch in November, how she wrote a eulogy for this bird, conducted a funeral for the bird, and read her eulogy aloud to the cold, night air, burying her Grade 3 year along with the dead bird...

Standing at the top of the snow-covered hill on top field at the school, our circular sleigh in hand. We have just kissed Rebecca and dropped her off at the schoolroom door. Sara and Erin are both standing by my side, beside the other mothers with their toddlers. Sara wants to slide down the hill with the other young children, and I let her. Erin is too afraid of the hurtling speed, and remains with me, clinging to my coat.

Why isn't Sara in school, a mother innocently asks, interest in her voice.

Dead silence. Waiting silence. All the other mothers stop what they are doing, gloved hands suspended in winter mid-air, freeze frame, watching me, waiting for me to speak, while the children laugh and slide in the background. A moment of pure drama. "The blade sliced through the tense, cold, morning air and--"

Because I am home schooling her, I reply simply. Tight. Taut. Tart.

(Because she hates school, I want to say. Very vulgar. Vogue. Vague.)

Shocked silence from all listening, then, were you not happy, asks this mother, not insensitively either.

Sara wasn't happy, I reply ethically. Polite. Proper. Ponderous. Pilfwater.

(No, I wasn't happy, I want to say. We cried. Both of us. When Sara began to cry and ran after me when it was time to kiss her goodbye at the classroom door, and this went on for weeks on end, I cried, too, again, this time out loud, long and out loud, out loud and out long, at home, I want to say.)

Mommy-please-don't-go-you-know-me-best-I-don't-feel-comfortable-at-school-I-don't-really-like-it-just-give-me-school-at-home-please-Mommy. Sara-runs-out-the-door-in-her-ruffled-socks-it-is-pouring-wet-from-all-the-rain-I-let-the-teacher-pull-her-back-inside-don't-look-back-she-advises-like-Lot's-wife-and-turn-into-a-pillar-of-salt. Don't-look-back-and-I-don't-I-don't-look-back-I-don't-need-to-I-know-Sara-is-crying-feels-I've-abandoned-her-and-I-have-but-I-don't-know-it-yet. I-didn't-look-back-I-didn't-even-listen-I-couldn't-believe-it-just-couldn't-this-can't-be. Don't-look-back-she's-fine-she'll-stop-as-soon-as-you're-gone-who-will-stop-me-I-wonder-what-does-it-matter-if-she-stops-if-she-feels-that-way-in-the-first-place-I-am-turning-into-a-pillar-of-salt-I-can-feel-it-as-I-walk-away-the-salt-is-melting-into-tears-all-over-their-blacktop. Sara-hear-me-think-this-we-have-to-give-this-a-chance-I-didn't-know-forgive-me-for-I-knew-not-what-did-not-listen-to-the-wisdom-of-little-children-out-of-the-mouths-of-babes-my-baby-I-could-not-protect-you-from-this.

Oh, comments the mother who asked. Let's go, say the others to their children. Everyone disperses except Sara and Erin and I who are left standing at the top of the snow-covered hill. Alone with our circular sleigh, and Sara slides down the hill some more, as Erin pleads with us to go.

Happy Birthday

I'm not ready
for the big black Sony Space Sound radio
taking up half her dresser space
the classical tapes
returned to the stereo cabinet
Red Riding's Hood given away

I only just folded the diapers into dustcloths
dismantled the crib
donated small sleepers to the playroom dollhouse

I watch her
by her radio
still deep in thought
dreaming to the raucous music

I see myself
by the screen door
tears pouring down my eyes
I gaze out at prairie sunset
blood red dulled by summer haze
chequered in the tiny squares
of front door lookout
my mother's radio playing
songs that make me cry
apron tied
she dances round our kitchen
making dinner

I want to hide that radio
in her room
cover it
paint it white
unplug it
smash its speakers
glue the buttons down
give it away

But I won't
it's me there by the radio
the sunset's calling
it once spoke to me

I'll play her radio
dance around her room
put clothes away
tuned to a classical song I like
wish it wasn't there

Afternoon Delight

(Note: This story is especially designed for the hearing impaired.)

Do you have a poem in your head? Sara asks as I sit down to do my work. We have just begun an imposed Afternoon Silence Time (which, as you can tell, we both forget about if the question is compelling enough). This time is sacred to me, and Sara respects it with an unusual maturity for a ten-year-old. But then, she is like that, one of the world's wise old souls inhabiting a child's body. Erin has succumbed unwillingly but necessarily to afternoon naptime, this time screaming all the way to her bed over having to leave Muffin, the neighbour's cat, then snuggling gratefully under her soft bedcovers, still howling about her removal. Ambiguous Womanhood begins early. Sara calls her an immature woman.

Afternoon Silence Time is my time to reflect or read or write, the time when the demands of motherhood ease somewhat for one hour fifty minutes. Four-year-old chatterbox is safe/silent for this spell, eight-year-old wildwoman is prospecting/adventuring outdoors, ten-year-old dreamer is procrastinating/pondering her way through the remainder of her day. Forty-four-year-old husband has escaped to work.

This is the time, several days a week, when I can talk to myself, instead of trying to focus on other people's questions. (The peanut butter is so in the fridge. Yes, we bought food for Tux. No, it's not your birthday yet. There are no sharks in California Disneyland. In an earthquake you stand under the door frame. Yes, I let them buy the apples and if one's rotten, just throw it out. No, I can't park the van any better, your four motorcycles were in the way. You'll have to wash that shirt separately in cold water. Yes, I see you jumping off the stair, that's wonderful.)

No, I don't have a poem in my head today. There's no room, it's so full of all the answers to all those questions. How did Sara know that's what sometimes drives me to write, poems in my head.

No, today I want to talk to myself some more.

Renee, I say, you are an intelligent, wonderful person, you are doing a great job, you are so patient and understanding and capable. Thank you, Renee, thank you. A Hallmark Greeting card thank you to you from you.

Well, that sounds stupid enough, doesn't it?

Let me try again.

Renee, listen, let me give you a word of advice from someone who has been watching you for a long time. Relax a little, let the little things wash right over you, live a little, quit complaining, you're luckier than most, and for God's sakes, get off his back!

Who let him in this conversation? Get out! You are not welcome here. Women only.

Is he gone?

Good. All right.

Renee, darling, you must understand, you are not doing anyone any favour when you lose your temper at Eaton's because the clerk treated you like what you are--a 43-year-old matron with three demanding little brats hanging onto your arm filled with parcels to return. And since when do you know more than the doctor? Doctors are Gods. Also, it's a wonder you are still married considering the way you talk. And I've been meaning to tell you, I found out about the time you and your sisters neglected to tell me about the break-in. But I wasn't fooled, you know. I've just been waiting to tell you how hurt I am that you don't trust me.

Mom. I love you, but I'm supposed to be talking to myself, and I'm not willing to pay long-distance rates in this story. Hang up, I'll call next week, and believe me when I tell you there was no break-in.

Renee, Renee, Renee, there was so a break-in, how can you lie like that? How can you hang up on your mother? How can you ignore her advice? Remember the time you hurt her so badly when you said what you really thought. Shut up and eat your words, Renee, when you talk to your mother, you're making it hard for the rest of us, and she deserves some respect, she's 67 years old.

Oh, please, not my conscience, this is just too banal now. This reads like a sit-com (a lit-com?), an episode of Roseanne, a really bad novel by Danielle Steele.

I'm supposed to be talking to myself, but all the rest of you keep interfering. And it's making me over-dramatize everything, which is ridiculous. I'm a happily married, heterosexual woman with three lovely children, and a mother who is the wisest, most loving woman I know. Why do you just write the parts that you think sound so dramatic, Renee? It's so, so, what's the word, so--POST-MODERN, so self-reflexively cynical, so ambiguously gratuitous, so selfishly self-absorbed. Why don't you ever write the parts that you are thinking but never, ever put into words? Or the parts that make you look like an idiot? Why do you exaggerate just to make it sound amusing or wry or poignant? Why not write about--

HEY! That's enough! Some things are private, and I'm not writing or talking about them, not even to myself. There are some things that I will never write about, understand, Renee? Understand?

Good. Now, let's just finish this talk and then you can go back and find out if Erin is awake yet, and what Sara and Rebecca are up to. I hear a lot of happy humming, but you can bet the entire playroom has been turned inside-out while you've been talking to yourself, Renee. It really wouldn't have killed you to check on them once during Silence Time, and do you truthfully think you've used this time wisely? You could have finished reading **Theory in the Classroom**, or tried to get a poem in your head. You could have baked bran muffins.

You see, there you go again, stretching the truth just so

the writing sounds the way you want it to come across. You know perfectly well you baked bran muffins this morning between questions, and someone is probably reading this story right now, getting the impression that you didn't bake bran muffins, couldn't bake bran muffins, and wouldn't bake bran muffins.

Now you're stuck in this tone of voice which is nowhere near the dreamy, reflective writing with which you began this story.

Serves you right, Renee, serves you WRITE, for talking to yourself when you write.

Where Did I Leave Me?

making my bed
I smooth plastic undersheet
protect adult mattress
from leaky child-urine
and regurgitated child-size dinners

remove the dangle bracelet
and Barbie boots
underneath folds of quilt

trip on purple-haired clear plastic
see-through pink pony
lying on the floor
drop-kick kinky-haired
white stuffed dog
down the hall
first freeing it
from fierce bed wheels

clear ten videotapes
with Disney-tale titles
off tarnished silver dresser set

sweep red and yellow elastics
into chipped china container

rearrange pile of new children's literature
awaiting bedtime storytime
add another small torn spring skirt
to sewing basket
still holding
waiting winterwear wearing out

glance in mirror
at wild knotted hair
and old cotton nightgown
rush by with hands full
of yesterday's underwear

POLYLOG: Re-membering

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October Sadness

October leaves
 me
turning colours
 in
 dry edges
 spread
underneath the trees

October chills
 me
filling corners
 with
 moist drops
 staunches
by mid-air freeze

October darkens
 me
tearing daylight
 from
 early evenings
 memorized
with painful ease

Facing the Music

I combed the library shelves
for self-help books that helped
Coping with Miscarriage
holding empty sleepers
and refolding them perfectly into
flat sleeveless dreams

when the wrenching wracks of
fullterm motherhood
radiated violently through my
unreliable body
the coursing wetness finally
slipped easily out of me
once again

still I would wait expectantly for
the bad news
the tragic end
the empty space of
unfulfilled feeling
checked my baby's breathing hourly
always rocked her down to sleep
if she cried
in case she died

how could I pause the chords
on the instrument of that rhythmic wailing
with me there outside
the discordant door of
devotion
divided
every rending rising crescendo cry
would sever me and soar
playing my love with
staccato pieces
didn't anybody know it was me there
mourning musically behind that door?

and now I've found another source
in which to seek my returning sorrow
emotional stories of those who grieve and misbore too
but as always when I find
some small solid note of wordless comfort
o, babies
I wish there was a page there
which worded you

Ms. Carriage Tries to Save the Baby

--a scene--

(A woman lies on the floor of the stage, dressed in a green hospital gown, and covered only by a thin sheet which doesn't quite cover her bare feet. A bedpan has been placed by her side, stage front. A green cloth backdrop is the only stage scenery in the background, suspended by a pole which runs the length and width of the stage, like the curtain which separates hospital beds in non-private rooms. The woman speaks her monologue from this position.)

Woman: Blood. Just a small, teardrop-shaped smear of blood. That was what I noticed first, and I thought, wait a minute. This isn't what's supposed to happen, this isn't Cinderella pushing dolls in carriages in my basement playroom on Sunday morning. They never told me about this, that's what was crystal clear in my mind.

I have been lying here now for a day and a half, waiting for the gynecologist, Godot, my arm green bruises from the IV the student nurse tried to stick in my vessels at least five times unsuccessfully. They won't let me eat or drink or get up, just in case I have to be rushed to surgery, it was explained, in case I begin hemorrhaging at any moment. And of course, I must lie still to try to save the baby.

I know there's no baby in my body any longer. I saw the great globs of red tissue in the toilet and I told them, but around here, your intelligence and powers of observation are directly related to the function of your bodily parts, and my body parts are definitely screwing up right now. They were rather annoyed I had gotten up to go to the bathroom.

She's gone. All the dreams I allowed myself for nine weeks gone, too. How stupid. I forgot about retribution. I'm sorry. Sorry about the time I said I didn't want children because you couldn't shut them in the basement like the dog. Sorry about the morning I phoned the doctor for the morning after pill, nervous anything might interfere with my blossoming career. Sorry that I waited and waited, expecting everything to fall into place. Read the thermometer, temperature right, time right, name the time, name the date, name the baby. Talking about gender, a room, furniture, daycare, part-time, happy, excited, anticipating,

BOOM!

I've been lying here for a day and a half waiting for the hospital gynecologist to come and examine me, so he can then scrape me out and I can go home. It's Sunday, and he's probably out with his children, I can't expect him to come quickly just

because I want to get this over with.

But I'm developing a definite dislike for the man. Shouldn't they examine me quickly if they really thought there was a chance to save the baby? She's not there anymore, I know. She's floating in the sewer system, flushed away and condemned to dissolving messy bit by bit among all the other guck. Good-bye seed, vesicle, embryo, fetus, baby.

I'm sorry. So sorry. Baby daughter human being little soul. Did you hear the Beethoven I played for you? Did you know you were expected on my father's birthday? Did you know I wanted to take you everywhere, teach you everything?

I'm tired of waiting here in this room. The other women are kind. The two Gall Bladders passed me some kleenex. They know she's gone, too, despite what the nurses say. The Teenaged Mother had her baby, but she won't get out of bed. The nurses make her walk around. She doesn't want to see the baby and the Gall Bladders think it's strange that no one has visited her yet.

The emergency ward was a nightmare. Never miscarry on Hallowe'en Night. They were so busy, witches and mice and pumpkins coming in a steady stream of accidents and mishaps. The worst was the girl in the car accident. They couldn't get ahold of her parents (I guess) and she lay in the next cubicle screaming and screaming in pain, while I writhed and in agony, gave birth to my miscarriage, her screams shrieking in my consciousness as each new pain of abortive labour coursed through my body, rendering me too shocked to even call out.

I refused the Demoral, refusing to believe the obvious, the ominous, the opposite, waiting for someone to phone me with the news, like the parents of the girl who lay next to me screaming in pain. My pain, too, all of us, all the women, screaming in pain, some of us screaming for the others who simply lay there mute, letting each new spasm of pain circulate through a body no longer trusted, no longer strong.

Miscarriage. Now there's a word. Interesting that this one word contains the feminine miss. Of course. A woman's body failing to carry. Failing. Carrying. Aborting. Spontaneously aborting. Sending out. I didn't want to send you out. I'm sorry. I felt your tiny lifelike flutters. I saw the fishlike pictures in the books as you developed. You felt real to me already, not a fish, but a little person. I'm so sorry.

I'm so surprised. No one warned me. No one told me my body might act like this. No one said it wasn't easy, wasn't smooth-happy-ending. My mother never talked about this, never once. Or my aunts. Or any of the women I know. I never knew anyone who lost a baby this way. I never heard a story about it once in the years I spent growing up to be a woman. Not once when all the women gathered up the plates and put the food away.

Not once listening to my mother talking on the phone, using the odd Yiddish word to keep us off track, which only made us more alert and curious. Not once when the aunts came together over ritual, birth, death, sickness. Certainly not in Biology 12 Reproduction.

Very common. Why didn't anyone tell me? Warn me? Tell me about the pain, the loss, the dreams dissipating like the fetal tissue as it spewed from my traitorous body, with a life of its own, with a trail of bloody mass spilling all over the floor of my life.

(All the stage lights go out. In the blackout, a male voice speaks, disgusted.)

Male Voice: You've aborted the baby. I'm going to push down hard for a minute.

(The lights go on. The woman is lying the same way, but on a stretcher with wheels. The bedpan is gone, and so is the green curtain, replaced by green walls. The woman is visibly shaking from the cold, her teeth chattering audibly. The doctor walks up beside her, taking off latex gloves.)

Doctor: You know, they used to do D and C's without anaesthetic. I'll have you spick and span, clean as a whistle, in a jiffy. It only takes 20 minutes and then you're out of here in no time, no worse for wear. Just a minor procedure, really. Nothing to worry about. I'll see you in the operating room.

(The doctor exits. The woman lies there, silent, shaking. Nothing happens. She calls out.)

Woman: I'm cold. So cold. Hello? Is anyone there? Hello? Could you come and get me now? Hello? I'm freezing. Could I get a blanket or something? Hello? Hello?

(The lights go out.)

Faces

I can't seem to write about my second miscarriage
I can't seem to write about the fixed smile on my face
when I accepted congratulations after returning to the table
from the bathroom where I found blood again

the grimace on my doctor's face
the sad grin on my husband's face
the grisly feeling it was all my fault
the focused look on my face as I waited
at the front entrance for 45 minutes
watching all the new mothers
carefully carry their new babies
to the waiting carseat
which the new fathers struggled with
the gripping fear on both our faces
that it would go on and on
the sly face of the nurse who tricked me
into giving her all my money and valuables
until the head nurse said
that isn't necessary here
and returned everything except \$10

Miscarriage of Justice

presently grieving
a second miscarriage of the past
not ever knowing I was
sad or accepting
grief-stricken or grateful
I am
writing writing
peeling back present layers
examining immediate past
and this event remains
 unresolved
 unforgotten future
(three beautiful daughters' loving faces
still two babies never erases)
 body betrayal
 mind manipulation
 life changes
 guilt induces
me to ask:
who am I to sorrow
no schedule can be satisfactorily planned
no career is worth all that ambition

I am a woman

no more burdens, please
to be carried by me
to be miscarried by me
miscarriage of justice:
I will sacrifice parts of myself for greater good
mother of miscarriage:

I want to rock that second miscarried baby to slumber
let her sleep peacefully
cry myself to rest with her

and forgive myself for everything

Two Ghosts

Two Failed Pregnancies

...lined up behind me by department store registers
laughing derisively at my indulgent choice of
babysoft rainbow blanket
"You won't need that," they hissed in my ear

...breathed what-a-waste-of-time
and panted see-he-knows-it's-useless
with me at classes
while my husband yawned mightily and looked at his watch

...sat beside me in the doctor's waiting room
waiting, whispering
"Just wait, wait and see, wait and see"

Two Failed Pregnancies

...marked the motherhood-baby-nursing-infant-titled books
on my shelves with bent-cornered pages
whose margins held invisible cliched remarks like
"Try again next time" and
"If at first you don't succeed..." and
"Third time lucky"

...spit in the hundredth glass of blue-tinged skim milk
poured out in an eight-ounce glass
and gratefully breathed in the smoke
from my mother-in-law's cigarettes

...warned me constantly not to allow myself
to hope, dream, plan or think ahead
posting signs in my head
"Dreaming and Desiring
is Damnably Dumb
and Disastrously Destructive"

...laughed knowingly when the crib was set up
joking about wobbly wombs and tenacious babies and
sarcastically reminding me about
crib death
convulsions
choking
falling

Two Failed Pregnancies

...fell silent, watching
when the nurses brought my firstborn to me
and placed her in my outstretched arms

...remained still, ever watchful
when my firstborn looked up at me
with wisebaby innocent eyes
full of day-old old-world soulful gleams
of newborn knowledge

...silently witnessed the eventful
normal births of two more babies
but buzzed petulant persistent
malicious memoirs in my ears
"Remember us, remember, won't you
when you least expect it
what can happen"

Two Failed Pregnancies

...finally faded from view
but failed to disappear

sometimes still lining up behind me
 still breathing and whispering
 still laughing and warning
 still spitting and buzzing
never still and silent for long

always waiting
always wanting

Giving Birth

beginning the end of myself
once known
the end of the beginning
of myself
I have come to be
forever changed
forever forever
blood
frightens me
my body blood
blood leaked and mixed
with the blood
of my memories
underground waves of pain
course down me
longer waves
wilder, pounding, pummelling
coursing
cruising
carrying
me on top of pain
mind above my body
cheering me on
watching me keel over
voices calling me
forever forever

Lasts and Firsts

The final day of preschool approached with alarming speed. The very last day for me. Youngest daughter about to enter Kindergarten in the fall, I picked up my daughter by her elephant nametag in the cloakroom, waited for her to don her outdoor shoes, and packed her indoor runners in her knapsack for summer usage. The two of us walked together to the car, holding one more preschool painting.

I have made this passage two times already, with two other daughters, and each time I cried, my baby about to enter the public school system, try her still-small wings and fly, hopefully without too many false starts. *And me, mother bird, hovering nearby, silent but watchful.*

This time the passage carried special poignancy, because it really and truly signified that all of my children have left babyhood. The busy baby years of breastfeeding, diapers, chewable books, booster seats, and tricycles have irrevocably come to an end. Again life is shifting and changing, like the sand every time a wave licks the shore. *And me: one part grateful for some precious time to myself that will be returned to me; three parts grievous for those sweet uncomplicated baby days of mother's milk, carriage walks, small knit sweaters, newborn lacy hats, and soft, wispy-haired necks.*

I should have taken more photographs when I could have. (With a third child, the number of photos decrease in number, and those that make it to the darkroom are crowded with several faces.) I should have taken more time to savour every moment, treasure every event, gather a catalogue of memories to draw upon in later years. I should have mentally recorded more "firsts"--teeth, words, steps, toilets, suns in drawings, strings of letters across the page. And oh, those "lasts". When my youngest daughter spit out my breast for what we both thought was the last time, I clung to her in my arms, the bond between us unbreakable, but no longer bodily connected, and I felt bereft. This was the last time I would nurse a baby. A week later she cried to be breastfed every night for seven more days: creation; a week in which the world was born. I savoured that extra unexpected week of mammary memory, every draw and suck a tactile photograph to trace with far-reaching fingertips when I needed to remember. If only we always received an extra week when we wanted it or needed it.

I am afraid that I missed something else that I will later regret because of my own goals, my own hopes, desires, ambitions. I do not want to wake up one day, filled with the sense that I should have done more with my children when they were young, that the days which sped by like the pages in a flip book have blurred the colors for all of us. *And me, a month earlier, gleefully telling the teacher: This is my last preschool Mother's Day Tea. Again in tears as one more baby steps out one door and enters another.*

A second severance from the body of our mothers, a character in Virginia Woolf's novel **Waves** says of a child going away to school. When I explain to Erin following her Kindergarten orientation visit that she will attend school five afternoons a week in the fall, she tells me: I can't do that. I will miss you too much. But already this second severance has begun, set in motion as inexorably as the winter winds that blow every last leaf off the autumn trees, the leaves spinning and flying upside-down, sideways, over and over. *And me, hugging Erin too tight, for one last taste of baby, driving away from preschool for the very last time, dealing with my own kind of severance.* Now cherishing every chatter-filled day. Now cherishing every extra request for a push on the swing. Now looking around the corner with bittersweet curiosity for more first days that turn to last days, too, a ferris wheel to ride upon.

