

The Elliptical Subject: Citation and Reciprocity in Critical Readings of *Ana Historic*

by Heather Milne

Reading the writing a woman writes as she reads out her life, a woman reader will often find herself reading in her own life there between the lines. This in-between space is not merely empty space between two definitive lines of print. It is also the space of what is indefinite, intermingled, shared, like the air we share with trees. In this oxygen-carbon-dioxide exchange, we experience a reciprocity. The reciprocal then is responsive to the terms of exchange, transforming and returning what is taken in, sustaining a vital polylogue that is shared.—Daphne Marlatt, “The In-Between is Reciprocal” (115)

In “The In-Between is Reciprocal,” Daphne Marlatt articulates a strategy for reading the “in-between” not as an empty space but as a shared space of identification and possibility. This reciprocity implies an organic system of exchange between writer and reader that occurs between the lines of print, and entails an intimacy and perhaps even an ethical responsibility. Marlatt sees this shared space not as closed, fixed and determinate but as a polylogue that engenders multiple dialogic possibilities. In the same essay, Marlatt refers to “women’s talk” as “elliptical, anecdotal and broken, suggestive of what is left unsaid” or what is difficult to say because it “contradicts the accepted real” (112). Much of her writing works to develop a poetics through which to write about the aspects of women’s and more specifically lesbians’ experiences that have been suppressed and oppressed by patriarchal and heteronormative language and culture. Marlatt’s works that are most explicitly engaged in the project of voicing the elliptical, including her poems and novels that explore lesbian identity and desire, have brought on charges of essentialism and ignited debates about the merits of attempting to articulate the feminine. Dennis Cooley, Frank Davey and Lola Lemire Tostevin have read Marlatt’s writings as advancing a reductive search for origins, while Lianne Moyes and Barbara Godard have challenged such readings.¹ Godard has convincingly shown that accusations of essentialism in relation to Marlatt’s work are symptomatic of a larger current in Canadian criticism in the late 1980s that attempted to dismiss feminist discourses addressing female specificity as essentialist in an effort to

contain them (“Essentialism?” 36). As Susan Knutson has argued, lesbian writers, specifically, tend to bear the brunt of critiques of essentialism because their projects pose the most direct threat to the patriarchal social order (6).

Marlatt herself has addressed the importance of the articulation of lesbian identity, but also the tendency for these articulations to be misconstrued as essentialist. In “Changing the Focus,” her response to Tostevin’s charge that *Ana Historic* simply replaces “phallogocentrism” with “vulvalogocentrism” (Tostevin 201), Marlatt argues that “a sense of identity is very important to us [lesbian writers] exactly because it’s so often objected to, erased, or denied in the feminist movement as a whole, and maligned or oppressed in the mainstream” (130). This striving to claim a space for the lesbian in poetics and politics has engaged critical readings of Marlatt’s writings that often subvert or misconstrue her struggle to articulate the elliptical, and in particular, her attempt to articulate lesbian desire.

Misreadings of lesbian texts often stem from the limitations of the cultural frameworks through which we understand desire. As Elizabeth Grosz has suggested, psychoanalytic models have difficulty accounting for “desire as a ‘proper’ province of women” since “desire has been almost exclusively understood in male (and commonly heterocentric) terms” (175). Julia Creet suggests that lesbian subjectivity, like all forms of subjectivity, is “in a crisis of representation, entangled in the need for political and emotional stability, and subject to the radical destabilizing of post-structuralist theories, as well as challenges to boundaries and cross-currents with other categories” (181). Much lesbian writing, Marlatt’s included, is engaged in giving voice to the desiring lesbian subject, and making such a subject a conceptual possibility. However, this project is often willfully misconstrued by critics, and these misreadings point to the vulnerability of the lesbian subject in the sociocultural arena. But rather than simply identify this circuitous formulation in which the lesbian’s attempt to inscribe her subject position results in her further marginalization, I want to focus on how the articulation of lesbian desire is misconstrued and misaligned in the critical domain, and what these (mis)readings suggest about the position of the lesbian in Canadian literary and feminist criticism. Furthermore, I wish to consider how we might read this exchange in relation to Marlatt’s articulation of a utopian space of reciprocity between writer and reader.