"I love you, Mommy," Erin says. "Give me another hug." This at least is constant. *And the ache in me subsides.*

Shadow

this shadow
does not go in and out
with me
is not mine
does not shrink or grow
with the passage of the day

this shadow
always the same
follows me
dogs me
haunts me
chases me around the corner of my confidence
no matter what I say

this shadow
black like an unending nighttime road
darkens my daylight
lights my insides
squeezes my throat
tries to ride on my back

I shun this shadow
afraid of its consuming depth
cautious of its burning touch
aware of its admiring envious gaze
I want no such shadow
stepping on my outline
I want clear colours
not black

but once I thought I saw
that shadow's inner tear
felt its black fingers
clutch my shoulders fast from fear
and turning
looked into a broken shadow mirror

so softly, gently
I drew that shadow fragment near
embraced it with arms outstretched
and placed the broken shadow pieces here
by my side, held together
a shadow shape from yesteryear

Oxen On the Roof

under the glass
a faded sepia photograph
of my grandfather Aaron
is preserved
a reflection of a Jewish Czechoslovakian man
riding a bicycle
smiling
in the foreground
behind him an ox upon the roof
trapped in picture memory time
upon a Yastrap village house
underneath my coffeetable glass
my grandfather (Zeda)
on the bicycle
rides freely
year after year
protected from the dust
of another generation
viewing
the oxen helpless on the roof
 my grandfather helpless on the roof
 the oxen helpless on the bed
 my grandfather helpless on the bed

my mother manœuvres the spoon
to Zeda's drycaked lips
a rhythm in her feeding frenzy
rife with long-forgotten spoonfed strokes
his old mouth involuntarily
opens to receive masticated sustenance
upon a cotsized bed
mushy life-giving motion delivered
on the silverware of daughterly devotion

I listen
focus on the rivulets of spoonfed spittle
and dripping streams of soft oatmeal-colored mush
disgustingly displayed
my grandfather's countenance
a mask of helpless hopeless
painted streaks of food
lifeless eyes staring
through the foodframed face
an old baby
tableturned in the mirror
to a mothering daughter

*Do you remember Renee, Dad?
She's home for the summer*

*Come to see you
Open wide
That's good
He eats well, you know
It's what keeps him going
All these years
We cried, all of us
There you go
When we sat in the office
We couldn't do it any more
It wasn't fair to Rose
Just a few more spoonfuls
Rose and I take turns
Coming to feed him
They haven't the patience here that we do
Don't give it back to me, Dad, that's better
Although they're very good
Lucille comes once in a while
You know your aunt
Cec is somewhat better
I know Irene will help
When they've moved
Now you're finished, wasn't that good?
Not all the grandchildren come to visit
I think it's terrible*

*in the presence of my mother's daughterly spirit
myself a daughter to her motherly magic
I cast a spell of backward time
upon that dear old foodstained face
clean it with a cloth of memory
place it upright upon a couch in my livingroom past
watch its mouth spilling spellbinding stories
of other countries
officers and wars
and ships that sailed away from our ancestral destruction*

*I'll tell you since you ask, Reevkala
We lived in a little village
Yastrap
It exists no more
I knew another war was coming
I was twice already an officer for the Germans
I speak seven languages, shena medelah
And I thought, no more, too many times
I could see what was coming*

*Max and I came over first
It took us five years to save the money for the others
Your mother was a baby when I left
A few days old
The youngest of seven
Although one other baby died
A more beautiful baby than your mother
I have never seen
Max is the oldest
I brought him with me
He turned bad
A black sheep as it happens
He broke your grandmother Sarah's heart
Sarah, God rest her soul
Would not speak of him
Even when she was dying
Even when I was dying
Even when I was the oxen on the bed
Even when I was the oxen on the roof*

underneath the glass
my grandfather Aaron still rides
his bicycle
past the oxen on the roof

Passage

Something is happening to me.

*At night I fall asleep
exhausted from the day
fevers down lunches made
dishes clothes children put away.*

*But always wake
memories playing through my head
past reels of people places feelings words
rewind play
rewind play
I cannot get the tape to stop
rewinding back through twenty-odd years
of almost-was and could-have-been
and if--*

*I had one more drink I'd--
wanted to kill you when I read--
look at the reaction you got there--
they really noticed you he said--
I know you wanted that too as much as--
you mean the grow old together love.*

*And I am writing this alone
have quietly stolen out of bed in tears
so the scratch of the pencil
cannot be heard
by anyone but me
and stops the videotape
of the past
from fast forwarding my years.*

First Love

my open words
once so full of innocent, unaffected love
sweet with youthful abandon
and promises I should not keep

were silenced
by young male embarrassment:
shouldn't women be mysterious? you asked
(instead of deep)

and I grew cautious then
and never loved so well again
for those lost words of love
(not you)
I weep

Herbal Remedy

the woman's tea
brewed mint the color of a light tan
not quite long enough in the sun
held up to brownberry lips
warmed the air
between them
could be a watchful gesture
when the silence
wrapped them
in its awkwardness
the smoke of lapsed time
rising in misty circles that broke
as easily as blown bubbles
when the words
filled them
with regret
the half-mask that covers all excuses

the woman's tea
herbal mixture
would treat his words
the cure
would not corrode her insides:
black holes
muscles held together
round broken tender
pieces of other people's
memories

no tea leaves to foretell
the future
just peppermint sharp
in her nostrils
the scent of daydreams
impossible to remember

POLYLOG: Re-feminizing

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Judgement Day

Dear Cousin Adelle,

Congratulations on your appointment as a judge! What a well-deserved honour. I know you will be both judicious and wise. And since you will soon hold the gavel, I want you to know:

I am guilty

of bad temper
impatience
knotted hair

being moody
hard to please
and I swear

I say one thing
but write another
I'm critical, analytical
and a lousy mother

I want too much
I ask for more
I'm never content
I'm hurt and sore

I'm ambiguous, ambivalent
an abstracted, obstructive wife

just convict me of gross womanhood
and sentence me to life

Love, Renee

Matron in the Mirror

I look in the mirror day before my 43rd birthday a new line
appears
left of my upper lip a subtle droop lopsided one-sided
sadness
reminding me I am changing
daily
once vibrant alive with wisdom each line just a path
towards a new adventure
etched
upon the matron in the mirror still shops for clothes
in the Junior Department wants young clerks
to stop calling her ma'am so many times in one
transaction
a new line pointing downward to the aging body
of a middle-class middle-aged mother
full of tinny feminist truthful tracts

you off to play war games with your friends
you could have stayed here with me played war games
with the matron in the mirror

Crazed Cookies

my mother
 expecting death
baked sesame twist cookies all morning
waiting for the phone to ring
answering machine turned to off

my mother
 recognizing death
in the hospital waiting room
went home and
feeling nervous
worked in her blue kitchen
where she knew the phone would ring
as surely as the tulips lost
their petals to the wind
every springtime

my mother
 foreshadowing death
filled her freezer with those cookies
rows of twisted dough corpses
packed in shoebox coffins
defrosting them
only two days later

my mother
 no stranger, she said, to death
served those cookies
cleared the plates that held them
vacuumed sesame seeds from
rug corners
and said,
prepare yourself
but don't let it make you crazy

Moodpiece

I'm bitchy.

Almost all the time.

Fortyish woman just finished toting Jerry Packs with babies, not quite finished with and able to fold the stroller (which is permanently stained with pee and apple juice) one last time and place it out at the bottom of the driveway on garbage day.

I walk by male teachers lining up the boys and the girls and call out, ever heard of gender equity? When the male teacher quips, the lines are equal, I respond with perfect precision shooting, designed to reverberate for days (he prides himself on his newly literate teaching), verry old school, and walk on by.

Bitchy.

I smile benignly upon hearing that a lovely, sweet young thing was hired to teach a course I once taught. (Her field is another discipline entirely and she thinks the leading scholars are completely wrong.) That's fine, I smile to myself, bitchy, just wait until she has to mark papers while she's throwing up in the bathroom, or plan the four hours while she's lying on the bed breastfeeding a baby, still not dressed.

Go for it, advises the closet-sexist-psychologist who I consult only three times about one of my children. He has turned the conversation to me, probably implying that I'm the biggest problem. You could really make a difference, he claims.

His name is Wally Cleaver and my husband and I think I am going to talk to the Beave's brother.

No, Wally, I already went for it, and it really didn't make all that much difference. He needs to leave TV Land for a while. You see, bitchy.

It's report card time and I'm crabby, confesses Ann to me at the xerox machine. I'm always crabby now, I reply to Ann. I'm just one even long line of crabbiness, snaking my way around the corners of the halls. I don't need to wear a warning label, it's palpable crabbiness. You can touch it, pick it up, it's red hot, toss it down, it never breaks.

At recess Ann reveals she once attended a workshop I gave in the district. You were young and starry-eyed, Ann says, you made us sit on the floor; I didn't like that. I nod, and Evelyn, school secretary (the backbone of our little annex) comments, you're not smiling, Renee.

But I do smile, still bitchy, when Sam walks by the activity room and comes to say hello. A person from my past, he calls out. And mine. I think: He's bald, no longer stutters, promoted to an administrative position. I'm fat, I don't care what I say anymore, working one day a week exhausts me.

I went to all the felt pen and chart paper committee meetings that Sam ran, rushed down the polished glow-back halls of the school board office past him, saw him dancing at the deadly retirement send-off parties. (People die quickly after

one of those.) He was called the Golden Boy back then.

He's probably dumped his wife and left his children, like everyone else, I think, but don't dare to ask. Not that bitchy!

Renee has three daughters now, the vice-principal who has joined us, adds.

Sam shakes his head. He remembers, too. Says a mutual friend of ours has two daughters now; he comments that she used to say she hated children. (We all hated children back then, but I don't say this aloud.) Instead I respond, she still does.

Bitchy.

Sam smiles wryly. Golden Boy's halo shines brightly and is reflected on the bald spot, illuminated by the institutional lights outside the activity room where we are standing.

My next class enters, the three of us disperse, and I begin teaching the way the sweet young thing considers folderol.

At home I drop pans and my daughters check to see if I'm angry. No, I just dropped the pan--really! I'm clumsy today, but my daughters aren't fooled. They feel the bitchy heat waves emanating from where I stand at the stove. You do bang things when you're mad, my daughters tell me, and I do, but I also drop things.

In my memory, Lisa flicks her daughter Sophia's foot away from her face, angry, bitchy, tired of the sniping jealousy Sophia directs to Lisa's cheek. Lisa once taught. Now she raises her five children.

I am humbled, Lisa says to me on the phone long-distance when we trade lives once again after a prolonged silence. She says this with one twin on her lap, interrupting our conversation to direct someone else to another, larger window for looking out (??), hacking from her bronchitis, her Greek husband, having survived an emergency appendectomy, busy at the restaurant they own. (I handle these things fine, Lisa says. I count what I have before I stand to lose something.)

No, Lisa, I am humbled by you, I tell her, my bitchiness temporarily put aside, as one of my three rushes into the bedroom to ask about where the ham is, rushing right past my husband who is sitting in the kitchen. Lisa laughs with me about the ham--we are both Jewish, married to non-Jewish men, and I say something bitchy about being the Keeper of the Ham.

At night my mother doesn't laugh at my jokes on the telephone--there's just a great, lengthy, hesitant silence when I quip. Long-distance bitchiness grating in my ears, she asks my father, why don't you turn the TV up even louder? (Her ears are not the same as they used to be.) Maybe she doesn't hear my wisecracks. Maybe I'm not so funny anymore. Maybe she knows I'm bitchy, too, so she doesn't laugh.

Oh, well. At least I was born, as Anton says in "A Literary History of Anton" by Matt Cohen (1992).

It sounds bitchy when I say it, though, doesn't it?

Language in His Foot
(Or Why Can't A Man Be More Like a Woman)

Upon the confirmation of my first of two miscarriages:
You aborted the baby.

Upon my refusal to be x-rayed at eight months pregnant:
All women think their baby is so precious.

Upon the six-week check-up after the birth of my third child:
You'll have to work on that (body).

Upon the chaos of getting five people (three of them children)
packed for a trip:
You sound just like a drill sergeant.

Upon the mention of my choice of political party:
If you're going to voice an opinion, it had better be right.

Upon sounding my middle-child voice loudly and resoundingly:
Bohunk.

Upon sounding my professional voice strongly and passionately:
Bitch.

Upon sounding my woman's voice strongly and passionately:
Man-hater.

Upon sounding my woman's voice longingly and emotionally:
Insensitive, offensive man-hater.

Upon sounding my woman's voice quietly and carefully:
Insensitive bitch.

sounding my aborted woman's voice
(working on being right)
the words drill through my body
I am Sergeant Bitch
I am Sergeant Bohunk
no longer longing
to be quiet or careful
the language is in his foot
my memory of the words of men

Playhouse Reality

he is ironing industriously
handmade wooden iron
slicking back and forth
upon a glossy wooden board
like a skater
turning figures in the ice
distracted
he turns
continues stirring pots
and moving dishes
small face intense
with the concentration
of his make-believe
and the hard work
of joyful play
plastic Fisher-Price toy kitchen
receiving
small ministrations
of yet another player

I sit on a hope chest
too tall to stand
in the playhouse
enter into the life
of the play:
he looks busy
is he cooking now?
yes and cleaning too
he informs me seriously
accepting my interest and intrusion
is he a father?
yes with six no twenty
children
there by me
on the hope chest
all twenty
upside down
in a basket
twenty I exclaim
impressed
with this participant
new-age father
and parent-in-role
sharing the burden
of household responsibility

a new model for the times
socialized equality
in the kindergarten

with five year old suddenness
abrupt
a change of scene
he dons a red helmet
and announces
he is off for a ride

testing
I enquire
but what about the twenty children
you look after them
he responds quickly
resonating authority

there I sit
beside twenty children
upside down in a basket
thinking:
this is my life
husband off riding motorcycles

uncanny
how that play episode
echoed
life

Woman in the Mirror

Women's lot:
share, don't dare
meet, but be discrete
be a friend
behind that subtle line

but disappear
decline
if the line's unclear
and never, never step outside the boundaries of that mirror

Toeing In

tiptoeing
tripping
treading lightly
traversing through the narrow university walls
of the men's club
(where women too
close the silver-knobbed
blue-painted doors of academia)
women with beige-white legs
well-cut matching flowered suits
and immaculate impotent hair

doors opening and closing between
the men and the doctoral boys
conversing in the halls
lingering by those doors
exchanging well-known names and pleasantries
that really all say clearly
just who belongs to
the club

we'll just let you in the
threshold of the door
if you're brief
if you don't disagree with the article
if you stop relying on that intuition which

paralyses
the tolerance of
the men and the PhD boys who
claim they admire wit and wisdom and intelligence
as long as it doesn't obstruct
the men's club
is hushed docile still
and stays where it belongs
 not behind any more blue doors for ecru legs
 not in the carpeted halls of blustery camaraderie
 not coupled with that intuition and mind and body reading
but in the
 safe
 distant
 faraway place of
part-time
home-bound
mother-hooded
non-academic
woman
dabbler

Excuses, Excuses, Excuses

I'm not a feminist, but--
did you notice that the author used the she pronoun
only when he referred to poor parenting?

I'm not a feminist, but--
I believe in humanity, humanism, all of us
working together in equality and with equal opportunity.

I'm not a feminist, but--
I certainly don't like it when the boys
are lined up separately from the girls.

I'm not a feminist, but--
do you think you could just let me finish
one sentence without being interrupted?

I'm not a feminist, and--
do you really think you'd want a man
you could push around like that?

I'm not a feminist, and--
I really think mothers should stay
at home with their children when they're young.

I'm not a feminist, and--
I wondered how a man would feel when he read that.

I'm not a feminist, and--
I just get my way by manipulating the situation
without him even knowing it.

I'm not a feminist, so--
I don't worry about things any more.

I'm not a feminist, so--
I can't be included as part of the problem.

I'm not a feminist, so--
I don't have to say I'm a feminist, and--
I am not seen as a feminist, but--

I am a woman, but--
that's not the same as a feminist, because--
I am a mother, and--
I do want things different for my children, so--

I may be a feminist, but--
I can't say I'm a feminist, because--
if she's a feminist I'm not like that kind of feminist, not really--
if I ever said that there would be hell to pay--

how can you be a woman and a mother and not be a feminist--
how can you say you're not a feminist but--and--so--

The Politics of Fear

I am a woman. I am also a writer. I am a wife, a mother, a student, a teacher. I am a feminist, too.

Lately, I have been feeling afraid to even say I am a feminist, to be seen to be involved or associated with issues and battles that are exploding all around me.

"It's a war zone out there," my husband says to me, and he worries about me. We discuss and discuss and discuss and no matter how far apart we feel on any issue, I feel secure in the knowledge that we can and do arrive at a place of understanding and mutual respect. But this is the private arena.

In the public arena, I have been feeling burned. I get notes back from journal editors who write: you have an atypical perspective (translation: you're a woman). Responses to some of my published feminist writing have included the accusation that I hate husbands and men, or that I have failed to connect to the lives of women.

And now, I am currently enrolled in a university course where I have had to listen to jokes about whether one should test to check if research subjects are male or female; where, in response to my paper on male talk dominance in the mixed-sex classroom, I have been singled out by a male professor and chastised in front of the entire class.

I am not humourless. I don't think I'm radical, although one would hope that today this would not brand a person. I walk my daughters to school, I cook meals, I drive on school field trips, I talk on the phone every week to my mother who lives in another city. I cry when I'm hurt.

I also write poetry and fiction and narrative, about my family, about what it is like to be a woman, about my many experiences as a woman. I try to write truthfully, I often use humour, and I spend a great deal of time reflecting upon my words.

And I read. I read books by and about women, women writers, about writing.

And every book I read, every word I have written, opens up a myriad possibilities for me: that women have voices and should use them; that it is not constructive or healthy to be trapped in silence; that we share many common experiences despite our differences, and our differences should be celebrated; that women's ways of knowing are important; that in order to envision a future that has a place for women and men living together harmoniously, we must engage in important discussions. These possibilities spur me on to further reading, further writing.

In the newspaper these days I read about women writers who receive anonymous hate letters, university professors suspended for sexual harassment of women, and entire university departments embroiled in problems of sexism. I read headlines that blame feminists for a political party's poor election showing, and letters that accuse editors of providing a forum

for radical feminism.

And so I feel afraid, because as I continue to read and write and step into the public domain, as I continue with my abiding interest in feminism and all the possibilities available to me, I feel I might somehow be made to pay dearly for all of this, have already as a result of some of my endeavours, experienced some hatred and sexism. It takes courage to write what you believe when you know the words cause strife and stridency, and I am tired. Tired and afraid. I am reluctant to be drawn into battles I didn't start or want. I am losing my courage these days. I have finally found my voice, but it may be dangerous to use it.

In the book, **Language in Her Eye**, Canadian playwright Margaret Hollingsworth writes: "Every time a woman puts pen to paper it is a political act" (1990, 142).

I am tired of political acts. I want to be a woman--writer, wife, mother, student, teacher, feminist--and I want to write as a woman, freely, without feeling afraid.

But I know that at this moment as I put pen to paper, as I once again engage in another political act, I am risking a great deal. I look deep into the innocent, trusting eyes of my daughters in order to summon all my remaining reserves of courage. For myself and for them. So I will not feel afraid. So I can sing out of the silence in a voice filled with strength and conviction: I am a feminist.

POLYLOG: Re-visioning

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Yes, Renee, There is a Virginia Woolf

when my high school teacher
caressed my arm
eyes gleaming power and authority
in chalkdust classrooms
when my uncle
held me too close
behind shoebox rows in warehouse offices
when I walked down dark streets alone
elbow jostled
till I ran to restaurant phones
calling taxi saviours
no one told me
said you were waiting
I used to read a book a night
somehow missed the W's
was I really listening
born under a rosebush
dreaming my way through
40 years of life
or did someone just forget
to tell me
mention
by the way
did you hear about Virginia
know she was waiting
would stir me to write
the ache welling up
and spilling on the poetry
on all the psychic children

who hid that row of W books from me?

I ate 6 Austen novels
and a 7th completed for a woman's magazine
inhaled the Brontes
waited for Godot
searched for the author
with those 6 characters
visited that absurd zoo
howled with Allen
was afraid of George's
big bad Woolf
spent time in the children's hour
but I never found
the W's
for 40 years
a lifetime to catch up on
catch my breath from
catch on to

yes, Renee, there is a Virginia Woolf
she lives in all your severed parts
doing dishes between lectures
putting phantom children to bed
a trace of tears
on all Shakespeare's sisters' cheeks
walking down autumn Oxbridge paths
to airless rooms
filled
with folding walls
wide windows
curtainless
against the summer glare
or hammerpelt of rain
writing lives
a penny a piece
buried under children's stories
3 little pigs
and big bad Albeean wolves

I walked past an office door one day
saw Virginia hanging on the wall
and knew
she was in my life

Power Games

Virginia Woolf--

Did Leonard ever do the dishes?

Did he leave the dishwasher wash cycle for the next morning because someone could squeeze in one more cup and anyway, he'd be gone in the morning, he had an early meeting?

Did he fold towels?

Did he wash them first, dutifully gathering all the towels from their various hiding places around the house (except never mine hanging behind the bathroom door, I've only been hanging it there for 20 years)?

Did he throw those washed towels into the dryer and forget them there? He didn't realize he hadn't turned the dryer on, right?

Did he buy groceries?

Did he use the last bit of milk for his coffee and cereal and place the empty milk container carefully back in its exact place in the fridge and leave for work, silently so as not to wake anyone?

Did he read bedtime stories to the children?

Did he hate Amelia Bedelia and refuse to read that again, he just read it last month, and did he say no, he couldn't read Pippi Longstocking either, she was a loud-mouthed, aggressive little bitch, was there a good book around here to read that's short?

Did he take the children on outings?

Did he offer to take the children out so I could get some work done and have some solitude and silence for a change?

Was he going to catch frogs because they'd been wanting to do that for a long time?

Did he sound surprised when I mentioned that he forgot the baby?

Did he pretend not to see my school tea thermos which needed rinsing out when he was doing the dishes because I left him the coffeepot and coffee grains the night before?

Did he ever turn the monitor down at night and claim not to have heard anyone crying?

Did he wake me up to ask where the clean sheets were when one of the children wet the bed and this time went to his side to tell

him?

Did he turn the heat down as soon as I had gone up the stairs and commiserate when I wondered why the house was so damn cold?

Did he forget the drycleaning piled up by the front door which he had to move in order to exit and the overdue Visa bill propped up against his keys, all of which he said he'd take care of that morning, don't worry?

Was he patient?

Did he help the children get their hats and coats and mitts and scarves and snowpants and umbrellas and knapsacks?

Did he yell when the boot wouldn't go on, and yell louder when it wouldn't stay on, and yell even louder when someone cried once that boot was on?

Did he find the old missing sock stuck in the toe of that boot the next day?

Did he take a well-deserved break?

Did he play basketball once a week, bruising his finger, breaking a rib, throwing his back out, driving his friend to the emergency ward, getting depressed over someone else's heart attack, just to

relax and get out of the house for a while?

He couldn't possibly miss basketball, right?

Did he talk to me?

Did he nod and say hmm, offering an occasional oh, and reply really, is that right, no kidding, you don't say, I agree, could you move a little to the right I can't quite see the screen and excuse me, your elbow's on the business section?

Did he cry?

Did he shout oh, God, in a terror-filled voice just like mine when one of the children hit the coffeetable too hard?

Did he have tears in his eyes after I miscarried the second time?

Were his expressive eyes full of awe, the first to hold our firstborn at last in his arms, crooning I love you, little baby, in his own baby babble?

Virginia, I want to know.

If Leonard ever did the dishes.

If he cried when you were gone.

Voices, Past and Present

"There's no doubt in my mind that I have found out how to begin (at 40) to say something in my own voice." Virginia Woolf (Woolf 1975, 47).

I think I discovered another reason why Virginia Woolf committed suicide.
Leonard.

"Oh, but I have done quite well so far with Room of One's Own"...(149).

I just read his preface to her diary, selections which he had especially compiled and bound in a volume meant to illustrate the writer, the person, the intellect, and the life, including the entries written just before her suicide, and keeping in mind, as Leonard reminds us so aptly, that a diary entry only illuminates and spotlights one mood, a few framed minutes in a whole life of emotion and feeling.

"And so I pitched into my great lake of melancholy. Lord how deep it is! What a born melancholic I am! The only way I keep afloat is by working. A note for the summer--I must take more work than I can possibly get done. --No, I don't know what it comes from. Directly I stop working I feel that I am sinking down, down. And as usual I feel that if I sink further I shall reach the truth. That is the only mitigation; a kind of nobility. Solemnity. I shall make myself face the fact that there is nothing--nothing for any of us. Work, reading, writing, are all disguises; and relations with people. Yes, even having children would be useless" (143-144).

But Leonard, I couldn't find or feel one word of your sorrow or regret or sadness at Virginia's death. (And don't you dare, patient reader, dare think between the lines that perhaps that was his way of showing grief, or that perhaps that is how some people hide from grief, or that perhaps his grief was very private, or that perhaps I haven't yet read the book Leonard wrote that chronicles his devastation at Virginia's death.)

I wanted that grief there in the preface. I wanted to sense Leonard's great sadness that his wife was gone, not read some bookworm's advice on how to read the diary entries and how he managed to decide which entries to include.

*"If I could catch the feeling I would;
the feeling of the singing of the real world,
as one is driven by loneliness and silence
from the habitable world; the sense
that comes to me of being bound on an
adventure; of being strangely free now,
with money and so on, to do anything"
(148).*

I wanted to feel some of what Leonard must have felt when she died.

*"And then I am 47: yes; and my
infirmities will of course increase"
(145).*

I didn't want a Harlequin Romance Preface, just a preface that paid tribute emotionally to the woman who also sometimes cooked Leonard's meals (it's there in black and white in one entry); who knew the poetry of Christina Rossetti was "natural singing power"; who wrote in a final entry before her death in 1941: *"I think I will be less verbose here perhaps--but what does it matter, writing too many pages. No printer to consider. No public"* (362).

Not an arid wasteland of a preface that took his wife's diaries and didn't burn them, but instead used them without even saying how much it hurt him to do that.

Leonard didn't even cry publically in that preface.

Yet he cried privately when he read her book, **The Years**: *"L. put down the last sheet about 12 last night; and could not speak. He was in tears."* *"I, as a witness, not only to his emotion but to his absorption..."* (272).

Poor Virginia.

*"I have this moment, when having my bath, conceived an entire new book--a sequel to *A Room of One's Own*--about the sexual life of women" (165).*

Knowing Virginia

I have been both haunted and inspired by Virginia Woolf. She is there in the bibliography of every feminist book I have read so far. I have written poems about her, used quotations from some of her books, and I feel her presence all the more whenever I write my words or encounter her once again in yet another book.

I know she was married to Leonard, had no children, suffered recurring bouts of debilitating melancholy, loved other women, declared her feminism even more strongly when she was in her fifties, and I know that she walked into a river in 1941 and committed suicide.

I know, too, that she wrote in **A Room of One's Own** that there were many women who would not be listening to her public lecture (upon which the book is based) because they were home "doing the dishes or putting the children to bed" (1992/1929, 148).

I know that she admitted that someone has to bear the children, because she wrote such words in **A Room of One's Own**, and I know, too, that she advises the women whom she is addressing that perhaps one or two children are enough.

I know that she felt, during her difficult times, that even having children would be useless, because she wrote those very words in her diary.

I know that she was nurtured and cared for by her husband, Leonard, and that it is entirely possible that were it not for his care that many of her great works would never have been written.

I know, too, that there are feminist scholars who are quite critical of Leonard; who say that he failed in his intellectual assessment of some of her work, and in the manner in which he treated her illness.

I know, too, that in his preface to her diaries which he edited, he does not mention one word about his great grief or sadness about her suicide and death, nor does he refer to how difficult it might have been for him to even consider her diaries for publication.

I have read--and am still reading--books by or about Virginia Woolf, and I suspect that I will go on reading these books for many years to come, and that there is still much I have yet to synthesize.

I have charted all the feminist books I've read, and somehow all the arrows in my flow chart diagram circle back to Virginia.

And I wonder about her. I wonder what she was thinking about when she walked into the river, when she felt the first cold shock of soothing water upon her ankles, upon her knees, when she felt her skirts dragged down by the weight of the water, water rising up to her neck as she walked her way out of our life and into her everlasting words. Words which we still read, which I see everywhere in every feminist book I have ever

read. What was she thinking in that underwater room of her own, that cold, wet room rising over her nostrils, closing her eyes, her hair spreading out above the water like the thin, skeletal hands of a thousand, thousand threads of time. Holding her hand up out of the river of her words to reach across to all of us who have learned from her.

And I wish I could tell her: she was never alone, even when she walked into that river, when she could no longer bear the pain. All of us were listening to her words echo across the water, in that final, wet auditorium of time.

Against the Grain

Virginia:
is this
folded fist
aching
tight
in my throat
what you felt

they criticized
your text

Leonard said

against the grain

like carving

the roast
the other way

like scraping

your fingernail
across the chalkboard

like driving

the wrong way
down a one-way street

like scaling

up
the down escalator

like shouldering

your way
through a crowd of

people

like writing

what
you actually think

Repeated in Threes

inside me
another hard thing grows

hard unmelting
formed still growing

a tumour of despondency

like Virginia Woolf's Rhoda

in Waves

*Woolf's waves break
over the inner lives
of those characters
but never wash away
the sores
each paged story offers
some new bit of life
and learning
each new detail
breaks the water
as it dashes upon the shore
causes birdsong in dissonance
to ring upon the blade
each ray of sunlit words
upon the house
a little varied
images shifted but lingering
repeated in threes*

*the water
the birdsong
the sun filtering through
to a room in the house
illuminating silver knives*

inside me
this tumour lives
repeated in threes

*the tears that break
the wordsong singing
disharmonious chords
the poem shining bright
upon my house of stainless steel knives*

another hard thing grows
unsheared

Virginia Woolf's Alive and Well
and Living in a Co-op in False Creek

Virginia Woolf isn't dead
she's playing the pink guitar
writing for the sexes
rewriting women's lives
spinning through gynecological time
(untouched)
not an unlikely story
she's theorizing feminist fandango
in calypso classrooms

Edward
you're afraid of Virginia Woolf
scrawled on university bathroom walls
scrubbed universally in bathroom stall

Virginia
menstrual minstrel
spiritual specter
death by dying
defied

Posed and polished on pages of
Daring Doctrine
caring
Daunting Doctrine
flaunting

Escaped at last from her own round-rugged room
the kitchen of tiled time

Virginia's building
motorcycle memories
in the word workshop
composing computer programs
of centennial sentences
bungee jumping
from bookshelf to bookshelf
mass murdering
male Mensa mainbrains

Virginia isn't dead
temporizing temptress
temporal-airily
temper-rarely
temporarily
interred

POLYLOG: Re-configuring

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Drumheller Landscape

parched earth
stone-filled paths
caked clay dirt
enmeshed with chain-links of the past
red-white-black
stripped dunes which rise in steppes
above the stone-hardened drifts
the sun burns my flesh
into another fossil on a rock
and I am awed
by all that preceded me here
another quick gust of wind
blows my wide-brimmed sunhat
upon the land
where once majestic dinosaurs roamed
we are all one landscape
that simply changes shape and color
every millennium
oil-painted by the eyes
of the sky

Another Mad Poet Eroding with Words

tangled dark curly hair
(like mine)
standing far too close for a stranger
like a tree
wedging roots into rock
and causing erosion
making it a ritual
he wipes the perspiration off his brow
a few long cosmic moments
before his mad words explode
and scatter on our universe
causing erosion
another damn poet you comment
(like me)

Twirling

two of my cousins
on my mother's side
(her brother's daughters)
twirled batons
for years
when they were children
entering contests
later judging other stick-twirlers
I would watch the two of them
dressed in little scalloped skirts
throwing those silver-tipped batons
in the air
on a summer afternoon
while we sat mesmerized
trapped on chairs
in the back yard
of yet another child-run exhibition
even then
sitting by the pea vines
crawling full of pods
out of their dirt box garden space
I would wonder
at my cousins' skill
dexterity
nerve before a crowd
allegiance to a stick
conviction the baton
would return
the baton spinning
round and round their routines
always
when a baton accidentally dropped
a cousin would pick it up
as if nothing had happened
and continue twirling
but I thought I felt
their dismay
at the way those batons
sometimes had a mind
of their own
despite the many hours
of practice
I used to laugh inwardly
at their dedication
to a stick
but now
I twirl words
the same way
enter contests
astonished

how the words
like that baton
sometimes have a mind
of their own
spoiling my routines
and me
a non-believer once
laying down my words
at the altar of my own addiction
a practice of allegiance
no different than the way
my cousins daily
threw those batons
into the air

An Educated Person

an educated person
reads writes feels
passion
intensely
a fire within
flames burn hotbright
spewspill scorching others
fire felt
not always seen

there is humility here
more questions to be asked
interrogate all those answers
touch the fire

strength overrides
passion
a length of steel
upright
hard to bend
glinting
the shine mesmerizes me
a rod strikes the ground
 with precision
 decision
 derision
put out that fire

feeling tempered by fact
prove it
it can't be true
firm course ahead
resolve that uncertainty
take the path
use the map
enter the room
use the map
begin the journey
use the map
check that course
who's lost along the way?
add the changes
to the map
record that journey
for the next course
the next procedure
walk around the fire

the fire still burns
hotbright
touch the fire

Curriculum as Dream

curriculum is a dream

I teach dreams
learn them too

days pass
filled with steps
bringing me closer
closer to the dream
never quite there
always the dream
is in front of me
in the distance
just a thought away

days pass
filled with plans
filled helping others
see their dreams
like a fiddler
I play on
wanting them
to hear the music
not the pied piper
I want them dancing
to their dreams
want the caves
that imprison them
empty

alienated and bereft
we seek the dream
seek the awe
and tasting it
change forever

if curriculum is a dream
I am the dreamer

Are You a Real Teacher When Tomorrow Turns to Today?

Is tomorrow today? my youngest daughter, Erin, asks me.

I think about this question for a while, trying to view it from a five-year-old's perspective. A five-year-old attending public school for the first time, eager for what the next day brings, excited to be going where her older sisters go, still attached to home and the familiar comfort of parental proximity.

Yes, I finally reply, tomorrow is today, intuitively understanding that my daughter wants to know if this is the day she will stay for "a long turn" in her Kindergarten class, following a week of gradual entry which eased her into school and routines...

I am teaching music and drama two mornings a week in the lunchroom this year. Enrolment is up and space is at a premium. An old upright piano has been wheeled into the space normally reserved for tables, and all that I need to begin are some small bodies.

I walk upstairs to fetch the Kindergarten children for music. This is the first time I have met them. I introduce myself while their teacher escorts several children to the playground to retrieve forgotten coats.

Your skirt is beautiful, some remark to me at our circle gathering. And your shoes. (So good for the ego.)

I thank them.

Are you a real teacher? they ask. (Hmm. Better not think about this question too much.) I tell them: yes.

Meanwhile, several children leave the circle and begin to play with puppets, trucks, the playhouse...

I'll count to ten and close my eyes, their teacher entreats them when she returns. You surprise me and get ready for music, she adds.

While her eyes are closed, two children return to the circle, but two others leave it for the toys. Their teacher gathers the drifters and lines everyone up...

I love five-year-olds. They are wacky, so fresh and new, interpreting life in the unique language of young children, a language filled with their delightful distortions of a large world inhabited with large people.

My daughters love to hear the humorous stories I have collected over the years, adding them to their storehouse of family favorites. Like the time I called, "Freeze!" to a class of five-year-olds. We were moving around the room while I beat a hand drum with varying rhythms, eventually calling out a teacher's generic stop signal: FREEZE! And that's exactly what one little girl did. She stood in front of me, hugging herself with her own little hands, shaking just enough to suggest she was indeed cold, and uttered: BRRR! BRRR! BRRR!

We sing a clapping song and I play the Kindergarten children some music by Beethoven on the piano. So far we have also waited for the Grade 7's who were playing ping-pong to vacate the lunchroom and lost three small boys to the nether regions of the

spacious area. I can't seem to keep the twins' names straight even though they are wearing different shirts, and many claim they have to go to the bathroom which is in another building. (A week later I discover two foul-smelling bathroom stalls off a locked door of the lunchroom.) But in their eyes I detect glimmers of delight as they listen to the music; they agree that yes, Beethoven (the dog) would like this music I have played, composed by Beethoven (the man). They want to know where Beethoven (the man) lives, and when I explain that he lived long ago, but is long dead, one child announces: We all die. But not yet. Another child asks of Beethoven's demise: Was there blood?

Erin and I arrive ten minutes early and decide to walk around the schoolground, looking for her sisters. Erin refuses to hold my hand, and I can tell by the way she places her new red knapsack on her shoulders, lifts her chin and glances at the other children, she wants to be a big girl, independent and free of mother's protective hand. But when I turn to leave once she has donned her indoor shoes in her own classroom, she runs to me for one more hug and kiss...

The "lost" boys scurry back when I declare that I don't tolerate nonsense. More likely, they return to get their turn trying out the piano. Another child climbs on some gym equipment pushed off to the side of the room. I reclaim him and decide that the bathroom better not wait anymore. There is safety in numbers, so we all line up to map the way to the bathroom together. This takes ten minutes. Some are thirsty, too. One boy gulps a prolonged, cool drink at the water fountain, then spits it out in an extended arc which he miraculously aims into the garbage can nearby. Suddenly five others are desperately thirsty, but it's time to go. We proceed up the stairs in a herd, line long since broken...

How was your afternoon? I query my daughter.

Nice. I made a new friend, she explains. She's French, but speaks English like me. (Some piece of information out-of-kilter here. I make a wild guess.)

Do you mean your new friend is Chinese? I ask.

Yes, my daughter replies. I listened to music with those rails, she continues. (Ah! Headphones, I translate.) We saw the principal today, she supplies happily. She's a girl. But not a teenager with long hair. (OK. I'm following. The teenager with long hair is her Kindergarten teacher, a young woman).

What else did you do? I inquire.

Circle. You gotta do circle when you come in and after you play, Erin expounds.

What did your teacher say at circle? I probe.

Nice stuff, Erin responds.

I smile, think of some more nice stuff we can sing when my own next teaching-tomorrow becomes today, and select another beautiful skirt to wear at circle. A real teacher.

An/other Return

*behind a pole
two partners kiss
their reunion full
of lived love and longing*

I wait
watching luggage spin
round and round the ramp
pieces of lives
zippered away for safekeeping
transported
across a country
finally claimed
and brought to life once again
hung out on hangars

*limp wrinkled fabric blowing
in the breeze
a clothesline full of flat
lifeless colors*

only flesh fills out
these garment ghosts
silent
with all they have just been
the suitcase closed
on other stories

*the kiss sealed
like an envelope*

the garments silent
like a secret

*whispered in the wind
carried
between the wisp/whoosh/rush*

when clothes
are worn again and rub together
the threads remembering
other lives

POLYLOG: Re-constructing

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Wedding Dance: deCONstructing marriage

smash

the sound of broken glass
destruction of the temple
Jewish marriage beginning
one glass underfoot
under the foot
to my left
right leg raised & brought down
hard

****smash****

shards of glass
neatly collected in a cloth
napkin
signifying remembrance
(the re-member-dance)
that which is whole can be broken
that which walks also tramples
that which is tender can also destroy
that which is a vessel holds
nothing at times
not even air
that which filters the real
can be distorted
that which begins also ends
that which is happiness & lightness of being
can be ruptured with the sound of breakage

lessons learned
(more than a temple at stake here)
I dance barefoot midst the pieces of glass
shattered
a deCONstruction of the temple
sanctifying love
sanctifying attachment
sanctifying a marriage

I am the temple
I am the glass
I am the foot

smash

s(mash)

sm(ash)

Post-Modern WHAT-DID-YOU-CALL-IT

--a response to **Postmodern Education** by Giroux and Aronowitz--

Stanley.

Henry.

Boys. (I can't seem to pronounce your last names.)

This is not your mother speaking.

BUT--

Did you learn to write in the Province of Impenetrable Paragraphs?

Were you schooled in the School of Obscurity?

Were you hall monitors mouthing multivocal mumbo-jumbo messages to mutants

Cruising down the corrugated corridors of crap,

Pausing to pee post-modern pomposity upon ponderous portentous poles now polluted by
adynamic adversative adverbs
neuropsychotic nouns
and sexpartite sentences?

the voice-the voice-the voice-
of-otherness-smothered-and-
bordered-and-decentered-in-the-
human-subject-of-meaningful-
did-you-mean-meaning-full-
curriculum-for-students-
whose-social-political-
cultural-gender-identity-

Oh, really?

This really cannot possibly mean to be identified here by me.
Not in those pauselesspretentiouspanderingparagraphs perused by
this publically
unintellectual
teacher-terror.

Post-modern Life Crisis

In the post-modern tradition
of disruptive discourse
I now cast all rhyming words
from my lexicon of letters

Note* Is alliteration still allowable?

In the post-modern polemic
of contradictory contentions
I now vacillate between polarities
as inconsistently as I can sustain

Note* Can inconsistency be sustained?

In the post-modern realization
of no real reality
I now seek the truth
in text

Note* But doesn't intertextuality texture truth?

In the post-modern subversion
of confining conventions
I now fuse my fondest fantasies
with metafictional friction

Note* Can a mass of metafiction become confining?

In the post-modern critique
of dominant cultural contexts
I now pause
ponder
with post-modern passion
and

Note* Repudiate the post-modern mantra.

Note* Far too dominant for the cultures that I wish to create.

Post-Modern Feminist Film

hands in blood
squeezing entrails of blood
dripping
streams of thin blood urine
hands splayed
and tied by a man
running running
escaped and chased
to swarming bees
grating voice
droning
beebuzz voice
(here I stumble over feet
bolt to bathroom)
return to bees
still swarming
over Sylvia Plath's words
which run
into Barbie mothers
and baby dolls
daughter mourning
mother's death
step away from a train
I listen
watch
interest caught
by the sand (or ashes)
slipping through
the palm
of a daughter's hand
the irritating slosh
of water
never stops
grates on my nerves
as the child plays
with the Barbie
mother and child
grown daughter
running running
like the train
over the sand
water sloshing loud
slapsloshslap
last few grains
of mother ash
slip out of daughter grasp
to join
all the other grains of sand
foreign voice next
immigrant mother

admits
with an accent
that she relishes freedom
is not motherly
is not a bad mother
mother tongue
from another time
another culture
repeats
 repeats
 repeats
and bleats
the unmother mantra
good mother
not-good-enough mother
tip
of her mother tongue
black
dressed in white
dress
white shoes
white tights
white hat
covers black body
playing
in a grass field
beautiful black face
image underneath
whitetipped top
overtop
whiteclad longlegged
body of black
hidden
by white words
spoken
which reveal
pain
in school
telling tales
a child
calls her nigger
a teacher prints
niggardly
on the board
all black class
all white teacher
just didn't care
anymore
say beautiful black
eyes of pain
woman speaks
of being bussed

and not speaking
not saying
one sole word
all year
not reading
not writing
just sitting
all c's
biggest racist crime of all
cheated
of her education
cheated
of all those words
words
that could lift them
out of pain
out of longing
into the world
out of the film
images
bleak stark
depressing
hopeless
ends
with two women
living alone
on the street
apart from family
drifting
collecting the debris
of an alien
alienated city
breaking
into a Kotex machine
for two pads
and some nickels
begging for five dollars
to buy a car part
to get her children
from the babysitter
some man
gives her the five dollars
sucked in
by the fiction
one woman stands
on that same corner
trying to sell
a tawdry lamp
back in her bleak
almost empty room
she watches TV
she watches

post-modern
feminist films
of black suffocating
despair
while people eat
hot buttered popcorn
and the blood
from those intestines
drips
on the screen
drips
these images
of hopeless
 hapless
 helpless
heathen
post-modern women films
lights on
curtains rise
popcorn consumed
we return
to our painful
(it seems)
existence
enriched
by the fifteen dollars
we spent
on post-modern medicine

M(other) of the Text

the blank page
no tabula rasa this
but white space
Monique Wittig's workshop
to play with
sub/text inter/text
 words sounds images
 voices visions
in/scribed upon the blankness
even the silence
is a mirror
cr(eat)or of
page
 text entered c(entered) dec(entered)
a stage a ree(a)l of film a canvas
(posit)ion of an in(strum)ent
collabor(ate)d in silence
trans(form)ed in text
b(ordered) by margins
no c(entre)
to the page
found w(or)ld
between the lines:
self
i/magined
for/gotten
re/membered
un/known
m(other) of the text
inter/dependent but separ(ate) too

I am a blank page
about to turn

POLYLOG: Re-centering

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Air Supplies

I'm so sick of myself. I mean selves. The trouble with all my post-modern posturing, my collective consciousness, my self-absorbed something-or-other, is that I am becoming so introspective and focused on my interior, that I am beginning to want to give myself (selves) a good swift kick in the posterior(s).

So when I recently sat within the circle of a conference presentation that sought to describe strategies for building alliances between "Women of Color" and "White Women," I attempted to understand my response to the presentation in light of my own post-modern angst.

I listened to the Women of Color outline their rules for a Mixed Group workshop. I listened to the White Women describe their feelings of responsibility and culpability about racism. I listened to a description of a workshop exercise that involved one person holding her hand to the throat of her partner, cutting off her air supply, until the partner broke the hold. Apparently meant to be a graphic symbol of how it felt to be a Woman of Color--gasping for air.

Excuse me, I thought silently to myself, reacting to such an exercise as a violation against my body, my right to breathe. I don't want anyone cutting off my air supply. Even as an exercise. Even if I decide when to break the hold. I have enough trouble coming up for air as it is. And I think I can learn to relate to other women--any women--with empathy and compassion. Regardless of lived experience.

When I first walked into that conference room, I didn't see Asian Women, Black Women, Filipino Women, Aboriginal Women and White Women. I saw a roomful of women. Is this undesirable, I wondered. Should we be accentuating our differences this way instead of celebrating what we hold in common? I felt an affinity towards all the women in that room, but after the presentation, I had the women all neatly compartmentalized in my mind. And I had immediately noticed the one man in our midst. Of course. We have lived a lifetime of noticing the men in our midst. I felt confused. I don't want to homogenize all women, or minimize their lived experiences in the world as a result of race, skin color, historical oppression. But I don't want to be labelled--as one teacher friend told me is the current politically correct term--a Woman of Pallor. What an anaemic vision that title conjures up, colorless and ineffectual, a whitewashed, wishy-washy, washed-out paleface. Ugh.

And what am I anyway, I wondered at this presentation. I'm Jewish. Where do I fit? Woman of Invisible Color? Jewish White Woman? Curly-haired Woman? Woman with Husband and Three Children? Tall Woman? Where do we draw the line? Why do we even draw the lines?

Sitting in a restaurant with two women friends, slaphappy and giddy, we rated ourselves on the Oppression Scale. Well, I'm Chinese, and a woman, said one friend. I'm highest on the

scale, I think.

The second friend replied, OK, I admit I'm a White Woman, but I have a child in a wheelchair at home. That should give me some Oppression Points.

Well, I'm Jewish, I countered. We have a long history of oppression. That should be good for a few points.

The Queen of England, said one of these friends. What about the Queen? All that status, power and privilege. She's not oppressed.

Ha! I countered. If she were a King, she wouldn't have to answer for all her children's failed marriages.

I want to laugh a little bit. Laugh and hold hands (not throats) and gurgle (not gasp) with the unsuppressed laughter of what it means to be women together in this world. Searching for the joy out of the sorrow. Uniting, not subdividing, in diversity and difference.

The truth is, I need to laugh more. Laugh and be silly. I don't want to always take myself (selves) so seriously. I don't want to participate in workshop exercises that portray what I should be communicating pointblank or perceiving with heartfelt empathy. I need to laugh and count those Oppression Points like the battle scars of living that Clarissa Estes says mark her years. Count them and mark them. Together. In one circle. I don't want to sit around in circles talking in circles about making more inner circles.

But nothing is ever that uncomplicated. I knew my confusion about the presentation I attended signalled that I needed to investigate further. I knew that my reaction could be considered offensive to groups I had no wish to offend.