I want to extend Marlatt’s concept of the in-between, the space where writer and reader meet, to consider the relationship between writer and critic, and more specifically, the relationship between the lesbian writer

and her heterosexual critic. If the “in-between” exists as a shared space of identification, exchange and reciprocity, how does the heterosexual critic enter this arena, and does he or she bear a political or ethical responsibility to the writer? If so, what form might this responsibility take and what are its stakes? What are the politics of identity underscoring such an exchange? Does the incoherency and instability of the lesbian subject within heteronormative articulations of desire suggest the need for an ethical imperative to be respectful of lesbian articulations of desire, or does the ambiguity of lesbian desire in heteronormative contexts allow for its recontextualization, and arguably its containment? And how might we speak of such an ethics without lapsing into a reductive recourse to questions of authorial intent?

This exchange between writer and critic arguably manifests itself most directly in the space of the citation, which functions as a fissure or an overlap between primary and secondary text, and thus as an “in-between” space in which the critic draws on the primary text to provide evidence to support his or her reading. However, the space of citation is also a site of slippage and recontextualization. As Mary Orr suggests, quotation is “the most condensed form of paradigm shift, transmuting the context, form and meaning of the items both inside and outside the quotation marks. It is always enrichment by inclusion, integration and proclamation of otherness, a dialogue not a monologue” (133). While quotations are used to support the critic’s own readings, and thus to solidify the critic’s relationship to the primary text, when placed in new contexts, quotations signify in new ways and engender new contexts. The importation of a quotation from a literary work into a critical one can create a site of rupture and transformation. The textual overlap that occurs in the context of the quotation is a potential space of reciprocity akin to Marlatt’s “in-between” (115). It is a textual space that bridges the work of critic and writer. However, as I shall illustrate through an examination of two critical readings of Marlatt’s work, quotations can also result in the foreclosure of meanings rather than the creation of new ones.² Marlatt’s poetics precipitate an invitation for the critic to deploy citation to extend her play with language, but the critic’s play often results in the effacement of the lesbian subject.

I am endeavoring here to articulate a somewhat contradictory formulation: how can we address the reader or critic’s responsibility to the work without reducing the multiplicity of contexts in which the work circulates? Citationality is not only about determining meaning but also about liberating meanings, and releasing writing from its brake. Roland Barthes describes this release as a “truly revolutionary” activity that poses a chal-

lenge to “reason, science and law,” and hence suggests that to shift from deciphering to disentangling writing does not preclude the possibility of understanding reading as both a generative and political practice (147). Citationality does not mark the death of reading as a social practice, but rather points to the potential to multiply the sites and ways in which politically invested reading practices may occur. Derrida reminds us that one can never fix or determine the context of an utterance, nor can intention govern its circulation (“Signature” 104). However, he also reminds us that the more we become aware of the freedom of interpretation, the more we must also apprehend the vulnerability of the context, as well as our political and ethical responsibility towards the context (*Limited Inc* 150).

My focus here is on both the use of citation in two critical readings of *Ana Historic* and the question of the reciprocal relationship between critic and writer. Marlatt is a poet who has always worked at the juncture of poetry and prose. Just as her poetry suggests “both the linguistic precision of poetry and the sequential motion of prose” (Davey “DM” 741), so too does *Ana Historic*. Moreover, this examination of readings of *Ana Historic* can inform our engagement with Marlatt’s other works, including “Booking Passage” and *Double Negative*, both of which address the dialectic of visibility and invisibility as it pertains to lesbian desire, as well as the political urgency of writing the lesbian into language.