When I shared my views with others, I was surprised at the diversity of responses I received. Two women said they found my notion of uniting in joy and laughter uplifting. Like me, one woman is Jewish. Like me, both women are privileged in economic and educational terms. One woman (white) also worried about offending other groups who make distinctions based on differences.

When I approached a feminist friend for a reality check, he suggested I had more work to do in understanding all the issues. There can be little to laugh about in other people's experiences.

Not content to stop here in my exploration, I phoned a Woman of Color who had attended the presentation and whose philosophy I respect immensely. I related my confusion to her, my worry about labelling, my wish to celebrate and look for some joy.

She emphasized the importance of naming who we are and allowing space for nonmainstream groups to talk about their different lived experiences, in a confessional way to begin with, and as a step in coming to terms with pain. In order to break longheld silences. There isn't always that much to celebrate, she added. And she considered the workshop exercise powerful and potent. Did I not notice that the Women of Color

who spoke did not smile at all or look happy, she enquired.

Yes. I noticed. When we walk down the street past the construction crew; when we have to decide upon whether or not to abort or keep the babies; when we watch our ex-husbands ignore our children while they lavish money and attention on their new families; when we have to call 9-1-1 because our ex-partners broke into our houses; when we sit with the men and try to get a word in edgewise, hoping against hope that just one of them will care what we do, what we think; when we talk about poverty and violence and women who are nonentities in society because of race or class or age or disability, there isn't much to laugh about and air supplies are cut off.

Certainly I have more to learn. I'm willing to listen. And I have discovered I can and should learn some of it by continuing the discussions I began with a variety of others.

I have to believe, though, that I must keep in mind the validity of my own experiences as a woman, regardless of my own privilege. I have to believe that despite the fact that there isn't always a great deal to celebrate, we must also search in solidarity for some joy and laughter in all this living that can elevate us above ourselves, past the post-modern paraphernalia and workshop wizardry. Elevate us and unite us and fill us with good, clean, deep breaths of fresh air. Breaths of fresh hope and vision.

So I don't have to be so sick of myself. Selves.

if the self is a house...
 echoes
if the self is a closet...
 dark silences
if the self is a bowl of cherries...
 fruit flesh
if the self is a detached stem...
 severance
if the self is

say I eye i aiii ah-ee

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I/eye/i/aiii/ah-ee Again

I and not-I
inscribing difference
the meanings
endlessly deferred
in Others

ah-ee (ʔʌ)
the 5th ah-ee
of my quintuplet selves

a pinch
(reminding me the fledgling i's
are awake
not dreaming)

a shout
(exclaiming that the action hurt
a small pinprick of real living
a jab at life)

a shout to be touched
ah-ee ah-ee
in/voluntary guttural keening

a shout to be seen
(tasting of flesh between fingers)

the echo of not-I
zinging past Others' ears

Trinh Minh-ha & Me

the same fears
the self-same guilt
the desire for words
the living at the masters' thresholds
the search for the poetic
an ethnic
 feminine
 elusive
 illusive
 I-dentity

the blood of our pens
s
p
i
l
l
i
n
g
onto the blank pages
of Woman Poet Other's time

no native I but Jew
Jew & not-Jew

still w-
 o/a-
 ndering
where such I-dentity
dis/places me
endlessly deferred endlessly deferring
 the emotional
 the intellectual
 the vital

(Asian philosophy)
I--Jew & not-Jew
Western woman
do not know about the vital

is that why I feel so empty

Asian Women: A Tribute

if I were an artist
I would draw these women
with deep lines of listening
eyes the color of pure attentiveness
beautiful dark hair adorning
their stories with life

but I am a poet
and so I draw these women
with words
pinning them like butterflies
to air

Renee's Story

Anjin's story
is my story, too
the love affair is with words
(be)longing in a poem
a desire so passionate
the teacher waters the poems
until they bloom with
(e)motion
& milady's face wilts
jealous of the time
spent on teaching

even in death
the teacher still watering the words
with Anjin's tears

Middle Place
(for Ted Aoki)

Dwelling with Ted
in the and
where the teacher disappears
the I's dissolve
and in their place:

a word seen again
spun into the air
like a juggler's plates

a silent face drawn
out from the crowd
beckoned to meet the stickiness
at the merest breath of movement

a voice heard
that now echoes endlessly
bouncing off the wall
splitting into atoms

a deed honoured & shared
hopeful celebration
in already knowing eyes

a dissent respected
the remnant of a whisper crying

an unformed thought
encouraged to flounder
entered into emptiness

an idea recaptured
and reflected back
hopeful dreaming
a vision

cultures felt
through language people
thoughts & laughter

and the middle place
is home to all

Hush for a moment.

Do you hear the memory singing?

Healing the Split Subject

I see Her waiting
purse hanging stupidly
round her neck
by Her school locker
hoping for hi
or a smile
some sign of recognition
evidence of visibility...
so-damn-needy-searching-searching-for-self-in-someone-else-
wanting-always-wanting-something-to-fill-the-great-gaping-hole-
the-emptiness-born-empty-no-one-especially-Her-ever-able-to-
fill-the-hole-to-relieve-the-great-enduring-loneliness-always-
standing-at-lockers-waiting-waiting-for-something-waiting-to-be-
seen
to be seen
at times
She prayed to be invisible
embarrassed
missing some protective layer
moving through symbolic days
peopled with--
that plain girl by the locker
that young woman walking down school board/halls
that 40'ish woman climbing university stairs...
unseen-through-the-missing-layer-one-heart-beating-like-the-
broken-wing-of-a-fluttering-bird-the-rhythm-drumming-out-a-beat-
of-longing-the-wing-broken-but-still-suitable-for-flying
flying
back to that girl
that imaginary child
standing by the locker
lift the purse
from around Her neck
gently lead Her
from locker sentry
plant a kiss firmly
on Her forehead
whispering words...
don't-wait-anymore
more flying
broken wing & all
watch Her
walk down all the halls
head high
purse unlocked swinging
by Her side
not waiting
waiting
I fly into Her
& weareone

INTERLOG

Re-thinking

On Second Thought

Wait a minute!

A thesis is a public document, you say?

A copy occupies a space on the library shelf?

Just a sec.

I have to make a few changes.

Let me just take out

that line about the senior administrator of schools.

I wouldn't want some administrator leafing through this.

And I'll edit out the line

about taut breasts.

Too sexual.

Well, then, I'd better remove the parts about the male dancers.

The Power Games piece.

Let me just fix that up a bit.

I'll take out this, this, this, and this.

(Wouldn't want my husband to see this.

Some of it is exaggerated, you realize.)

There.

Virginia Woolf,

did Leonard ever do the dishes?

Short and to the point.

Oh, um, the Prodigal Mother poem.

That has to go completely.

And Everywomen, and the Happy Birthday to my daughter one.

I wouldn't want anyone to get the impression

I'm a selfish, self-serving, emasculating bitch

who really wants to abandon her children.

Let's see.

The response to Mary Daly's book.

No, too emotional.

I used the word porno at least twice.

Just keep the last sentence:

"I'll never be the same again."

That says everything in one breath.

The title of my scene about the miscarriage.

I'll change that to Untitled.

And I'll add more pain, suffering, loss, tears,

and a female doctor.

The three poems to my daughters can stay as is.
As well as Collections of Home.
Well, on second thought,
they're sort of on the light side
just there by themselves.
Too light, maybe?

All right.
Keep the three daughter poems and Collections
but put back the line about taut breasts, OK?
Hmmm. Doesn't sound right unless
the male dancers dance,
so they're back, too.

Do you really think I can accurately convey
all the complex aspects of filial love
without including these other mother poems?
Put them back.
And put back the entire Power Games piece.
I had something important to say.
The Daly response.
Put it back whole.
Put everything back the way it was before.

Maybe I could use a pseudonym.

(The names must be changed to protect the innocent--
and the guilty.)

MONOLOG

Re-vealing

A Woman Writer's Diary

EARLY JANUARY:

Is this real? The first night of the second half of my graduate writing course, and in walks Carl Leggo, the professor who teaches this part of the term: a poet/writer with long hair, earrings, and a sensitive face; a post-modern Lord Byron in a cream-colored fisherman-knit sweater. My surprise at his appearance--this is a very conservative, staid university--is compounded by my astonishment at the major assignment for the term, a portfolio of creative writing. Is this a figment of my imagination, or some sarcastic dean's?

I am delighted and challenged and astounded. Finally some time to devote to "real writing," something that seems to beckon to me now almost as if I had been waiting for this opportunity. Growing up female did not include the possibility of writing for me, partly due to a distinct fear of failure and partly due to a distinct lack of encouragement in the past. I do not truly believe I am a "writer" in any sense of the word. My one and only attempt to take a creative writing course when I first attended university as a naive young undergraduate was thwarted by the rejection of my manuscript. What did a sheltered seventeen-year-old girl from the prairies have to say anyway? Like so many other women who were born in the 50's, I became a teacher.

But somewhere deep inside my head were dreams and images and words being turned over and over. Turning until someone said, "Write them!" Turning until something happened so I would.

Despite my insecurity, I have lately determined that it is the writing I love in any graduate work I have done so far. I have been feeling that creative writing is something I always wanted to do. Carl later comments that he can feel the palpable "fear" in the room in reaction to being asked to write creatively and share this writing, but I do not feel afraid tonight. I feel exultant, stimulated, excited, somehow relieved that here at last is the opportunity I seem to have been waiting for, and curiously, I feel very emotional about the prospect of getting down to the business of writing--at long last.

MID-JANUARY:

I write my first poem for the course, my first piece of writing, and it is all about my silent voices, my hoarse voices, my lost voices, my drowned-out voices, my unsanctioned voices, my drifting voices, my "unspoken, unshapen, unbidden, underneath my tongue" voices...I ask who will really listen to my voices and sing back my words.

I resolve to write what I want to write. But it feels as if someone is stripping away layers of my many outer, protective

skins and it hurts. It is frightening, it is fraught with emotion, and it is freeing, too. I write a scene about my first miscarriage which I have not dealt with for years, but I do not submit this scene just yet. Perhaps next time. We'll just see.

And I write more poems about how I write in my sleep, in my dreams, in my head, at the kitchen sink; how I have a whole other life that wants to be written; how I want to write this story awake.

I write about my apparent rebirth after my daughters were born. I write about the feminist writing I begin to read. I write about being a feminist wife with three children, and I write about the present joy in my life with my family.

Little do I know at this juncture just where this present joy will lead me, or what new skins I will be wearing next with each old (tough, worn-out, mottled) skin that I shed.

MID-FEBRUARY:

I dream another poem. It is so strong that I have to get up out of bed and write it down. It refers to an incident earlier in my life, and I have no idea why I think of it now, immersed as I have been in writing about the love and laughter and delight and poignancy and wryness involved with my three daughters and family life.

I reach for a nearby pencil and paper resting on my nighttable and begin writing the words down, inadvertently waking and startling my sleeping husband, who growls grumpily at me, "WHAT are you doing??"

"Nothing," I reply quickly, feeling as if I've been caught doing something illegal and must conceal it. I take my pencil and paper to the bathroom where I close the door and sit on the floor to write the poem, which seems to write itself. It is just as well that I have changed locations. The tears spill down my cheeks unchecked onto the paper and the bathroom floor as I write. I fold up the wet poem into a tiny, thick square of paper and carefully bury it among my school papers for typing, then I return quietly to bed.

It is compulsive, this whole writing venture which I have begun. It is addictive. It is erratic and undependable and overwhelming and cathartic and revealing. It is also very lonely, and sometimes, very sad.

LATE JANUARY:

We have been asked to share some writing with the class tonight. I have my first submission ready to hand in to Carl for response. When he asks me if I am going to share anything tonight, I answer, "yes, but I don't yet know what," and I don't. I am still unsure of the group, unsure of myself, unsure of the instructor. At this point, sharing my writing is like shouting into a wide canyon for me, and I don't want my words to reverberate that loudly. I am having enough trouble listening to the words with my inner hearing and getting used to that, never mind letting near-strangers and classmates who I've only

known a few weeks hear my words.

Should I read reflections on writing or one of my poems? Which poem? Which reflection on writing? Am I ready to reveal myself and parts of my life to these people? I am usually very private. I am feeling very self-conscious and agonised, and yet, I want to share some of my writing, too. Shouting my words into that canyon makes the words come alive, gives them a real, pulsing life, and I sense that if the words remain unexposed and hidden on the paper, never shared with anyone, then they will disappear from my life and I will be bereft. I will have lost something forever.

Two others share some writing. The first piece is funny and touching and well-written, and so is the second, and everyone responds positively. Carl honors each reader with some affirmative comments, including the remark that one poem is publishable, even. I am feeling more relaxed, although the latter remark rocks me somewhat, because I feel shaky enough in confidence to believe that I will never, ever hear such a comment directed to me. But I want to hear it, I realize, and I am surprised at myself, because this desire seems to have welled up suddenly out of nowhere. No, not nowhere, out of a past that bypassed writing in any serious, very committed manner, and I wonder why my commitment is beginning to surface now, so late!

I decide to read my feminist poem. I read, but I am afraid to gauge the class response. When I finally do look up, I focus on one of my classmates: he is silent, speechless, looks shocked to me. There are several such moments of complete silence, during which time I fling myself suicidally into my metaphorical canyon, climbing up reluctantly to hang from the edge with trembling fingers, waiting for someone to step on my hands. The shocked-looking student speaks, saying he doesn't want to cloud the rich words with any other words. Others discuss the feminist aspects of the poem for a time, especially the women. Carl speaks of how important such feminist writing is, and adds that there are different kinds of feminism, too. I hear and accept the positive words of encouragement, but the victim who is still hanging off the edge of the canyon flinches.

No one steps on my hands, but oh, the skin feels so red and raw. I am glad I have shouted into the canyon. I am even glad that I have jumped right into the canyon, and I am glad that I have climbed back to the edge to listen. My words have been entered into the echoes of time and place, and I know they will not vanish now.

So why do I wish that these echoes were not ringing in my ears, and why do I feel as if I have just given something away that I really still needed?

At the end of the class I bravely hand in my first submission of writing, trying not to think about all the personal, private, revealing aspects of my ordinary life and about my boring self that a near-stranger is going to read.

I am sleepless for the next week.

MID-MARCH:

I am writing a poem about a woman I knew who died of cancer, and I am writing in the bathroom, of all places, sitting on a closed toilet seat and crying.

My husband walks in and sees my paper, my tears, and gives me a look I can only describe as

wide-eyed,
incredulous,
unbelieving,
and
dismayed.

I wake up in the middle of the night again, with a start, and cannot seem to stop thinking about past events stretching back over twenty years or more. I feel like a videotape machine, rewinding and playing my past relentlessly. The present emotion associated with such meditation sends me from my bed, sneaking away to the playroom with pencil and paper where another night poem seems to write itself. Again, I am grateful that I am alone, because I can't seem to stop crying, and I don't understand why I am even thinking such thoughts at this point in my life.

This time I immediately steal away by myself to write. Such self-imposed isolation is a facet of my woman writer's life.

We are travelling to Disneyland and my husband is relaxed, happy to be on vacation. He has been working long, hard hours and has been tense and short-tempered of late. I talk to him about writing, poetry, the writing course I am taking, and what it all means to me. He is receptive to what I am saying and seems to accept and understand all of it.

He pats me on the knee in a symbolic show of support. But I feel like a deviant wife and mother who, it is hoped, will soon return to reason and sanity.

We are returning from Disneyland. Everyone is tired and grumpy. I am wearing dark sunglasses behind which I am silently grieving two miscarriages which have inexplicably surfaced in my writing and which I am writing about. I say nothing aloud about any of this, nor do I share what I have written. I have carried and lost those babies, but I cannot, cannot share my returning sorrow aloud to my unsuspecting family. I can (and do) write about it.

Writing seems to uncover past pain within me, and encourages that pain to resurface among all the other muck. I seem to cry a great deal these days, and often. Not just when I am writing, but when I am reading, too. Certain passages, especially in feminist books, move me to many tears. I am crying an ocean of tears, and if it is true that God counts women's tears, I hope She's using a calculator for mine.

EARLY FEBRUARY:

Carl returns my first submission of writing at the beginning of the class. (I am glad I don't have to sit for two and a half hours staring at the folder on the table in front of him, wondering about it.)

I read his comments, immediately noticing that he has indeed sung my words back to me. He has also shared some of himself and his own life as a writer through some of his comments. I especially appreciate these personal responses because I have come to writing late in my life, without a background of experience.

As I begin to get a sense of myself in my writing, the comments act as a sort of sounding board and a means of comparison. These open comments encourage my own risk-taking in writing because he risks letting me begin to know him as a writer and a person.

Later when I go to his office to borrow a book, he says my writing is wonderful. I feel encouraged, and less wary, but even so, unbelieving.

The next time I read a poem aloud in class I know exactly what I will read, and it is a provocative, contentious feminist piece. I am confident only that this is what I wish to share. I feel like I have opened a wound which is about to bleed all over my paper when I finish reading the poem aloud, and even worse after the poem is discussed. I notice those first few seconds of silence once again, and this time fill them myself, nervously, with some anecdote relating to some details in the poem, feeling foolish after I tell the story.

I am left with the impression that the poem has caused some acute discomfort, especially following the final statement: "You certainly struck a chord."

Again, I interpret these fair-enough remarks negatively. Have I gone too far? Have I insulted anyone? Have I presented the issues in a balanced way? While I am delving into issues that I feel are important and true, I am not used to my own strong emerging voice, or the reaction of others.

And it seems to me like I am reading my work as if I am trying to join some exclusive men's club, and once again, never quite make it.

I'm certain this impression emanates from my experiences as a woman and a student, but if I am supposed to be hearing how important feminist writing is, etc., and how these issues should be opened up, etc., I keep hearing some voice in the past saying, "Boy, what a bitch!" underneath the surface of it all.

I submit the scene I have already written about my first miscarriage with my second batch of writing. I am beginning to trust my readers--and myself.

END OF MARCH:

My daughters are playing in the playroom, happily occupied, or so I believe, while I write in my bedroom, immersed.

One daughter then enters my room and asks me, "Why do you never spend time with us anymore? What is bothering you?"

I am stunned, as we have just returned from a trip to Disneyland where I spent twelve days and nights with them. I discern that this daughter was sent to me as an emissary, obviously the end result of a recent child-run conference.

I manage to stutter a few calming (I hope) words, determining to get back to this matter later. When I think about my daughters' adjustment to my immersion into writing, and analyze it, I comprehend that they are jealous, threatened, and feel they are losing me.

Just like when a new baby is born.

I fight the immediate guilt that threatens to engulf me and wonder why they don't go to their father with their complaints. (He is away more than I am.)

I have discovered writing, my new baby, and an identity that goes along with this, and parts of a self formerly buried, and parts of a self now emerging. It means so much to me. My sensitive daughters sense this and the status quo is changing.

Later this day I discuss my writing some more with my daughters. I reassure them that I love them unconditionally and unequivocally, but I add that they'll have to get used to me writing. I don't intend to stop writing, I tell them, and some of my time is my own for doing what I feel is important.

They seem to understand. We make arrangements to go grocery shopping together but I can't shake my feelings of guilt. When it is time to leave for the store, one daughter opts out and decides to stay home with her father. This makes me feel even worse.

MID-FEBRUARY:

I feel a breakthrough in my writing this week. I try a story based on a bizarre idea that just came to me, another one of those inspirations that visit me at the oddest moments, when in the bath, for instance, or down on the floor wiping up grape juice.

The story seems to write itself, and I feel so pleased with myself when it is done. I include some (tastefully written) sex scenes. At first, I am shocked that they seem to want to be written in the story, then embarrassed when I think of anyone else reading them. As I write the words, I feel myself struggling to cross some line of self-imposed propriety, and yet I continue. When I finish writing these scenes I feel curiously free and abandoned and even can admit to myself that writing these scenes gives me an incredible sense of control and pleasure.

I notice my writing is beginning to change. I am writing more intimately with less concern about being private and guarded. I earlier wrote in one piece:

Hey, that's private! There are some things I will never write about.

So much for that.

But besides writing about more private matters, I have begun to write about more past painful events that I thought were well-forgotten and forever buried.

So much for buried past.

I am aware of my readers, but this is not stopping me from writing what I want and seem to need to write. I think I trust them now, writer to writer, writer to reader. Some of the class responses have given me a clear indication of the group's integrity, professionalism, sense of responsibility and trustworthiness.

Carl calls me a poet and a writer in some of his recent responses. I have never been called either before. I realize that I have always wanted someone to name me poet and writer. I have not been able to name myself. I did not have the confidence. I realize I want to be a poet and a writer. It means everything to me.

LATE FEBRUARY:

Tonight I read some of my writing to the class, and again I feel so vulnerable and exposed. That bleeding wound opens again. Will I ever feel comfortable about sharing my work (and myself)?

When I read the next set of written responses, Carl writes that he hopes I will seek publication, and offers to give me advice and addresses. He also writes, along with very encouraging and positive responses, "do you know how good you are?" in the margin of one of my poems.

No, I didn't know. No one has ever really told me, not the way he has. And I have probably wasted a lot of time because I didn't know.

Again, I am amazed at how readily I am embracing an identity as a writer, how addicted I am becoming to writing, how committed I feel to seeking publication.

I am taking more risks, growing stronger and more fearless in my writing, and am fearfully changing as a person.

END OF MARCH:

I wrote and submitted an incredibly personal narrative, another very intimate piece of writing which has taken me deeper and deeper into myself.

I am astonished that I am even willing to let anyone read this piece of writing. I am astonished that I wrote it. I am astonished that I trust readers enough to submit it. I cried for days (again) after I wrote this piece. I am feeling like salt was poured in that open wound as a result of writing the narrative. At times I write and open up my wounds, and it seems like I am putting myself at other human beings' mercy, praying that the wounds don't get infected. I become angry and annoyed and bitchy and dissatisfied and dissenting and disagreeable this night. I ardently voice my dissent and concern aloud, but I don't understand it until much later. Am I perhaps having some trouble accepting the approach of the end of this writing

course, and being adrift on my own? Is this affecting my perceptions?

It takes a great deal of thinking and soul-searching to sort out all of my thoughts about this night. I write some bitchy, strong, passionate words. I submit these words for response.

SEVERAL WEEKS AFTER THE COURSE ENDS:

The writing has been a lifeline for me, one that extended from my ordinary woman-cloistered existence to another world where thoughts, impressions, images, symbols, ideas, language were all churning together in a tumultuous kelp-filled, murky sea. The writing cleared the seawater somewhat, so I could see where I was swimming. The writing parted the waters, too, so I could swim unhindered, at least for a while, until I knew where I was heading. Sometimes the writing distressed me, uncovering some sharp coral or (to my mind, at least) some beautiful but poisonous sea creature there in the underwater. Sometimes the writing confused me, muddying the waters where I believed I had cleared them as I swam. I believe my confusion often stemmed from my own perception that I did not know exactly what the words I wrote were trying to communicate. And I desperately hung on to any responses I received because I was not yet a strong enough swimmer. Carl said that language slips and slides, that we are never successful in writing/saying exactly what we mean, but still, I write and attempt to get close. I think words all have layers of history and emotion behind them. Sometimes I find it difficult to fathom the depth of the ocean I am swimming in.

I was very conscious of all the time it must have taken to read all I had written and write back so many words of response, too. Yet I don't think I would have grown as a writer if I had not been given the time and those words. I certainly might not have grown stronger in writing conviction and confidence, and I know I am not yet as secure as I could be.

As the course drew to a close, I was also conscious of how dependent I could be on others' responses, but how important it was going to be to learn to write without them, too. Time to swim on my own, with the lifeline, and hope I don't drown. But this is more difficult when you learn to swim as late as I have, and are not even certain you tread water well!

I am a writer and I write, and although the course has ended, I will keep writing.

JANUARY TO MAY:

I am making a bed, angry because of some tasks left to me that were supposedly "forgotten." I pull up one of the bedcovers, drop it, and go and write a poem about power games.

I am making my bed in our room. Picking up toys, children's books, children's clothes, and rearranging a plastic sheet meant to protect the mattress from their urine. And I stop, write a poem titled "Where Did I Leave Me?"

I am sitting at the kitchen table, writing, and my husband asks: "What are you writing about?" I read him a silly limerick with sexual innuendos and he says something ridiculous in return. I can tell by the look on his face that he is uncomfortable about what I wrote.

I am sitting at the kitchen table, writing, and my husband asks: "What are you writing about?" I tell him a bit, and he says, cautioning me, "I hope you don't use her real name."

I am sitting at the kitchen table, writing, and my husband asks: "What are you writing about?" I tell him it is a narrative that I am sending to the newspaper and I tell him a bit about it. He requests that I don't send it in right away as some of his colleagues might see it and react negatively. (He needn't have worried. It doesn't get published.) I send it in anyway, and I don't wait.

I am sitting at the kitchen table, writing, in my nightgown. The dishes are waiting, the beds are waiting, the laundry is waiting, and I have no idea nor do I care about what to serve for supper. My children weave in and out of the kitchen. Somewhere I make them lunch, and add those dishes to the stack on the counter. It is 5 P.M., and finally dressed, I drive everyone to McDonald's.

I am checking the mailbox for any word on the writing I have submitted for publication. Nothing.

I am checking the mailbox for any word on the writing I have submitted for publication. A postcard (with postage). It states: Your submission was received. You included sufficient postage. Be patient.

MID-MAY:

My nine-year-old daughter asks to read my story when I show her the five pages I have just printed off the computer. I jokingly refer to the story as my gothic piece. It ends mysteriously and even I don't know what it means. I have the distinct impression that a psychiatrist would have a great deal to say about the story, interpreting it as a woman trying to break out of the confines of her restricted life, or as evidence of a woman's unfulfilled life. Maybe the story symbolizes a woman's internal longing for a day or two all by herself. (I have not had a day to myself for nine years!) I love my daughters dearly, but to be perfectly honest, I also crave some time to myself. Maybe my allegorical story is merely about a woman's instincts gone awry.

I mention to my young reader that writers often use what they know from real life and change it, too, but that the story is not actually about us. (I add these last words because the ending could be interpreted quite darkly, too.)

My daughter giggles when she reads the dialogue of the children in the story, and it does sound just like her and her sisters. She giggles at the way I describe the wind blowing away their umbrellas, but she falls silent and thoughtful at the ending.

When I ask her what she thinks it means--it's surprising how many times my children's responses have been incisive--she asks me, "What happened to the children?"

"I don't know myself," I reply, "there are several possibilities." She finally states that she thinks the woman main character is really on a walk all by herself and the rest of it is all a dream.

Okay. I'll buy that.

APRIL:

I feel more peaceful and content than I have in years. But this is short-lived. I then feel at loose ends, uncertain where I am going next on my writing journey.

So I write.

Some days the writing flows. Some days I throw away what I have written. And some days I cannot write at all. I am afraid not to write. I don't want to let it go now that the course has ended. So I write again, and keep writing. I cannot seem to accurately gauge what is good and what is not. But I check the mailbox daily, impatient, for rejection or acceptance letters.

My husband remarks to me: "You are in your power mode, entering a positive field."

My children stop asking: "When will you be finished your writing?"

I am a writer.

I am a writer.

INTERLOG

Re-locating

Doctor, Help!

My husband won a cruise for us when I was nine months pregnant with our third child, and his parents got to go.

The receptionist at my doctor's office wants me to bring one child with a pounding earache in at 12:45 and the other two who are coughing in at 3:45.

The custodian at the school where I teach opens the door for me in the morning so I don't drop my boxes of paraphernalia and brings me my mail afterschool. (What a caretaker!)

The headline: A COYOTE TRIED TO EAT MY SON leaped out at me from a tabloid by the Safeway checkout, and I'm wondering if that conservation officer lied to me.

I now write material like this on papers propped up against the back of Cheerio boxes while I'm waiting for the Safeway computers to start working again.

I now often look back to check if what I already wrote was written by somebody else first, and I can't believe it if I can't find my writing somewhere else, I just keep looking. Like now, I'm sure someone wrote about this in one of their articles somewhere (only with alliteration), if I could just find it.

People reading this thesis probably know more about me after reading my writing in that writerly way. They may know more about me than my two sisters, my husband and my mother. They may, in fact, know more about me now than I know myself.

DIALOG ONE

Re-citing

Unknown Poet: There is a strange movement in the Polylog, like a boulder rolling down a hill, and unearthing other rocks, but the boulder comes to a stop at points. Full stop, and transforms, changing shape, color, texture...A crystal ball that reflects your world from underneath the glass and the small rocks bounce off the domed globe.

Renee: That's very poetic. Yes, I guess you could say that. You could say anything. The Polylog represents the past few years of my writing life, of writing about my life, and I look back now to the beginning and I am amazed at how my writing has unfolded. Keep in mind, too, that I played with the polylog a great deal. Some of it is chronologically ordered, like my poems and reflections on coming into writing, on breaking silence. More recently, much of the writing bears a metafictional, post-modern flavour. But some of the writing is positioned in the Polylog where it seemed to fit. For example, the three poems about my daughters (**Snapshot; Cameo; Pencil Sketch**) are more recently written. They seemed to belong in the **Re-joy/sing** section. I'm sure you noticed the reference to Heidegger's term: "always already" in **Cameo**, a result of the reading I have been doing about Hélène Cixous in Conley's book, and about post-modernism in Somer Brodribb's book. The theoretical and literary readings I have been engaged in seep in to the poetry and narrative. **re-nee in the poem's pores**, a poem in the Prolog, attests to that. By the way, I wrote **Cameo** before reading David Jardine's text: **Speaking with a Boneless Tongue** (1992b). I was greatly intrigued with how often Jardine uses the term, "always already," throughout his book. It wasn't until I read Somer Brodribb that I noticed the phrase recurring and repeating in so many of the books I had been reading. That term was not acknowledged in many texts, either. I think Conley is the first author I read who attributes it to Heidegger. I've gone off on a tangent, I know, but I wanted to illustrate that behind two seemingly simple words in a poem, there is a context and history that is only ever insinuated. Behind the placement of a poem or narrative between other poems and narratives are artistic decisions that dis/place the textual signs which appear differently to readers; which, in fact, alter and distort the so-called truth of a text. None of this takes away from the movement you notice in the Polylog. It complicates that movement with textual and creative considerations that construct the text, and the life written about in the text. Recall Ted Aoki's comment about the said and the unsaid in poetry (page 20 in the Prolog). There is so much in any writing that is unsaid. So much that has to remain unsaid. I like Gary Snyder's discussion of this cited in **Speaking with a Boneless Tongue**. He writes that a poem "walks the edge between what can be said and that which cannot be said" (1992b, 115). The Polylog walks the

edge between what can be said and that which cannot be said. Words, spaces, silences, meanings, graphics, chronology, order, all live on this edge. By the way, you may have noticed Ted Aoki's influence in **Cameo**, too. The reference to my middle daughter in these lines is certainly influenced by Aoki's cultural philosophy: "reflecting the in-between/ where she gives everything away in her features/ but stays out-of-focus." Aoki speaks of living in a middle place of culture, one which is neither this or that, but this and that, with the egocentric I/eye de-centered (and so the features are out-of-focus). Less I, as Ted would say. My generous middle daughter embraces such a de-centered ego. She is deeply philosophical for someone so young, considering others before herself, already living, I believe, in Ted's middle place.

Unknown Poet: That's a great deal of history and context behind one small poem. I think I am beginning to sense how overwhelming the unsaid can be. As a poet myself, I am conscious of some of my own unsaid, but much of it does not rise up off the page to whisper in my ear. Much of the unsaid remains elusive and buried. The silent unsaid. Some of this unsaid becomes apparent to me years later. The revelatory unsaid, slow in coming. I suppose this is where we must all take care when discussing any writing. We shouldn't attribute too much to the writing in an effort to interpret and analyze, to pin words down to meanings. Perhaps some things are best left unsaid, and this silence speaks to us in a manner heavily endowed with important meanings.

Renee: That's very mystical and I agree. There is a tendency to want to analyze and theorize every aspect of the writing. This is impossible--the nature of the writer/reader/text relationship is such that the writing changes constantly, as does the writer and reader, for that matter. Not only that, such analysis sucks the breath out of the poetry and narrative, leaving flat, deflated words. Recently in a writing course I was taking, we discussed a portion of the text from **Touch the Dragon**, a Thai Journal. The writing is breathtaking, full of vivid images and details that evoke the earth, the people, the author's bicycle ride. I found the language in the excerpt beautiful and rich, evocative and lovely. By the time we had dissected the writing, the writer's intent and the techniques, my initial sense of wonder and appreciation had faded. Our analysis spoiled the freshness of the journal excerpt for me, its beauty and authenticity. Partly this seemed due to a propensity to find fault, but I wondered at the time if there should be a careful balance struck between analysis and appreciation, between writing and theorizing.

Unknown Poet: Yes, but I think good writing makes us curious, too, about the writing, the writer. On that note, I wanted to get back to something you said earlier, how your writing has

unfolded since you began writing. Could you elaborate on that?

Renee: This is difficult to put into words. When I began to write, I peeled back many layers of skin. I refer to that many times in the first section of the Polylog. As I wrote about my life, my experiences, my writing, it felt as if I were falling down a black hole at times, deeper into myself, uncovering past events and emotions. It seemed bottomless. I spiralled down and the words spilled out. Then I reached a point where I could feel I was not pitching headlong anymore (your metaphorical boulder coming to a stop). The words were slower, more considered. This poem which I wrote in 1993 demonstrates the slowing down I felt at the time:

My Words

my words of poetry are
slower now
considered
always just a shade away
from inspired
always just a tone away
from musical
always just a minute away
from finished
always just a stamp away
from published
always just a word away
from what I want to say

my words of poetry are
slower now
a dull ache
in the side of the page
a margin
a hyphen
an empty line
an unspoken silhouette

my words of poetry are
slower now
slower
and slower
until
they
finally
stop

Of course the poem is also about the difficulty of putting into words what we hope to express, and of course, my words did not stop. Nor will I let them. I had broken through my layers with the writing, to the poet and writer. To an identity as poet and

writer, in addition to all my other roles and selves. I read more and more, too, as I wrote, particularly in feminism and post-modernism. I am still reading and learning. The writing began as a breaking of silence, a discovery of another identity, assisted by feminist texts such as **Room of One's Own and Writing a Woman's Life**. The writing then developed as a practice, an addiction, an obsession, a way of life, shaped and formed by the life that I live as a graduate student and scholar, reading and studying (always in addition to my other identities as a woman). I became a poet and writer. I sought and found publication for some of my writing. I send my words out into the world everywhere. This continues to this day. As does the continual conflict between scholar and poet/writer, exemplified by this poem:

Where the Words Come

again I return to these pages
words spilling from my pen
away from works cited
quantitative mind games
graduate hoops and hurdles
can I cope with the struggle
I am not Jeremiah
I don't have the answers
to any of the questions

the academic soul feeds
supports my creative muse
which nurtures
the ability
I know
I acknowledge
the ability
I question
the desire
abandon all thoughts:
academic goals
simply pursue the pages:
words
someone whispers to
my confusion
write your way
through life

ask
from where do all
the words emanate
would I just explode
and scatter
all over the universe
am I held together

by the structure
of the intellect
would I still have words
substantial
anywhere to go
or gossamer-lace-film
pillow-feathers
blowing by my breath
short gasps
I form
no structure
for the form
disappearing
in the words
falling
down black holes
overwhelmed
emotionpassionneeddesirepain
both halves
make a whole
courageous only
if the words are backed
by deeds
that take me from the words
until I run home
to the words
nothing
can wrench me away
again
courageous only
if I lose myself
in the words
only the words
always the words
the pain/pleasure
of the words
nothing in-between
devoting everything
would they mean as much
would I have
anything to give
would I lose my self
in the words

I can walk away
from everything
if I can keep
the words
if the words
keep coming

I should mention, too, that I reached an autobiographical point

where I felt sick of my selves, wanting and needing to branch out to other issues, other people. Of course such writing is autobiographical, too, since regardless of topic, the writing says something of the writer. But I actually felt for a while as if I had no more stories to write about my selves, my life. I felt I had reached the end, and I was both relieved and horrified. I think poetic and autobiographical writing leads one to focus upon one's selves, especially the dark moments. This can get relentless. At one point I think I recorded every dark moment I ever had in a new poem, and frankly, I got sick of such indulgence, even if it did record the details of my womanly existence. Sick enough to turn a corner. What in fact happened was that my writing took a new turn. Instead of writing about each and every dark moment, I became more de-centered, looking beyond ego to the world at large, and happier and more content in my writing for the change. I still write about my selves (and my dark moments), but I don't feel I've reached the end. Rather I feel I've widened my autobiographical possibilities. After all, there is a whole world out there to write about. We live in relationship to everything in our world. I got past feeling I had no more to say about my selves by opening up more to the world around me. Perhaps this is akin to what Ted Aoki means when he discusses overcoming the Western primacy of the I/eye. Or what Trinh Minh-ha means when she writes that "writing is born when the writer is no longer" (1989, 35). Beyond the I/eye of our selves, our autobiographical stories, we can write a life that is populated with many I/eye's.

INTERLOG

Re-inscribing

Metaphorical Madness

Did you know--

--that Pears shampoo residue works best for producing great towers of bubble mountains when you turn on the Jacuzzi jets fullstrength.

When I write I like to record moments of pleasure and pain that rise up and out of jetstreams of living, spilling bubbles all over my emotions.

--that the best place to be alone and think is shopping at the mall, if you leave your family at home.

Writing for me is a lonely venture full of introspection, inspection, retrospection, circumspection: sitting in the midst of the tempest.

--that rice is easier to pick up off the floor the next day when it's dry.

Writing forms damp words so close to me that I often have to step back from them for a while and let them solidify.

--that the crunch you hear when the chiropractor adjusts your neck is not bones cracking, but nitrogen, and if you plug your ears, you can't hear it.

Often I view what I have written with trepidation, very afraid of what is coming next, yet unable to stop the words which whisk right by my twisted longings.

--that the week when everyone was home sick with the flu was when I first realized how good it felt for once not to be enslaved by the clock.

Sometimes I wish writing could be the centre of my life from which all else flowed and followed.

Now you do.

ANALOG

Re-playing

THE UNSAID:

I wrote "If I Call Myself" after I read Elaine Showalter's **The New Feminist Criticism**.

I wrote "Women Who Write" after I read **Sudden Miracles** and **Language in Her Eye**.

I wrote "Repeated in Threes" after I read **Waves**. Several people I knew were waiting for news of possible "tumours," and this made me face my own possible "tumours." In **Waves** Virginia Woolf interrupts the narratives of the main characters with sections that describe the waves, the birds, and the sun filtering upon the house. These poetic interruptions are repeated throughout the book and each repetition is slightly different, but retains the thread of the waves, the birds, the sun.

I wrote "Trinh Minh-ha & Me" after I read **Native Woman Other**. I ended the poem asking: "is that why I feel so empty," and this emptiness is double-edged. I meant the words to signify a bleak, despairing emptiness as well as an emptying out in order to begin again and fill.

I wrote my "Bitter Milk" after I read Madeleine Grumet's **Bitter Milk**, during the time I pulled one daughter out of school and homeschooled her for a year.

I wrote "Pedagogy" after checking on my sleeping daughters late at night. They are always full of questions, and as I frame some answers, some more questions, we write and re-write the world together.

I wrote "Judgement Day" after my cousin Adelle was appointed a judge.

I wrote "Moodpiece" when I learned a woman colleague was dying.

I wrote "Travel" when I wanted to attempt some short fiction.

I wrote "Post-modern Feminist Film" when I wanted to respond to the film produced by a group called the "Post-Modern Sisters," from the San Francisco Bay Area. In perfect post-modern fashion, or so it seemed, the people sitting to my left and right at the theatre ate popcorn as the images played across the screen: a juxtaposition of hot, buttered pleasure against the bleak post-modern landscape portrayed through the colors,

shapes, images, projected on Deleuze's "white wall" (1987, 17).

I wrote "Re-nee's Rhetoric" when I wanted to play with language.

I wrote "Knowing Virginia" after letters to the editor appeared in the newspaper, castigating my previously published "Power Games" prose poem.

I wrote "Virginia Woolf's Alive and Well and Living in a Co-op in False Creek" after I charted all the feminist books I had read and realized they all circled back to Virginia Woolf.

I wrote "This is How the Writing's Going" after someone asked me: How's the writing going?

I wrote "Passage" after I dreamed it.

I wrote "Endings of Beginnings" sitting on a closed toilet seat in a hotel room bathroom in Disneyland.

I wrote "Shadow" after a conversation with one of my sisters, which intensified a complex set of feelings. The words of the poem were in my head. I simply wrote them down and changed nothing.

I wrote "re-nee in the poem's pores" after I read about Hélène Cixous in Conley's book and I worked on that poem for days.

I wrote "Asian Women" during a summer course I took with Ted Aoki, and the words fell into place like the summer rose petals that had fallen on the ground in our flower garden.

I wrote "M(other) of the Text" during a curriculum course and referring to a conference lecture delivered by Monique Wittig. I shaped and changed the poem many times, the slashes and brackets and dashes speaking their own poem within the words of the whole poem. I highlighted (eat) and (ate) in the poem because when I write and the words are entered (centered, decentered), they seem to eat up the space of the page, re-cr(eat)ing many word-space images. There is motion, fluidity, speed, multiplicity, change on the blank page, reminiscent of Deleuze's line of flight on a white wall (1987, 17-31). The page has a kind of depth perspective that Homi Bhabha discusses (1987), doubled in the possibilities the blankness offers.

I wrote "This is the Poem" at Christmas time, recalling my feeling of strangeness during a family gathering. My Jewishness is part of the fabric of my Be/ing and Be/coming. My Jewish Identity dis/places me in the midst of my husband's family. I am a foreigner among family. This strangeness exists at other

levels, too. All my life I can recall moments when I have felt an intense, internal alienation, a sense that in the midst of be/longing, I don't belong; a sense that I am not anchored in any way to my selves; a feeling of Otherness, deep, internal, and desperate. These moments occur at the oddest times, even surrounded by love, intimacy, family. The reference to *l'étranger* in the poem is my way of making meaning of the strangeness, the isolation within I-identity and because of I-identity. This reference is also an allusion to Camus' novel: **L'étranger**. Kristeva speaks about *étrangeté*, about foreignness, about the other within our selves (Clark & Hulley 1990/91).

THE UNSAID:

I don't always know what's good, except the odd time when I feel very excited about what I have written.

Some of my poems and narratives have travelled across the country several times, and I keep a record of their flight on the back of the hard copy, the words scribbled there telling a story of hope and longing, commitment and obsession, faith and blindness.

Sometimes a response to something I have written surprises me, rocks me, shocks me, annoys me, pleases me...

Sometimes I have worked on one sentence for an hour, thought all night about a word, and written ten pages in the space of time between emptying the afterschool remains of my children's lunchkits and preparing dinner for five.

RE-WRITING:

As I write myself deeper and deeper into writing, I feel myself come closer and closer to my central core. As this core is newly examined with each word and sentence I write, I come closer and closer to that which has formed me, de/formed me, mis/in/formed me, un/formed me.

THE UNSAID:

"Renee's Story": I came late to writing and discovered it was what I have always wanted. A teacher opened my way to words, named me poet and writer, because I could not yet name myself. "Anjin's Story": I will always feel a deep connection to my teacher, as I believe Anjin, poet/writer/scholar, feels for her teacher (Aoki 1990). The "death" of a teacher-student relationship is a re-birth, a re-casting of the initial relationship, leading to a new path.

RE-WRITING:

Writing has been devoted, difficult, cleansing, amazing, frightening, rewarding, loving. Writing has been fraught with pain, suffering, self-doubt, lack of confidence. Writing has been no real substance like the dandelion fluff that blows in the breeze. And writing has been a rock, immovable, solid, slowly eroding. Writing has bitten me, infected me. Writing is spreading through me unchecked and unblocked. Underlying my days.

THE UNSAID:

...these words out of the body of the text, body words, bawdy words, words connected to the body of experience, of femininity, of me...the blank page of woman's time is being written by many feminist women with a vision of all that has gone before, all that is now in action, all that should come in time...women thinking, re-thinking, writing, re-writing, countering, re-countering, structuring, re-structuring...

I remember writing down my mother's place of birth--Czechoslovakia--on school forms, wondering if I'd spelled it correctly, daydreaming about my mother as an infant travelling to Canada from this foreign, exotic, faraway place.

I remember coming home to the smell of freshly baked cookies. I remember my mother beckoning my sisters and me to the bedroom where our dolls lay on our pillows, dressed in new, homemade clothes, lovingly stitched by hand.

I remember my father sitting down with me at the kitchen table, taking a paragraph from my Science textbook, and explaining to me how to read it, extract the main points, remember the important details.

I remember reading late into the night, so sorry when I reached the last page of a good book, wishing it would go on and on.

I remember my first pair of glasses. I remember walking around the yard looking at the Spring flowers which magically blew in the Chinook breeze with clarity, up ten feet (it seemed) above the sidewalk.

I remember riding my bicycle all alone down a steep, gravelled hill, skidding alongside of a car. I remember the driver rolling down his window to inquire as to whether I was all right.

I remember the wind in my hair, singing "Up in the Air, Junior Birdman" at the top of my lungs, pumping my legs furiously, seated on a wooden swing, young, alive, free, no worries in the world except to be home before dark and don't go the the playground until you clean your room.

I remember filling out a form stating how many minutes it took me to walk home from school, in the event of a nuclear attack, and feeling absolutely terrified and helpless. I never walked home from school again without thinking about that form.

THE UNSAID:

...I find that when we write and remember, this process is colored by present moment, and just how much writing and remembering we are doing...memories can be suppressed, forgotten, filtered by time into what we want or need at the moment...it takes a great deal of writing and introspection to uncover a "truth"...writing a memory may only be a tiny beginning kernel of a "truth," or an untruth waiting to be re-sifted...

I remember sitting in the junior high school basement lunchroom, eating a tuna sandwich, and the vice-principal announcing over the P.A. system that John Kennedy, president of the United States, had just been assassinated. I can still remember the lump in my throat from a bite of sandwich.

I remember my father driving us home from the hospital where he visited his dying brother, commenting that we hold on to life, no matter what.

I remember the silence from my father about the war, about his childhood, about his emotions or hopes or dreams or desires, and the story he told my mother about wanting a bicycle so badly when he was a young boy.

I remember waking to my mother's crying, a high-pitched sort of keening. In the living room, a friend's arms were around her as my mother grieved over her mother's passing.

I remember my first airplane trip, the plane ascending steeply as I left my childhood home for the first time, my eyes filled with tears of excitement, regret, anticipation, longing.

I remember my first glimpse of ocean, and how I knew

instantly that I would never want to leave the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Despite the prairie in my heart, I belonged to the waters.

THE UNSAID:

...writing brings my emotion close to the surface...but it calms me to get the words out, spilling out of my pen, out of me...I find when I am feeling emotional and tender that I write from "first thought" as Natalie Goldberg calls it...that is also when my writing seems to come out of me straight from my heart to the paper, as if the pen is writing all by itself, and it is only my job to hold the instrument upright so the words can appear upon the paper...when I write the poem, it is another one of my writing times when the poem is in me and the words rise up out of me and jump on the paper, whole...I have not had one of these "dream poem" experiences for a while and I was beginning to wonder if these experiences were to be temporary...I didn't sleep all night...this has put me in touch with my insides, and they are tender, but this is the place where much of my deepest (I think) poetry comes from...I wish there were more times to bring back those tender, inside places and more time for writing out of that place...

I remember standing behind a crowd of other university students in a lounge in one of the student residences, craning my neck to see a launch into space, my heart soaring as the countdown began.

I remember the first classroom I could call my own, reaching out of the darkness in the hall to flick on a light, screaming at the mice crisscrossing the floor, probably just as frightened as I was.

I remember how I had to hold the class register up in front of my face for a few minutes so that I could collect myself, following Show and Tell, which on that morning included Daphne's description of how her father pushed her mother out of a moving car during their fight.

I remember how the Grade Three's turned the room into a small village, moving chairs around, speaking to one another in-role, taking over our dramatic play so that I only had to stretch their thinking with my questions, never once reminding someone about rules, behaviour, courtesy, consideration.

I remember the hug I got when Joel, soaking wet from his recess in the rain, threw his arms around me just because he saw me in the hall.

I remember packing a pair of running shoes in the car one day when I left the house to drive to the school where I teach. A precaution in case I ever had to walk home after an earthquake. I remember wondering what would even be left of the old school where I taught in a room stocked with the emergency water supply.

THE UNSAID:

...I wrote pages and pages of words, first in a voice of joy and wonder and self-reflection, then in a voice of pain and bitchiness and introspection, and now, in many different voices that take turns taking over and speaking, like the multiple personalities of some disordered psychiatric patient...as I found my way into writing and allowed my voices to be heard, I let the words flow...I am adjusting to the ups (few) and the many downs...I will go on...I will write and I will continue to write and I will send my words everywhere and I will endure...I will write my stories and my poems and the words that come out of my heart and my creative imagination...I will not leave the words buried again underneath all the voices...I will sing my words into the air of doubtful, critical assessment, and I will hold on to those words as my light, the light that writes me into a creative existence...I will write and I will sing what I write and I will endure...

I remember all the blood, lying flat on the hard cot in the emergency room, waiting for some intern to tell me what I already knew about my unborn baby. I remember a young girl beyond the curtain screaming and screaming in pain until they finally reached her parents.

I remember the way my firstborn child looked up at me when I first put her to my breast, as if to say, so this is what you look like. I remember all the old-world knowledge in those soulful, newborn eyes.

I remember holding my youngest daughter in my arms in the rocking chair, breastfeeding her for the very last time, and memorizing the sensory feelings, the warmth of baby against me, the steady sucking sound, so I would have a lasting lithograph in my mind to recall when I needed to remember.

I remember picking up one of my daughters on the last day of preschool in June, tears streaming down my face as my daughter asked why on earth was I crying. Driving away from her preschool years.

I remember how terrible I felt when I walked through the first house we ever bought, and saw the empty rooms, the faded rug, the stained walls.

I remember how I knew exactly what words to ask for on the engraving for a medallion, a present for my husband on our twentieth anniversary.

THE UNSAID:

...my poem is the tree...the hope that I added is the broken branch, once a part of me, but not living inside of me on Friday, breaking off and dying...I will need to grow another new branch of hope...perhaps when I added that hope to the poem I was trying to grow that new branch...

I remember standing in front of the main library at UBC, twenty years later than the last time I had stood underneath the bell tower, this time holding books and babies, and harbouring dreams that were still waiting to be realized.

...language: forms us, lies to us, interprets us, mis/presents us. Language: guides us, sometimes down paths we'd rather not venture, sometimes in ways we can't control...I want language to be free, fluid, ever-changing, female, playful, inventive, emotional, personal, obsessional, confessional...I don't want language to be constantly defined and judged by the dominant culture, invariably clear-cut and understandable, perpetually obscure and hidden. I want language to be interpretable. Language: emotion behind the words, words in front of thoughts, thoughts made into explicit impressions, impressions turned into convictions--just a moment in time captured...

I remember opening the self-stamped envelope addressed in my own handwriting, steeling myself for yet another rejection slip, and realizing one of my poems was about to be published, and I could finally call myself a poet without feeling like an imposter.

...I am touched and moved by the response of the women in the audience...they cry, and I know at that instant that my words can reach other women, and that moment links me to all women everywhere in time...women's tears...they could wash floors, move whole cities, fill swimming pools, baptize babies, create stepping stone puddles to walk on the way to nowhere...women's tears...wet, bitter, joyful, filled with the memories of a thousand details and a hundred dreams...tears to grow on, tears to remember, tears to hope with, tears to rage against, tears to tell our many stories...tears filling oceans,

filling those empty spaces, stopping the bleeding...and I feel the presence of Virginia Woolf all the more...Virginia, I feel you here in the room with me, can you hear me? do you ever watch me? do you hear me read my words, inspired by you?...

...I write from selves that I have found again, that I am forming anew, that I am watching develop...nurturing others does not have to mean negating self...Hélène Cixous writes: "And woman? Woman, for me, is she who kills no one in herself, she who gives (herself) her own lives: woman is always in a certain way "mother" for herself and for the other" (1991, 50). I love my daughters more openly and more dearly because I have other selves from mother (selves who write)...Anne Tyler writes: "It seems to me that since I've had children, I've grown richer and deeper. They may have slowed down my writing for a while, but when I did write, I had more of a self to speak from" (1980,9). The bonded mother-daughter connection grounds me, centers me, allows me to think, write, be...

I remember all I have to remember, and my heart is full of the many memories of this remembrance, the pain and the joy of it, each new day adding another frame to the movie, another page to the book, another line to the poem.

RE-WRITING:

Writing at the kitchen sink (thinking the words down).
Writing at the kitchen table in the middle of the chaos (getting the words down).
Writing at the kitchen floor (hunting for the elusive words I want for a particular section and mopping up the grape juice, too).
Writing as the kitchen darkens (re-reading and re-scrutinizing what I've got).

RE-WRITING:

Home in Calgary this summer, place of childhood love and hurt, pleasure and pain, security and repression, growth and regression, I walked through the familiar rooms, laid on the bed beside my mother, looked at my fading graduation picture on the wall, and I wondered how such a normal, warm environment could have produced all the dissonance and despair sometimes in me; wondered where my poetic passion originates. Not in my parents' ordinary down-to-earth love and philosophy. Not in the white paint peeling off the fence that surrounds our sturdy family home. Not in my father's surprised look when he hears I want to see the film, **Orlando**. Not in my mother's sincere question about my first poem about to be published: Do you get paid for it? Perhaps my poetic passion commenced far back in time, from some Czechoslovakian or Romanian ancestor, a woman in a long

dress, who stood alone on a hill above some village, and wondered about the meaning of it all, pondered her future, dreamt what life would hold for her children and her children's children.

RE-WRITING:

I've reclaimed the "girl within" (Hancock 1989), the "authentic identity...embodied as a girl...the inner girl, lost and reclaimed..." (4): the ten-year-old girl who sent a story to a magazine all those years ago and proudly collected her first rejection slip. How strange that I have only recently remembered this episode, since I believe it indicates my pre-adolescent desires which were diverted and thwarted in the process of learning to be female. How very mysteriously the threads are interlaced and knotted, and how remarkable it is when each thread seems to be connected to another thread, all the threads woven together in a story that emerges of its own making, with me, one of the main characters, always glancing at the pattern, musing about how it fits, how it seems to come together so neatly and perfectly. Almost as if someone is sewing and lacing my story, a few stitches ahead of me, and then I live in the motif we both create.

RE-WRITING:

Like Natalie Goldberg, I am afraid not to write. Writing is the act that keeps me from sorrow, keeps me from giving up on a creative existence and merely marking my way through life by the meals I prepare, the number of loads of laundry I wash, or the days I rise up out of my bed and return to it (exhausted) each night.

RE-WRITING:

I worry constantly about not writing. Then I realize that I am always writing: when I look out the window at the flat heat of the prairie; when I remember through the busy years of not writing (on paper); when I place the towels in the dryer; when I think of the next poem or article. Not writing, the words spin in my head, like the wheel of fortune, finally landing on paper. Writing, the words appear almost by themselves on the page, imprinted forever in my mind's eye.

RE-WRITING:

Natalie Goldberg says to shut up and write (1986). I have shut up and written, I will shout out and write, I will not shut down and not write, I will not shut down when I write. Shutting up and writing is the single, loudest act that I have ever engaged in, and this quiet, silent, lonely placing of words on paper is the noisiest, most pressing thing I have probably ever done,

apart from giving birth.

RE-WRITING:

Somer Brodribb writes that an "essential part of feminist strategy" is to be aware that "not all thought is male" and that "knowing this is...a significant feminist activity" (1992, xxix). Writing is the most radical, most threatening feminist activity that I have ever undertaken.

RE-WRITING:

It hurts. All of it. The hate letters. The tension it causes. The way the tension eats into any sense of security or peace or the rhythm of a day. The loud words invoked in the heat of a mis/understood, mis/perceived, mis/directed moment. It hurts, and the salt of those letters and words burn.

RE-WRITING:

I am learning to take risks, get kicked as a result, feel absolutely terrible about it, write it all out, use the feelings for my writing, and use the writing to sort out my world and then carry on. I just wish I didn't feel that kick, everyone's feet in my feelings, and I wonder if I have to keep walking around like this, a whole world of feet in my face.

RE-WRITING:

I accomplished something in my writing this week, something small but recognizable, something I had wanted to do for a long time but hadn't yet done, something that would be a public, everlasting token of my love--in words.

RE-WRITING:

I am filled with a growing contentment but also a kind of pain about what one very close family friend of my parents said to them: I had no idea that Renee could write like that. Neither did I. Neither did I.

RE-WRITING

Random acts of writing. Senseless acts of sentiment. Dreams and dustclouds. Philosophic feminizing. A rainbow of writing. Rainbow: any brightly multi-colored arrangement or display; a wide variety or gamut. "The 're' at work" (Aoki 1994).

INTERLOG

Re-versing

This is How It's Going

1 How's the writing going?
2 You're an ass for putting that much work into it
3 He looked at me like I was from outer space
4 Do you have a poem in your head?
5 I wrote it after sex
6 And don't write that in one of your poems
7 You're probably practising
8 I'd really like to read your poetry
9 What do you need him for?
10 Just duplicate them all and send them to me to read
11 Are you working?
12 That's very funny
13 Why did you say that?
14 I hope you didn't use her name
15 What are you working on?
16 It sounds like you're dying
17 Why did you phone him?
18 Maybe you shouldn't be writing then
19 Are you still writing poems?
20 I did not drive someone to the emergency ward
21 How is he reacting to it?
22 You never tuck us in any more
23 You sent it to the NEWSPAPER???
24 I like the part about the pink ribbons
25 Are you drugged?
26 You'll probably go home and write a poem about this now
27 Why don't you want to spend time with us anymore?
28 A regular Pauline Johnson
29 What is bothering you?
How's the writing going?
You're an ass for putting that much work into it
Work into it
(Repeat lines 3 to 28)
What is bothering you?
How's the writing going?
You're an ass for putting that much work into it
He looked at me like I was from outer space
Space
(Omit lines 3 to 28)
What is bothering you?
How's the writing going?
(Go over lines 2 to 5)
And don't write that in one of your poems
One of Your Poems

You're probably practising
(Practise lines 8 to 24)
Are you drugged?
You'll probably go home and write a poem about this now
A poem

about this

now

(What about lines 27 and 28 now?)
What is bothering you?
How's the writing going?
(Skip the next 2 lines)
Do you have a poem in your head?
poem in my drugged after sex head
practising to duplicate your poetry
you're an ass dying poems to the emergency ward
bothering Pauline Johnson
to spend time reacting to the pink ribbons
funny you phone the NEWSPAPER to tuck us in
from outer space
Space
Repeat verse

DIÁLOGO TWO

Re-peating

Women Who Write

It is only recently in my life that I have found my voice as a writer, an identity as a writer, and this after some years of silence. It took me many months to even give myself the right to call myself a writer, after several others named me.

My voices and the words of those voices first spilled out of me once I broke my silence, and I could be anywhere doing anything and feel the urge--no, the necessity--to stop what I was doing and write. My various voices rose to the surface from beneath all the layers of my woman's life and threatened to choke me unless I gave them a life in words.

When I began to write I was 45 years old and had had a great deal of all sorts of experience...British writer Winifred Holtby called us the "interrupted sex." Was that the reason I attempted no creative work, which needs blocks of continuous time, until I was 45? Helen Weinzwieg

(Weinzwieg 1990, 297-301)

Silence. Which is what every woman shatters when she realizes/knows herself a feminist, when she puts that name to the language of her thinking. From then on, the language of her writing can never be the same...When a woman declares herself a feminist, she becomes part of a tradition, a continuum, and a history, a powerful cacophony of voices and words. She breaks silence.... Aritha Van Herk

(Van Herk 1990, 272)

Realizing one of my poems was about to be published, I could finally call myself a poet without feeling like an imposter.

A poet who has discovered her voices and her opinions and is tired of holding them back, keeping them to herself, defending them always, over and over. A poet who doesn't want to be silent anymore, but doesn't want any more of the anger and tension that accompanies the breaking of that silence.

I have been silent so long. I have been silent too long. A question never asked. A thought never put into words, never spoken aloud. A poem never written. Listening, listening, listening, the thoughts fighting for space inside my head, stored there for years, and finally, finally, spilling out through my many words, spirals of words, circling round and round memories, emotions, desires, hopes...

I am sometimes filled with pain and anger. And I sometimes wonder what I, who am so lucky and fortunate, have to be so angry about. The anger that feminist writers write about: our

collective rage. I feel too self-absorbed, too self-pitying. I want to break my silence once and for all, and move past the rage. But I can't, I can't. I am sometimes trapped in the pain and I can't get out.

We read writing by women...we were curious about the lives of these women. How had they managed it? We knew about the problems; we wanted to know there were solutions. For instance, could you be a woman writer and happily married, with children, as well? It did not seem likely...It seemed likely that the husband's demands and those of the art would clash...combining marriage and art was a risky business. You could not be an empty vessel for two.... Margaret Atwood (Atwood 1990, 17)

I am very imperfect in a hundred ways. I should probably be living all alone. I am difficult and stormy and bitchy and super-critical and a hundred other terrible things. But I have my own thoughts and I want to think them, voice them, hold onto them if I want, even if I am emotional or dead-wrong or absolutely ridiculous.

Feminism has done many good things for women writers, but surely the most important has been the permission to say the unsaid, to encourage women to claim their full humanity, which means acknowledging the shadows as well as the lights. Margaret Atwood (Atwood 1990, 24)

Last night I cried and cried about--what? About my empty places that will never be filled. About those sweet and innocent faces curled up against me, those small, warm, warming bodies inflating me with joy and love, the helium of hope, air-lifted to the empty places, but never filling them completely. Or is it that I know this air is impermanent, and so I feel emptiness even when filled with love? I cried about--what? I would give a great deal to have what I had before. I would never again want what I had before. I am a mass of contradictions. The month comes and goes, I rise each morning, teach or go to university or walk my daughters to school, and each day follows the next and sustains me at the same time that it fills me with dread. Each word, each sentence, each discussion reminds me that I am alone in the midst of a crowd. Each drawn breath hurts. I continue to breathe and I continue to hurt and that is why I sometimes cry. Why the anger and the pain well up and rise out of me in a tidal wave of grief. I am full of hate for this self-absorbed reflection. But I have temporarily lost the joy, I am blinded by the pain, I am overwhelmed with emotion and stark, unadorned fear.

this broken branch of
a large living tree
hanging straight down to
the wild grass below
filled with poisonous
inedible cherry-red berries
green-veined leaves
spreading out to
catch the light of
the morning sun in
the cloud's clutch
the occasional yellow leaf
spread with brown
losing colour
the tear of the limb
a wound upon the tree in
opposition to
the unfolding patterns of
green-prismed pinpoints is
at
times
me

I crave that elusive morning light
watch the clouds keep it close
or give some away
a suppliant

It's been said that poetry is a response to silence...John Berger wrote: to break the silence of events, to speak of experience however bitter or lacerating, to put into words, is to discover the hope that these words may be heard, and that when heard, the events will be judged...

Language casts a wide net; you capture something only by pulling up a lot of dross with it; the shell still entangled with seaweed. A "truth" is always mired in personal context, the way weather inhabits a room....

Anne Michaels (Michaels 1991, 177-179)

Perhaps I am just overwrought from all the emotion of the past month and a half since my contentious Virginia Woolf piece first appeared. Or overtired from another too-long, too-loud discussion. Or angry about the overreactions. Or maybe it's just "October sadness" again, the change of the seasons which fills me with such regret, such a sense of loss, such a feeling of wasted years and un-lived life. I look at my daughters and I know I am loved and I love them all so much. Erin, with her funny four-year-old words, like "I can hardly wait to grow up, so I can be beautiful." She is so beautiful now. And her "writing," emergent scribbles graphically arranged close together like the print-out of some lie detector test. Rebecca, who lovingly runs her chubby hands through my hair and tells her

friend, "you can talk to me if you have a problem," and cries when it is too late at night for her and she cannot find her favorite parrot. Sara, basking in her newfound happiness and independence at school. Making lunch for everyone when Don is out gardening and I am out walking, and then refusing to brush Erin's teeth for me because she worked so hard all day.

There. I have written myself out of the tiredness and the pain and the sadness into some calm and peace.

I wrote my way out like some dog burrowing after a bone she knows she buried...somewhere...I think I became a writer out of nostalgia, an attempt to reclaim the inner life that guided childhood. Ann Ireland (Ireland 1990, 158)

Wonderful bears that walked my room all night,/...When did I lose you? Whose have you become? Adrienne Rich (Rich 1990, 118)

Where are my bears? Large black shadows that I hid from in the dark of childish night, the covers over my nostrils and up to my terror-stricken eyes. Not in my room at night. My bears live in my mind and memory, living testament to my woman's life, now taking shape in words on paper.

And me? I finally claimed my words in a loud, strong voice. My name. My thoughts and opinions and beliefs. And I have been paying the price ever since. I have broken out of the mould and the silence and I have let my voice sing into that silence, and I will not let anyone tell me that the songs cannot, should not be sung, that the songs are not worth singing, that the songs must be sung to a certain, prescribed-by-others tune.

I want to trouble the reader--to upset, annoy, confuse...I want to explode writing as prescription...I want to make trouble...Do I consider myself a feminist? Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, despite all the difficulties. Feminism is a dirty word...Feminism as a great glittering heaped-up pile of possibilities. Aritha Van Herk

(Van Herk 1990, 276)

The book...had been a first step out of the shadows, and suddenly I could see this was the moment to claim the voice and to stand behind my own words with my own woman's body. Susan Crean

(Crean 1990, 87)

...I have to go back to my work, to the poetry that tells my hidden stories no matter who insists I stop. I have to take the risk of offending, angering some of my readers. I have to name the

places that, for me, have gone unnamed too long. Find the words. Speak the flesh. Kiss and tell with anger, grace, humour, and sometimes, love.

Lorna Crozier (Crozier 1990, 94)

A friend asked me if I had thought about why I use humour, a rhetorical device, and what, or who, was the humour for? Why do I use humour? Sometimes I feel funny, that's why. Funny and wild and free and witty and unfettered and full of amusement at something someone has said or done, or about myself who can see the other (laughable) side of life and nature.

Do I use humour to hurt? I hope not. To stab with little jabs of pain that seek revenge? I don't mean to.

I think humour sometimes covers a great deal of pain. Or is a way to seek the truth, by looking at life with a measure of irony and self-amusement because we are all human with foibles, me at the top of the list. And humour reveals hurt, but in a manner that attempts to make it bearable, because if we laugh, then we won't cry. If we poke fun, then we can also have some fun. If we turn life into what is funny/humorous/amusing, it becomes more bearable. If we don't always take ourselves too seriously, we will see other qualities in other people, the other side even to the dark underside. And then we can carry on, despite and in spite of everything. And if we laugh, especially at ourselves or the events in our own lives, we will heal the rifts, seal the love, mend the hurt, build the trust, and let the laughter ring in our ears, longer and much louder than any of the cruellest words that can be spoken.

As a writer whose principal literary device is comedy, I am often asked if the kind of humour I employ in my writing could be called "feminist"...the much-vaunted "laughter of recognition" is elicited by the character in order to preclude the recognition of pain. Erika Ritter (Ritter 1990, 221-223)

Nothing of mine published in the newspaper for ages. Publish my Collections one. Publish my Santa one. Publish my Politics of Fear one. Publish me, oh, publish me. I need the support, the lift, the fix, my words in print, holding me together as I fall apart inside, my words staring back at me as I look out at my world spinning recklessly around me, the words standing firm and erect and decisive and uniform, unlike me, falling, falling, further into black holes, down, down, past where Alice went, into the depths of utter confusion, terrible want, desperate acts. Wanton, reckless, abandoned acts. Acts of need. Acts of memory. Acts of hope and desire and unrequited passion. Acts of writing. Acts of sentiment. Acts of fear.

The writer need not worry about what she or he should say: that is poison....What the writer does is

look inside and tell us what is there. Never mind the embarrassment of it, or the noses in the air one will see, or the rejections that will result. If you know what you have done is the only thing you can do, good. Kristjana Gunnars (Gunnars 1990, 129)

And then I finally started listening to my own heart because it was the only sound left in the room. Ann Ireland (Ireland 1990, 158)

Free for a while to think, dream, read, write, sort out my many conflicting emotions, let all my many thoughts spin through my mind, inside that circle of feeling that moves ever so quickly, turning round and round and round. Free to not read, not write, not think, just be. Just kiss daughters and be grateful to bake cookies and to remember my journal waiting for my words. Free to ignore even the tasks that I have set for myself over the holidays, the tasks that I have set for myself come January once again. The books that lie unopened. The words that live in my mind, not written down. The goals that form part of my dreams, spoken and unspoken, real and imagined, tangible and untouchable. Free to let the pen slide over the page when a poem isn't there, when a research assignment isn't due, when a book isn't appealing enough at the moment. Free to look at myself in the mirror in my new, flowered, flowing, romantic new dress, around my neck the choker that my daughters bought for me with their own money (such a pleasant reminder of love and responsibility). Free to relish love present, love past, love future. All the possibilities that words hold. All the friendships and family that I cherish.

We want, need, the stories of others. We need, too, to place our own stories beside theirs, to compare, weigh, judge, forgive, and to find, by becoming something other than ourselves, an angle of vision that renews our image of the world. Carol Shields (Shields 1990, 257)

When I read a friend's fiction, I thought I understood the pain, could share the (fictional) journey where the words were woven together so powerfully to convey someone's raw emotion, someone's painful experiences, someone's journey into the darkness and the light on the other side of that darkness.

The journey was with words. The pleasure as well as the pain of those words. The love in the words and all the strife (and hate) that love caused. Until more words, healing words, split open the silence.

My words have come out of my own long silence, and I let well-chosen words heal me. And I, too, face the pain as well as the pleasure in the wild, abandoned stream of words, face the darkness right in the midst of the light of all those words. Face the madness of all the wildness of words.

I understand the never-ending journey. I understand it and I share it, because it is somehow my own journey. The moment I first read the fictional words I was touched by them and moved by them; this moment now months later I remember the words and make them mine. The stories of the journey are written and re-written and unwritten, always changing.

And I am up to my neck in it, this shitty, sexy language, shaped and developed by a patriarchal frame of reference, excluding me and all women, a male m(y)nefield of difficulties, words capable of inflicting so much pain, and also so much pleasure. Aritha Van Herk (Van Herk 1990, 272)

a scream is an appraisal. you. a scream is a refusal. we. refuse to keep in all that silence pressing through the wall, o women, women who write. Daphne Marlatt (Marlatt 1991, 61)

So how do we, as writers, women, Jews, integrate into our work what we really are, as opposed to these refutations or denials, these shadows of otherness, these acquiescences?...As women and Jews we share a common posture; a tenuous, ambiguous position in a social structure which is emphatically not our own and yet which we know and understand intimately, profoundly. Rhea Tregebov (Tregebov 1990, 270)

For where else but in poetic language may she, the subject, be inscribed in all her (unnameable) complexity? Gail Scott (Scott 1990, 24)

This Is the Poem

no poems
wrapped in my green
wool coat
reach across and
hug a greeting
expansive flourish
hesitant laugh:
merry christmas--no--
chanukah--no--that's over--
well--
happy holidays anyway
sea of seasonal activity
emotion suspended:
swept aside
behind
the crumbs behind
my garbage can
in the kitchen

awaiting attention
(I'll get to you
when I damn well please)
curiously flat
outside:
sea green coat removed
inside:
some important organ
missing

no poems
I listen
over and over
each stilted greeting
sets me further apart
a flush of isolation
spreads through me
(hot water I sink into
every morning in the bathtub)
eyes focused on a mouth
talking
lips smiling disoriented
heads floating above
the fireplace logs
burn intensity
I shiver as the warmth
radiates its glow
not belonging
odd woman out

no poems
just the dust debris
of the day
holiday revelry
end-of-year introspection
suspended animation
flat calm buried
second skin of discomfort
a part of the familiarity
apart from the warmth
an existential fur coat
l'étranger
wrapped in sensibilities
close
that which sets me apart
close
the poem
this voyage of strangeness
lets the words out
my head aches
the effort of dreaming
this is the poem

INTERLOG

Re-contextualizing

Deft Detail

She couldn't quite pinpoint when it first began to happen, or when she first noticed that it was happening, but the writing which she carefully completed at work was beginning to spill over into her personal life.

It was her job to preview the tapes of upcoming Public Broadcasting programs which claimed to provide a special feature for the viewing impaired, then write a detailed transcript of what she observed in the images and pictures of the program as it advanced, looking through a glass window of second sight for the hopelessly blind with perfect hearing. This took imagination as well as skill, for she didn't just examine the programs and comment on the objects in the background, the people who had gathered to move or speak, the change of frame to a different location, a flashback to the past here, a forward to the future there. No, she also had to consider where the narrator, with his flat, unemotional, tempered, well-modulated voice could insert her precise pieces of visionary prose, without hampering the flow of the production or the dialogic text. She even wrote script for the beginning animated credits which introduced the Mystery series, although this was far less complicated since she only had to write the clean minutia of how each black, animated figure fell down on top of each tombstone, hair falling back in a dark cascade of deathly shroud, without worrying about anything but the rollicking music in the background or the tidy, spare words.

She was proud of her work. It gave her a satisfactory sense of accomplishment, not just that she was assisting the less fortunate than herself (who could not envision all those important, progressive or classical, interesting reflections), but she was creating meagre, restrained prose that dwelled on fine detail devoid of any extraneous emotion. She enjoyed her work, although at times she wished the narrator did not deliver her well-thought-out, well-timed sight sentences, in quite such an unobtrusive way, or with quite such a barren, hopeless tone meant to be a discreet cough behind the hand of a symphony patron.

If the truth be told, at the same time that she admired her own handy work, often tuning in to the latest program, whether **Pride and Prejudice**, or **Testament of Friendship** or some modern depiction of a female British Police Inspector encountering prejudice and sexism among her fellow workers and victims, she had not yet once been able to watch a whole, scripted episode all the way through to the end. Not even half of the first chapter. Nor a mere five minutes worth, if she really wanted to

admit the reality to herself. She could not bear to watch those profound lives or listen to those prosaic stories with her own beautiful, faultless, particular commentary sandwiched so heartlessly in between. She occasionally questioned the point of providing the impaired viewers with such a trivialized account of what was happening plot-wise through the movement of the characters, or the placement of the objects in the set, or the shift of time from one frame to the next. (Shouldn't they attempt to follow the story just by listening to the text of words, not worry about the colored, flashing scenes of hope or despair? But this was uncharitable, for she had perfect vision, and she liked her job, and did not want to suggest herself out of employment.)

Once she purposely wrote in a detail which was not there--"he moved his hand back behind his jacket"--but which would never alter the effect of the overall theme, just to see if it made a difference to the story. But she had not been able to watch longer than the five minutes she forced herself to focus on the screen, listen to the narrator's intrusive comments, so well-written by herself, and take in the dialogue of the characters as they spoke between the plot shifts of their lives, and her detailed renderings.

Thus she couldn't tell whether her little experiment made any difference at all. She did learn that it could go undetected since no sighted producer or director or Public Broadcasting administrator or friend of the channel had ever complained about this additional line. Not even the narrator, whose job it was to read her script of insightful words, weaving them in and out of flickering frames of human suffering, joy or sorrow, seemed to notice that extra hand behind the back of the jacket, or if he did notice, didn't deem it worth comment. Perhaps he edited it out himself, which was not his right. She would never know for sure until the repeat program--if she could just watch beyond those first few minutes of contextual difficulty. And she wanted to know if that upstart narrator had played around with her script.

To repeat, she couldn't quite remember the first time that her work began to affect her private life. All she knew was that one night when she served her lover a bowl of homemade soup which she had kept warm at the stove for two hours until he could get away and come to her apartment at the pre-arranged time (this wasn't always easy, you understand, he had a wife and children, responsibilities at work, he was a regional sales administrative executive at a large corporation), she saw him bring the hot spoon to his mouth, spilling droplets of soup upon his white now-greatly-wrinkled shirt and drop the spoon in the steaming bowl, sending out globules of brown broth and pureed vegetables spraying onto her green and white flower-bordered rug. She did not really hear him swear, "Shit!" unabashedly but kept watching as he picked up the white table napkin and wiped his chin, moving a foot on top of some of the ground vegetables and grinding them into the green and white rug.

As the evening progressed, more and more actions seemed to loom up out of this apartment scene with her lover, and dominate the room. She didn't feel his hand touch her breast, she saw him move a hand across to her and place it on her left breast. She couldn't seem to lose herself in his wet, passionate forceful-gentle-roving kisses, she saw the man turn to the woman and kiss her for a time.

When later on in the evening she lay beside him in her bed, where once she was usually mindful of his strong, powerful force and presence flung across her sheets, she now saw the man and woman lie side by side in bed, his foot folded up beside her form, reflected in the mirror.

The telephone rings, the woman reaches across the man to answer it. The man rises from the bed and puts his clothes on. Then the woman replaces the telephone receiver and lies back down upon the bed. The man kisses the woman and leaves the room. The woman does not speak but still lies upon the bed. The hand of the man moves back behind his jacket. The woman smiles.

The part equals the whole.(Lechte 1990, 97)

The 'truth' or the pertinence of scriptural practice is of another order; it is undecidable (unprovable, unverifiable)....(Kristeva cited in Lechte 1990, 104)

Not simply words create meaning, but the contextual relationship between them.(Lechte 1990, 107)

...poetic language, founded on the logic of ambivalence, also embodies prosaic speech.
(Lechte 1990, 110)

...each element...carries the whole of the poetic message.(Kristeva cited in Lechte 1990, 117)

INTERLOG

Re-sisting

In my graduate curriculum course we are asked to devise a conception of curriculum and produce a twelve page paper. I ask if I can include poetry and narrative and write some diverse discourse. I receive support for my endeavour, as long as I fulfill the requirements of the assignment. When I receive this paper back, I am encouraged to seek publication in a curriculum journal. One of the journal's reviewers comments: "This paper is couched in unhelpful vague metaphorical language."

Writing is impossible without some kind of exile.
(Kristeva cited in Lechte 1990, 66)

Poetic language...is full of meaning...calling for interpretation. This fullness differentiates it from the communicative language of everyday life...in communicative language, the presence of a fullness of meaning passes unnoticed by consciousness. It passes over, or resists, the possible plurality of meanings evident in the language of communication in the form of ambiguity and nonsense...Consciousness and its agent, the ego, thus have a tendency to resist poetry--to resist the notion that consciousness, too, is a product of language, and that the subject is thereby divided between two heterogeneous systems: the conscious and the unconscious. (Lechte 1990, 35)

It is precisely one of the features of poetic language...that it embodies contradiction. A text does not (simply) obey the rules of logic, or grammar, or the characterization of mathematical formalization; or at least it does a great deal more....
(Lechte 1990, 95)

...what could not be conceptualized, objectified, represented, or simply imagined, tended to be disqualified from entering the field of discussion.
(Lechte 1990, 97)

...although these young women 'have both learned how to write papers, they have not yet learned to write--that is, to be able to communicate by expressing their own ideas, feelings, and voices on paper.'
(Bolker cited in Belenky et al. 1986, 108)

There can be no closure; there can be no final answers...Neither...King Lear nor Picasso's

Guernica...solves anything, offers any guidelines. They do, however, make one see and hear and feel in such a fashion that one's questions sharpen, one's head aches. Marcel Proust once wrote that the writer and painter are like eye specialists for those who attend to their works. 'The treatment--with the help of their paintings, their writings--is not always pleasant. When the treatment is concluded, they tell us: You can look now...' (Proust in Polanyi 1964, 200). What he was describing was what Virginia Woolf called a 'shock of awareness,' an experience that shakes conventional certainties as it opens the way for something new. (Greene 1984, 131)

Interlog

Re-signifying

The following is an excerpt from the work I did in a graduate curriculum course:

Giroux, Pinar and Penna (1981) call curriculum in 1981 a "field in evolution." This could certainly be applied to feminist curricula, which for a long time and to an extent even now, have not found a stable niche within any curriculum orientation. Largely this is due to omission. However, to contend that a feminine curriculum is outside of any curriculum position seems to render it invisible as well as exterior. To the degree that a feminist curriculum works towards social change and is based on transformative action, this is largely untrue. And so I prefer to locate this curriculum within the reconceptualist and humanistic camps, recognizing the similarities between them while also honouring the differences.

The reconceptualist curriculum recognizes subjectivity, the art of interpretation, the centrality of intentionality to understanding human action, and the political (power relations, class conflicts, resistance, and the political nature of culture, meaning and knowledge) (Giroux et al. 1981, 14). Feminism (or feminisms) analyzes and regards gender as the political and historical and social force shaping society. "For feminist educators, feminism is a primary lens through which the world is interpreted and acted upon" (Luke and Gore 1992, 138). Through this lens, subjectivity, interpretation, intentionality

and politics are recognized. Since feminism recognizes that there are "gendered structural divisions upon which liberal capitalism and its knowledge industries are based" (Luke and Gore 1992, 37), thought and action (praxis) are related to awareness and transformation of these gender divisions. Feminism, then, shares those features of reconceptualism that lead to a more just, creative, radical existence, arising out of social analysis and transformative action, but a feminist curriculum's search for truth and struggle for power is historically rooted in and largely concerned with changing the social order for women as well as for men, in ways that liberate and emancipate women from gender inequality as well as class and race conflicts.

While there seems to be no disagreement with such ideals in reconceptualism, there is a stunning lack of willingness to grapple with the issues of feminism (Luke and Gore 1992, 1-12). For example, Freire contends that "the concept of the gender struggle is political and not sexual," that "the fundamental issue is the political vision of sex, and not the sexist vision of sex" (Freire and Macedo 1993, 175). Many feminist scholars and educators are highly critical of the reconceptualist base which is founded "by the fathers," and which is centered on the "primacy of male consciousness" (Luke and Gore 1992, 35). In fact, feminist scholars insist that if a creative democracy and social/self empowerment (both features of a reconceptualized curriculum) are to move beyond that envisioned by Dewey (Luke

and Gore 1992, 29), we must take care not to universalize oppression, the oppressed, the struggle or the resistance, but must situate these within a specific history which has omitted and excluded and dehumanized women (Luke and Gore 1992, 33).

The new sociology of education which emerged in the 70's and which focussed on how to make education meaningful in a critical and emancipatory way can be regarded as the historical base to a reconceptualization of curriculum, one which has also influenced feminists' role in education. This new sociology emphasized the reproductive function of schooling, but although it provided necessary criticism, it was a "language of despair," with no hope (Giroux cited in Freire 1985). Such despair and hopelessness were tempered by the work of Giroux and others, and in particular, were recast by the philosophy of Paulo Freire. While Freire did not theorize gender, feminist curriculum has been deeply influenced by him, and this is particularly true of Patti Lather's women's studies course (Lather 1991).

Notably, Freire's notion of conscientization undergirds Lather's (and other feminists') curricular conceptions. This notion embraces the empowering ideal of transformation, through self-awareness, consciousness-raising, social action and change. Such transformation is central to Freire's beliefs and can be regarded as the underlying meaning to a transformational curriculum. Through Freire's conscientization, that is, awareness of sociocultural reality that shapes one's life and gives rise to the ability to transform reality (McNeil 1990,

37), the individual who is part of a larger society, and in feminism, the female who is part of a gendered society, recognize oppression from within as well as without. Critique leads to possibility (Giroux cited in Freire 1985). Despair changes to hope, the vision of a changed society. The curriculum is related to society as it should be (McNeil 1990, 46). Schooling--in this case, Patti Lather's women's studies course--is an agent for subversion and political change. Teaching is oppositional. Knowledge is oppositional. And this opposition, this subversion, this change, and the vision of what "should be," reconstruct, reconceptualize, and transform the learner, the teacher, the curriculum.

But although Giroux warns that we should not get caught up in the rhetoric of neutrality in schooling and curriculum (Giroux et al. 1981, 403), it is the feminists who state succinctly that "citizenship in the democratic liberal state is gender specific" (Luke and Gore 1992, 32); it is the feminists who ask "what diversity do we silence in the name of liberatory education" (33); it is the feminists who warn that we can no longer exclude women "by failure to critique masculinist theoretical narratives" (29); it is the feminists who challenge "the outer limits of the epistemological horizon where the masculinist logic of the universal subject and its naming of the other are inscribed" (Luke and Gore 1992, 37). To truly democratize education, "we must engage with feminism through the analysis of sexual division and subjugation" or else we have

simply rewritten progressivism and humanism with critical words and no critical substance (138). Therein lies the critical difference between the reconceptualist curriculum and a feminist reconceptualist curriculum.

The following is a poem I wrote during the same graduate curriculum course:

A Feminine Curriculum

all the women
not on the pages
silently there
shaping education

man acts upon the world as object
man acts upon woman
whose reality is eliminated?

getting smart means
academic adversary:
geronimo, giroux!
now I've upset you!
straw men
written by straw women
who claim in the last chapter
maybe this voice doesn't ring true
lived experience but--

impenetrable paragraphs
no spaces between the words
just strings of post-modern neo-marxist
babble
a new kind of baby talk
mothers don't understand

in flux
only more and more questions
my beliefs
a set body through the years
like a chameleon now
soaking up whatever color comes my way
the white of everything
the black of nothing distinct
me, Renee
a new shade
a different tone

bordered by the white
or black

what color will I be
when I am done?
the colors leaking
the colors dripping
the colors drying
me, Renee
never-ending-spectrum

getting smart
means painting all those pages
with me

The excerpt is an example of communicative academic language.

Non-metaphorical.

Derrida: "Language is always already double" (cited in Lechte 1990, 95). Derrida: Trace. Absence. Différance. Erasure.

The poem is an example of poetic language. Metaphorical.

A fullness of meaning. (Lechte 1990, 35)

The part equals the whole. (Lechte 1990, 97)

The writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he [she] comes to life again in signs.
(Kristeva cited in Lechte 1990, 161)

INTERLOG

Re-fusing

Carnival

I don't think masks are meant to be worn all the time. Nor are the changing faces of all the masks anything like a face which can be a grimace or a grin, laughing or brimming with tears, safely hidden underneath the face of the latest mask donned.

The face of the mask obscures what lies behind.

I've got a set of masks, made by an artist/mask-maker to my specifications. This very loosely entailed asking her to create some plain, white "drama" masks which show little emotion when not worn; the "people" face masks which were her trademark; any masks she desired (for example, unusual half-masks with teeth, colored-feathered masks); and some smaller-faced masks which would fit small children. I feel lucky to have this set of masks--which I was allowed to order and use and eventually keep when I was once a drama consultant. These masks have been well-used, by children who I worked with in schools, by teachers/prospective teachers I taught who were hoping to learn about teaching drama in schools, by the children I now teach at school, and by my own children.

We create masks to express, explore, perform, compare...

I learned how to use these masks from a woman clown, a really creative, zany, off-the-wall woman named Gumboot Lollipop. I haven't seen Gumboot for years, but I know that she and Conrad Flaps, her one-time clown partner, went their separate ways. Gumboot and I once briefly shared the pain of our respective miscarriages in a bathroom at a hotel conference, Gumboot in a rush to be off to perform another of her pathos-filled, child-like performances, reminding me so much of my own second miscarriage when I, too, simply carried on with the workshop I was in the middle of conducting.

Masks come to life only briefly when we use them.

Dolly--Gumboot-- teaches that you must treat a mask with respect, never placing it nose-down on a table. She is mystical about masks, too, suggesting one always face away from the audience when donning the mask or removing it, so the audience cannot see you make these changes. Dolly claims the mask takes over briefly if you let it, if you look deeply enough and long

enough in a mirror before you turn around.

Every mask is different, but the technique of wearing them remains the same.

I have seen this happen with both children and adults. It is this same quality of losing oneself that also frightens some children and adults badly, so that when I've used masks with groups, I have learned to make it clear that it is always optional whether or not one wishes to try on a mask or share the experience in the first place. Some children never do try on that mask, or try it on at the mirror but refuse to turn around. Most adults that I have worked with willingly try the mask, even the more reserved people finding it comfortable to hide behind this oval mirror.

We can hide behind a mask that can expose our inner selves.

The masks are not meant to be worn for long: the glue smells, the material on some of them is rough, and despite the maskmaker's foam pads, every mask fits every face somewhat differently. I always remind young children to breathe. They tend to hold their breath behind the initial excitement and exploration of this new and temporary face, not really realizing that they must still draw air from the sides and nose holes of the mask in order not to pass out!

Masks are as temporary as the length of time we keep them on our faces.

My favorite mask in my collection is the small orange one with a tear painted underneath the eyehole. Strangely enough, it does not always look sad, depending on who wears it and how a person moves in response to the character she absorbs from looking in the mirror.

A mask changes by the way one wears it.

Dolly also advises strongly that you never speak aloud when wearing a full mask. Such sound is reserved only for a half-mask or a mask which has a small hole removed at the area where the mouth should be. There are times when it is impossible to tell who is behind the mask, despite one's recognition of moving limbs or bending forms or improvisational movements. It is also impossible to know what expression is on the face that lies beneath a particular mask, despite the eyes that radiate through the eyeholes, and I know this because I've tried it. You can wear a mask and look very tragic but be quietly smiling to yourself. You can look very jaunty in some mask, depending on how you move an arm or hand or place it in juxtaposition to your body, but be truly looking and feeling rather unhappy after all,

underneath the surface of that mask.

Masks lie at the same time that they tell a truth.

I use masks with children to help them see the poetry and the possibilities in masks and movement. I use masks with children because it is always (still) very interesting to try on another face for a few minutes and imagine it is you. I use masks with children so they might experience for a brief time at least, the awe and magic and even mysticism of drama. I use masks with children since like puppets, masks sometimes free shy and reserved children into expression or offer active, acting-out children a safe outlet.

Masks teach us that we are free to be our/selves.

But I always carefully bundle up those solid, unchanging-on-the-table, mask face forms and put them away for another day. They're not meant to be used all the time, and I would miss the fluid eyes and ever-changing, real-life skin and bone expressions of the small faces I teach, faces I am always looking into and trying to draw out.

When you look at a mask face, only the eyes return your stare. A face isn't just the eyes. Missing are the crinkles, the tears flowing, the way the mouth moves along with the eyes in a smile or frown, or puzzlement or wonder. Even the cheeks move. Eyes are framed in a face that moves.

Masks are rigid forms that borrow life briefly from people who live it.

Carnival: the "make-believe overturning of law and existing social norms" (Lechte 1990, 105).

Poetry becomes, in Kristeva's analysis, a way of maintaining social bonds through what is destructive of the social, and conducive to madness. Poetry is capitalist society's carnival, a way of keeping death and madness at bay. Poetry is a refusal of a 'flight into madness.'

(Lechte 1990, 6)

DIALOG THREE

Re-poetizing, Re-identifying, Re-theorizing

Poetry is the culture of a people. We are poets even when we don't write poems...

(Nikki Giovanni cited in Minh-ha 1989, 15)

I believe implicitly that poetry is the culture of a people, that there is poetry in people as well as words. Homi Bhabha (1987) suggests poetry and the reading of a poem are a means for understanding other cultures, and I would add that if we read these poems deconstructively, that is, if we allow for the inter/textual space that permits inter/action, inter/weaving, and inter/rogation, such a suggestion is important. A poem is a construction, too, as my eight-year-old daughter Rebecca's poem demonstrates. Still, her poem speaks about her selves, about culture. A poem can be read many ways, just as culture can be read many ways. A poem is autobiographical, too. We need to rethink how we view the autobiographical aspects of writing, how we view culture...

The Wind and I

There I stand
just me and the wind

A silence falls
upon my wife's grave

I stand there
gazing at the meadow

There I stand
the wind getting weaker

Night falls
as I slowly turn to go home

There I stand
just me and the wind

Rebecca Norman, 8.

Writing, in a way, is listening to the others' language and reading with the others' eyes. The more ears I am able to hear with, the farther I see the plurality of meaning and the less I lend myself to the illusion of a single message. (Minh-ha 1989, 30)

I believe, too, that poetry and all forms of poetic language are important ways of speaking and knowing, ones that embrace a multiplicity of meanings, a multiplicity

of metaphors, memories, musings. A part of me wants to let poetic language speak for itself, let the poetry be read by the reader who can live between the lines, dis/placing herself in the words and spaces.

Another part of me knows there is much the poet/writer can say about her selves and her writing, and this, too, is a kind of poetry that needs to be inscribed and heard. A theory of the soul?

The notion of poetry as culture, poetry as theory is enormously appealing. I am a poet, and I speak through my poems, which re-present me and culture.

But as a poet, I speak in many voices: some joyous, some contentious, some feminist, some pain-filled, some respectful, some essentialist, some post-modern, some unsparing, some despairing...Is the poem the poet? Perhaps only for one brief moment in time, for no sooner do the words inscribe experience, another experience comes along and rewrites the poet, the already written poems be/coming a record of words which is subject to the multi-faceted subject who recorded them and the multi-faceted subjects who read them.

I live a post-modern life. I sometimes write post-modern discourse and poetry. I construct, de/construct and re/construct. Why the resistance, I am asked when someone recaptures what I've said and wonders if everything is constructed.

Because a part of me believes that some things just are. And should be. Natalie Goldberg's **Wild Mind** (1990). Do we construct everything? Does everything construct us? Is there a third here, some unknown, some psychic force that is impervious to the post-modern? Call me mystical. The mind existing deep within a chasm of Being and Be/coming, not constructed because not everything can be built, not constructing us because we in some deep mysterious sense already are. I have held three newborn babies in my arms and looked deep into already knowing eyes...(Renee Norman)

Nowhere was it more apparent to me that the poet/poem can be rewritten by others than in my recent lived experience with a poem I wrote. This poem, "Power Games," was published in the newspaper. A prose poem, it is a humourous but sharp-edged account of my twenty year marriage living with my husband and our three children. The poem ends redeemingly, filled with a love that recognizes imperfections as well as what is important.

What controversy this poem created! One reader (a male academic) wrote and called me a man and husband hater. And how dare I invoke the name of two long-dead writers (Virginia and Leonard Woolf)! Another reader (a woman poet, I later learned) wrote to say that I failed to connect to the lives of women. People have no sense of humour, commented the editor when I phoned to ask him how many of these letters he had up his editorial sleeve. A woman and her daughter then wrote to defend my words, calling me insightful, a kindred spirit, and offering sympathy for

my plight.

Meanwhile, my husband, who is adjusting to living not only with a poet and writer, but one who sends her work to the newspaper, responded to the poem with:

- 1. initial pride and understanding about what I was saying*
- 2. increasing resentment about what I was saying as each letter from a reader appeared on Saturday morning*
- 3. a request for a copy of the poem which he took to work in order to solicit his colleagues' reactions. One woman asked if the house was in my name. A younger, unmarried man pronounced: She loves you.*

My mother read the poem and asked: Were you mad at Don when you wrote this? I read the poem in a writing class, and the women laughed; the men looked stunned. My sister phoned and told me she cried when she read the poem; it was so authentic. A woman friend said her husband was incensed by the poem; she felt he was consumed with guilt because he had done everything I wrote about in the poem. I read the poem at a conference and a colleague called it brutal.

At a family gathering of my husband's relatives, my husband's sister commented: Women like this poem, but I don't think men do. Her husband commented: Sounds like Don to me, and laughed. A cousin (whose first feminist wife left him, taking all the contents of the house with her) refused to look at me or speak to me throughout the evening.

...the tension in teaching, in living, at home. If you're alive, there's tension. If you're dead, no tension. (Aoki 1994)

For the surface agitation of the passing car as it sunk grazed something very profound. (Woolf 1925, 21)

Perhaps poetry is the culture of a people just because it makes many places for many others. Perhaps poetry can be theory because it combines lived experience with structures which can house these experiences, always leaving the doors and windows open...

*Be-longing in a poem--a new inter-cultural strategy??
(Renee Norman)*

Mommy, my daughter asked as I was scrubbing ink off our white patio table. Do you like the table more than us?

As I scrub some of the ink off the poetic language I offer in the logs, I am remembering that I love my daughters more than tables. I love the poetry more than theory.

As I write this, my family is away, giving me time and space to write. I found a little unicorn drawn with pencil on the window sill. I know this is Erin's artwork,

because my four-year-old draws horses and unicorns always.

I left the unicorn unscrubbed on the window sill, a reminder to me of what is most important.

...it is still unusual to encounter instances where theory involved the voiding, rather than the affirming or even reiterating, of theoretical categories. Instances where poeticalness is not primarily an aesthetic response, nor literariness merely a question of pure verbalism. And instances where the borderline between theoretical and non-theoretical writings is blurred and questioned, so that theory and poetry necessarily mesh, both determined by an awareness of the sign and the destabilization of the meaning and writing subject. (Minh-ha 1989, 42)

The post-modern. Interrogating identity. My own resistance to the post-modernisms that color my own thought and writing. In an article I recently wrote: I am so sick of myself; I mean selves. The decentering of our selves gives us even more selves to focus upon.

What draws me to phenomenology and Ted Aoki's work is hope and goodness and vision. What worries me in the post-modern is what I perceive could lead to a lack of ethics, a kind of fickleness that exists in contradiction. I do not believe that everything is fixed. Neither do I believe that each contradiction should be an excuse for whatever we say. Along the way to the post-modern, have I lost my desire to seek consistency in chaos?

Identities. Poet. Each poet who writes is interpreted by Homi Bhabha (1987). I like that. Poetry as theory. Poetry taking over where phenomenology leaves off, to reverse what van Manen cites in *Researching Lived Experience* (1992, 19).

But something feels like it is missing. What? The poem is not only words, not only eloquent silences, not only created spaces for others. The poem is art, a symbol, a feeling, never captured but there all the same.

When I read a poem, I hunt for that feeling. Does theory feel?

At the bookstore when I approached the Special Orders Desk to try and obtain the *Poetry Markets in Canada* book, the woman at the counter subject-searched poetry combined with markets and got nursery rhyme books.

To market, to market to buy a fat poem.

To market, to market to buy a fat pig.

To market, to market to buy the latest book.

To market, to market to buy the latest theory?? (Renee Norman)

I sat with my daughters and wrote out my "Renee's Story" poem. I lived with

my words in a way I have not had time to do for a while. Not only writing the poem, but placing the words artistically on calligraphy paper with my calligraphy pen. The pen scratching out the letters. Like a spade in the earth. Away from the word processor. Away from double-spaced, paginated and one of ten required pages.

It felt so good. A returning home, a returning to the earth. (My husband laughed when I told him this, remarking that I never garden in our yard. But I used to, I replied. Before we had children. Before I began to write. Now my children are my garden; my garden is my writing, where I grow flowers (and weeds), where I hoe and fertilize and move plants and pull those weeds and watch those flowers grow, picking blooms to display at times, or leaving them to open freely, until each petal drops away, another nutrient for the earth--the text, the child. I tinker with words, putter around in ideas, dig in ideologies, nurture and am nourished by my children, my poems...)

I didn't like my first calligraphic attempt, and I did a second. Better. But all this space to the left. The left side of knowing? Ah. Get out those dried flowers from years ago. Arrange them and stick them to the page with special clear paper, the dried flowers sometimes rising up off my arrangement to meet the stickiness at the merest breath of movement. This is living poetically, as poet and academic Carl Leggo speaks of it. Living artistically.

I don't always think things. I feel them.

I want to feel post-modern theory.

We have feminisms
post-modernisms
pre-modernisms
modernism
post-modern modernists (Virginia Woolf)
post-modern feminism
post-colonialism

and now

post post-modernisms.

I WANT TO ASK: WHAT IS ALL THIS MULTIVOCAL MUMBO-JUMBO?

Alison Jaggar who spoke in Vancouver this last spring defined a feminist as someone who works to eliminate suppression of women. I WANT TO ASK: DO POST-MODERNISMS WORK AGAINST SUPPRESSION OF WOMEN?

Somer Brodribb writes that Nancy Hartsock comments: isn't it interesting that just as we women are discovering our voices, along comes post-modernism and problematizes the "I" (Brodribb 1992, 46). I WANT TO ASK: IF THE "I" IS DECENTERED, WHERE'S MY CENTRE GONE? THE ANDROGYNOUS ZONE SEEMS ENDLESSLY COCENTRIC. WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS KNOWN WHAT IT MEANS TO BE DIVIDED. ALL THOSE SELVES TO JUGGLE IN THE AIR LIKE PLATES.

Somer Brodribb satirizes the Post-modern Man with a list of traits. I WANT TO ASK: IS THERE A POST-MODERN WOMAN? AM I A POST-MODERN WOMAN? IF THERE IS A POST-MODERN WOMAN, LIST HER READING MEN, LISTENING TO MEN, BUT READING AS A WOMAN, LISTENING AS A WOMAN.

I attended several sessions/lectures on post-modernism this last year. At one, the leader apologized for his patriarchal model of lecture/listen/compete to speak and then proceeded to use it. Another presentation was humourous, a group of administrators, three men and a woman, trying to deal with post-modern theory in educational leadership, placing colored transparencies on the overhead and then laughingly labelling them post-modern. In another presentation, a woman self-deprecatingly commented that it's cool to put post-modern in your thesis or dissertation or paper. I got lost in the post-modern landscape of her words, not between the words, but outside of them. I WANT TO ASK: WHY, EVERY TIME I QUESTION POST-MODERNISM TO THE POST-MODERNISTS, I FEEL THE DISAPPROVAL OF THE POST-MODERN POLICE?

Is post-modernism a theory? a cult? a practice? a way of life? a recipe?

Take 1 cup of Derrida and deconstruction, add 2 tablespoons of Lacanian lack, a dash of Foucault's power, and fold together. Do not stir. Do not overbeat. What is missing? What is missing? What is missing?

Jean-François Lyotard, in a chapter entitled **Rewriting Modernity**, discusses the word "postmodernity," preferring to replace "post" with "re," and "modernity" with "writing" (1991, 24).

I myself have used the term "postmodern." It was a slightly provocative way of placing (or displacing) into the limelight the debate about knowledge. Postmodernity is not a new age, but the rewriting of some of the features claimed by modernity....

(Lyotard 1991, 34)

Lyotard reasons that the displacement of "post" and "modernity" takes into account the temporal quality of the "flux of events" (24). He maintains that "the postmodern is always implied in the modern" because modernity is itself always in flux, always moving towards a state other than itself (25). While Lyotard addresses how the "re" can mean "a return to the starting point" (26) which erases all else, he prefers a meaning that embraces a working through.

a "working through"...a working attached to a thought of what is constitutively hidden from us in the event and the meaning of the event.... (Lyotard 1991, 26)

Nor does Lyotard believe that the "re" in "re-writing" should encompass a kind of remembering that accuses, nor should this "re" repeat what it re-writes (historically).

...working through would be defined as a work without end and therefore without will.... (Lyotard 1991, 30)

For Lyotard, re-writing means registering the elements of a scene without re-presenting it like a picture; rather, presenting the elements of a scene like an aura, privileging play, freedom from empiricism, fluidity and imagination in a process that is unending (31).

...rewriting means resisting the writing of that supposed postmodernity. (Lyotard 1991, 35)

Perhaps in my own resistance to and confusion about post-modern thought, I have unwittingly stumbled upon some of the limitations that the word itself causes. Certainly Lyotard is suggesting a much more fluid cultural consideration of modernity and post-modernity, where the "re-writing" embraces the past as it forges ahead to the future, never excluding the present. Such re-writing seems to parallel the process of writing and re-writing one's lived experience: presenting it like an aura and privileging imagination and play in the writing.

Within re-writing modernity as Lyotard discusses it, perhaps feminist theory can live more comfortably, since I concur with Jane Flax who states that feminist theory certainly does not belong with Enlightenment philosophy (Flax 1993, 71).

Having now re-sisted, I embrace:
the multiplicity of meanings
the unfixed unstable discourses
the poetic in the post-modern
the language-centeredness
the word
intertextuality

There is danger in embracing any theory totally without deconstructing it. We need to slide. We need the subtext of the intertext. We need to examine our interest as well as our resistance.

Especially we must also question authority as well as author.

No authorial I, but Authority lives in the academy, Authority lives in the post-modern.

Authority should be subverted, just as the I/eye is inter/rogated, or we merely create a new kind of dualism: what is post-modern and what is not. (Renee Norman)

The I/eye got a quaking. (Aoki 1994)

...how do you forget without annihilating?
(Minh-ha 1989, 28)

Woman can never be defined.
(Minh-ha 1989, 96)

Woman, as Cixous defines her, is a whole--'whole
composed of parts that are wholes'--through which
language is born over and over again.
(Minh-ha 1989, 38)

Writing is born when the writer is no longer.
(Minh-ha 1989, 35)

There is a fine line between poetry and madness.
(Renee Norman's journal)

...if the self is a house I have searched for a home....
(Hussey 1990, 69)

...difference...produces the illusion of identity
while undermining it relentlessly. (Minh-ha 1989, 116)

...speaking nearby or together with certainly differs from
speaking for and about. (Minh-ha 1989, 101)

Laying claim to the specificity of women's sexuality
and the rights pertaining to it is a step we have to
go through in order to make ourselves heard; in order
to beat the master at his own game. But reducing
everything to the order of sex does not...allow us to
depart from a discourse directed within the
apparatuses of sexuality.
(Minh-ha 1989, 39)

I want to expand the discussion of difference, and
difference in kind, to one of recognizing, too, what we hold in
common, what it means to be human, the metaphoric mosaic in all
its glorious colors, each color separate and distinct, yes, but
side by side comprising an array that is whole, beautiful, with
elements of form, texture, color, that affect us all, that make
us all who we are. (Renee Norman)

*After writing my decentered self poem, I approached my Israeli friend, curious
as to whether or not the Hebrew word אָה־עֵי (ah-ee) which I "invented" really meant
something. It means "Ah-ee" like ouch, my friend replied, as he pinched my arm.*

*Perfect, I thought. The fifth ah-ee is an exclamation, shouted when we are
pinched to make sure we're awake, not dreaming. The fifth ah-ee is an exclamation
made in response to an action that hurts. The fifth ah-ee is a shout in response to
a violation of the body, a shout to be heard. In-voluntary and reflex-ive at first, but*

warranted. And it occurs to me with all this reflection that I prefer to write de(c)entering with the "entering" showing. We enter more selves into the fray, acknowledge our dividedness, and still dwell on egocentricity. It is merely dispersed more, radiating from the multiple ego, the divided selves, in circles of subjectivity, each circle now requiring attention, analysis, nurturance, a dis-placed place in the circular scheme, a cell subdividing into twins, triplets, quadruplets, quintts, each "self" subject-positioned in a social and cultural and sexual context.

So how do we, as writers, women, Jews, integrate into our work what we really are, as opposed to these refutations or denials, these shadows of otherness, these acquiescences? (Tregebov 1990, 270)

When I look at a person, "subject" a person to my own gaze, I look with much more than my eyes/I's. I am looking at a body, yes, an outward appearance that is substantial, dressed in the accoutrement of culture, but I am looking at a presence that is more than a visual re-presentation.

I look with my ears, listening to the words that give some initial indication of how a person is thinking, who a person might be, what parts of the selves a person wishes to share.

I look with my heart, opening the chambers to the possibility of connecting with another's blood, the pulse of my human beat racing unchecked and drumming its staccato sound, silent but searching, into the air between us.

I look with my feeling sense, a dimension beyond that of the eye/I and the ear/hear, groping for goodness, for hope, for possibility, for the unnamable cry of recognition that I know can sometimes be there when one human being speaks to another without saying a word aloud and understands: Ah. So that is how you are.

I look with my experiences in the world, some painful, some joyous, some I have no wish to remember but in remembering and facing have opened myself. As if to open the way for the spirit of the Other to enter me and leave, risking what I might lose in the passing, but knowing that without such an exchange, I will not only be alone but empty.

I look so I can begin to write the person before me, hair, eyes, face, demeanor, expressions, impressions, inwardly knowing that this writing tells more about me. That my gaze, while stretching beyond the visibility of the eye/I, is always full of the distortions and distillations of my own reflections. A circus House of Mirrors, full of my own hopes and desires and longings, full of my one simple wish to be seen.

Invisibility is painful. To look without being seen, to be present but cast absent, to be between shadow and substance, still then in shadow, is my woman's experience, my Jewish experience, and when I look I cannot help but feel my own invisibility every time my glance radiates its circular search to any other.

In the process of being written and re-written, there is always more to be said,

always that which is unsaid and therefore significant, the search begun but never-ending, the beginning a small oasis in the emptiness, the J of Jewish a hook to catch some of the encouragement of encounter.

There is no stability in this world. Who is to say what meaning there is in anything? Who is to foretell the flight of a word? It is a balloon that sails over treetops. To speak of knowledge is futile. All is experiment and adventure. We are forever mixing ourselves with unknown quantities. What is to come?
(Woolf 1931, 100)

A classmate lends me a book of classical Chinese fiction, and I leaf through it, finding a tale about the Jade Maiden, a story of supernatural, unrequited love. Two times the Jade Maiden gives her lover a poem, and the tale ends with the lovers' reunion, so inspiring that a scholar named Zhang writes a poem about it (Chen 1990, 21). (Renee Norman)

There is a fine line between poetry and madness.
(Renee Norman's journal)

...unearth some new linguistic paths. Do you surprise? Do you shock? Do you have a choice?
(Minh-ha 1989, 20)

ILLOG

Re-assembling

Semiotic Double Text

I.
i am
the computer
(underneath which the dog warms my bare toes)
i re-read
my words
(who is this woman?)
move poems & stories
shaping a poetic text
a production
shaping a life
producing me
the pages lengthening
when are you going to stop?
(maybe i don't want to stop)
STOP
the end
death
the disruptive unconscious
between the lines
i am
writing the unconscious
Maurice Blanchot says: "writing in order not to die"*
Renee Norman says: "dying in order not to write?"

II.
my plural practice
re-shaping me
semiotic re-assembling
re-as-sembling
re
a n g
s i
s l
e b
m

every text double
every text double
a chorus
for the chora
metonymous mother-vessel
full of meaning
full of MEing
full of me
re-nee a re-ceptacle

block/move/re-block/re/move
de-lete
re-write/re-vise
save
control two
accent
accent
play with those fonts
font with those plays

want to play?
de-fence
around a table
de-fence that table
no white pickets
separating me & the committee

what's your (the words catch)
thesis about? (in my throat)
idontknowidontknowidontknow
what's guiding (something)
you? (a vision a dream a feeling)
propelling me forward
(doomed)
untitled
unbridled
double double text
no trouble

*(cited in Lechte 1990, 48)

Re-sonating

I am dreaming. They are all here, floating wraiths, with striated gauze fingers reaching out to me, and I stretch my own fingers out to touch them, slicing through air, slicing through nothingness...

Patti Lather swoops down first from the mist, earthy and real, a post-modern neo-marxist angel, hiking up her dress and adjusting her pantyhose, asking: "So, Renee, is this a deconstructive tale or a realist tale or a critical tale or a self-reflexive tale?" (Lather 1991).

I try to form the words to answer her, stutter, "W-well--," but she cuts in and reminds me: "Oppositional knowledge. That's what you've tapped into. Remember the journal comments from my Women's Studies course: 'Can you be a feminist and do what's right for yourself and still have a husband and family? I don't want to lose my family in the finding of myself' (78). '[My] world is shaken up. I feel I am living in constant crisis' (140). '...it has caused me confusion, alienation and fights...' (133). '...I've felt the oppositional knowledge; indeed there are some days I wish I didn't have to deal with women's issues--but the wonderful hours come when I feel liberated, not angry, but full of love...' (133).

"And you have to put something back into the process," Lather continues, talking at me. "Something that makes the research worthwhile. You have to give, too."

The angel lines of Patti Lather turn shadowy, split apart like a spidery web pulled between two opposing branches. And in the space between the branches, a vision of a woman walking down a road appears. Only her back can be seen. She exposes no face but I see wings sprouting out of her back. Someone calls out to the woman who reveals no face: "Hey, lady, who are you?" The woman turns around quickly, as if surprised by the question. I gasp. It is me.

The vision disappears. The woman that is really me, the jet stream lines of Patti Lather, dissipate in the overhead frame of my dream. I hear Patti Lather's distant voice, a dim chorus to a choir of disappearing angels: "multi-valent-text-how-we-other-others-troubling-our-own-assumptions-try-hard-to-understand-less-role-of-the-autobiographical-a-less-comfortable-social-science-a-poetic-speaking-a-text-that-works-against-knowing-too-quickly-inviting-open-readings" (Lather 1994).

Sudden silence. The white mist of my dream remains, and Monique Wittig falls from the mist, jabbering first in French, then in a heavily-accented English, then back to French. I strain to hear what she is saying. She turns over and over as she falls. The only words I can make out are "white workshop space" and "the blank page."

Monique Wittig begins to spin around and around, faster and faster, a blur now. The mist swirls into a page of a book, pure white, and the blur that is Monique Wittig turns red, spinning

onto the page-mist and dotting it with small pinpoints of red color.

The red turns black for a moment. I can almost see the words I think are there, but the black turns white again, blending into the page-mist. Monique Wittig is gone.

Again the mist swirls, a heavy fog in my dream, and the page transforms to a white wall. Over this wall leaps Alison Jaggar, smiling sideways, and with a slight lisp, she turns to me in the dream, repeating over and over: "A feminist is someone who works to end the suppression of women. A feminist is someone who works to end the suppression of women. A feminist is someone who works to end the suppression of women." Alison Jaggar walks through the wall, which closes behind her.

The wall expands, growing other walls, producing tables and chairs between the walls, producing cups of coffee floating mid-air between the chairs and tables. One chair stands up, and I can see it is taking on human proportions, but I am unclear about who it is.

"Natalie Goldberg," the chair announces for my benefit. "Cut! Cut! Cut!" the Natalie Goldberg chair calls out to me, reaching for a floating cup of coffee and setting it upon a table where the cup refuses to stay still, dancing up and down in a boiling frenzy.

"Cut! Cut! Cut!"

I open my mouth, again trying to speak to this apparition in my dream. I croak, a hoarse, toad-like sound. The Natalie-chair cries: "Shut up and write! Look for the poems! Write about what you don't want to write about! Write through the layers to first-thought, wild mind. And cut, cut, cut!" (Goldberg 1986; 1990).

The hand of the Natalie-chair slices through the air between the dancing coffee cup, crying cut, cut, over and over. "Cut!" (Slice of her hand.) The cup dances. "Cut!" (Slice of her hand.) The cup dances, disappears.

The Natalie-chair freezes, her hand no longer slicing, and conversationally, she adds: "I got a phone call from Leonard Cohen's manager, you know, about **Writing Down the Bones**. Leonard Cohen liked my book."

The Natalie-chair sits down, a chair again. The coffee cups settle on the tables, and I hear the lyrics of Leonard Cohen's **Future** CD re-sonating from behind the white walls, sung in Cohen's gravelly voice: "...and all the lousy little poets coming round trying to sound like Charlie Manson...." Then silence.

From the corner of one of the walls, an all-white, ghostly Phantom of the Opera seeps out and snakes along, white cape emerging, hands clutching claw-like, corner to corner. The masked mouth chants: "She has been vell-taught" in an European accent. The Phantom snakes along to another wall corner. A cloud formed from dry ice rises, obscuring the Phantom's shape, covering the chairs, the tables, the walls.

Clears, revealing a river. And a woman with long hair

standing in the river. Her hair curls down to the river so that they seem joined. The woman walks deeper and deeper into the torrents of the river, hair pulled by the currents, currents tugged by the hair. Until the swaying woman becomes the river, or the raging river becomes the woman, I cannot tell. A face smiles from the depths of this swaying body. I can see the face. It is Virginia Woolf, no, me, no, Virginia Woolf again, then the face of a wolf. Clarissa Estes smiles in the wolf's face, and from that smile, strings of words are spewed out. Each word is clear and distinct at first, then fades slightly as it moves over the body of the river, the body of the woman, to make room for the next word, and the next, and the next:

Through slips of the tongue,...the poetic dimension of language (to the extent that it is full of ambiguity, and therefore full of meaning), the dream as a rebus, and forms of nonsense, we glimpse the unconscious.
(Lechte 1990, 34)

...the unconscious is always equivocal, between the lines, the irreducibly poetic which a plurality of meanings resonates.... (Lechte 1990, 36)

For we dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order to really live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future. (Hardy 1981, 13)

I think the world is a better place because of Jerome Bruner, who has looked at narrative as one of two possible modes of thought, a way of knowing, a means of ordering experience, a mode for constructing reality. (Sutton 1992)

...narrative is built upon concern for the human condition. (Bruner 1986, 14)

What is the power, the pull, the magnetism, the dynamism of narrative? (Leggo 1994, 19)
How does narrative relate to self, self-awareness, self-realization, self-actualization, self-narration, selfishness, self-centeredness, self-understanding, self-knowing, self-knowledge, self-consciousness, self-determination, self-familiarity, self-construction, self-conceptualization, self-contradiction, self-generation, self-representation?...What counts as narrative knowledge/knowing? (Leggo 1994, 20)

...narrating is not merely a thoughtful narrating of

stories and themes of lived experiences...the act of narrating is already involved in the becoming of identity...narrating is not only a thoughtful telling but also a way to come to be.

(Aoki & Shamsheer 1993, 1)

It is a long time before I wake from the dream. I want to write the story awake, but I want to dream, too. And so I write. And so I dream again.

EPILOG

Re-capitulating

If I Call Myself

if I call myself a poet
will the words come
spilling upon that blank page
the blood of my memories

if I call myself a revisionist
will the changes come
stories rewritten that mythologize
a woman's experience

if I call myself une féministe
will my body come
in an ecstasy of jouissance
that celebrates my womanhood

if I call myself a mother
will my children come
to remember back through me
days we could have come together

if I call myself a woman
will I come to believe
that I, too, live in a world
that means to let me speak

if I call myself
will I come
screaming echoes of self
calling **COME**

COME
COME

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