Before addressing the use of citation in critical readings of *Ana Historic*, it is important to acknowledge Marlatt’s own use of citation in the text. Pamela Banting refers to *Ana Historic* as “the novel as translation” (125), but it is also arguably the novel as citation.³ The narrative is structured through the contrast between quotations culled from medical, historical and archival texts, and Annie’s attempt to imagine the circumstances of Mrs. Richard’s life in Vancouver in the late nineteenth century, as well as her own attempts to come to terms with the circumstances of her mother’s illness and death, and her growing awareness of her own lesbianism. The juxtaposition between the citations from texts that tend to occlude or misrepresent women and Annie’s own meditations on her mother, herself and her fictional character Ana create “the gap between two versions” (*AH* 106), a gap through which meaning emerges. Marlatt draws explicit attention to citation in *Ana Historic* when Annie, the protagonist, imagines her husband’s censure:

but what are you *doing*? i can imagine Richard saying, looking up from the pages with that expression with which he must confront his students over their papers: this doesn’t go anywhere, you’re just circling around the same

idea - and all those bits and pieces thrown in - that's not how to use quotations.

irritated because i can't explain myself. just scribbling, i'll say. echoing your words, Ina - another quotation, except i quote myself (and what if our heads are full of other people's words? nothing *without* quotation marks.) (81)

While foregrounding the difficulty of getting outside the chain of signifiers that imprison and dictate meaning, Marlatt also strives to break with existing contexts to engender new forms of expression. Marlatt's use of citation is not empirical, scientific or scholarly; rather, it is associative, subversive and ironic. Citation is a politically-invested and potentially revolutionary practice in *Ana Historic*, and one that strives to pry open dominant modes of signification.

Through her own reliance on the play of citation, and the juxtaposition of competing discourses that signify through their differential placement in the text, Marlatt produces a linguistically playful and deconstructive narrative. *Ana Historic* operates as what Barthes refers to as a "tissue of quotations" that undermines the primacy of authorial intent and locates interpretive authority with the reader—the "modern scriptor" (146); it also serves as an example of Derrida's concept of grafting, where every sign can be "cited within quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts" ("Signature" 97). Marlatt's citations break with their originary contexts to generate new and subversive meanings but they never break completely. Through ironic juxtaposition, Marlatt gestures to the political underpinnings of the quotations, which maintain their original intent because they repeat the patriarchal and colonialist assertions against which she writes. She uses citation to call into question the official narratives of the "city fathers" (28). Through the play of contextualization and recontextualization, Marlatt enacts a poetics and politics of citation driven by the desire to inscribe a space for the specificity of women's experiences. This entails a political risk. As Tostevin's charges of "vulvalogocentrism" and Davey's of "monologism" reveal, Marlatt's intertextuality has often been read as a reductive assertion of authorial intent (*Post-National* 203). Attempts to locate Marlatt's grafting of a tissue of quotations as a monologic rather than polysemic practice emerge from a reluctance to recognize, as Marlatt does, the potential of citation to be politically effective through its shifting contexts. The reluctance to recognize the stakes of citationality also enables the elision of the lesbian in much of the criticism on *Ana Historic*.

While Marlatt employs citation to create a proliferation of meanings, critics of *Ana Historic* have used citation to foreclose the polyvocality and multiplicity of meanings in the text. Two of these critics of *Ana Historic* who use citation in ways that reveal a reluctance to engage with the full spectrum of issues the text presents to the reader are the poets Frank Davey and Rishma Dunlop. As poets and as critics, they are acutely aware of the importance of context, as well as the minute details of punctuation and word placement, to the construction of meaning. They both enter into a dynamic engagement with Marlatt's text, but inadvertently foreclose its political potential. While not overtly hostile or deliberately homophobic, their critiques nevertheless point to the perilous position of the lesbian in public critical discourses, and underscore the political importance and continued relevancy of Marlatt's project.

In *Post-National Arguments*, Frank Davey considers Marlatt's practice of citation at some length and suggests that it leads to a reductive monologism, even as she pretends to use citation to interrogate positivist history. Davey objects to what he sees as Marlatt's equation of women with a pre-national mythical landscape that frames Canada as "a ubiquitous patriarchal symbolic order" (196). Although Davey's critique of the book's engagement with the nation space is useful when reading *Ana Historic* in a regional, national or post-national context, it is of more limited use when reading the book as a lesbian coming-out text. Davey's chapter on *Ana Historic* is entitled "The Country of her Own Body," suggesting two competing readings—lesbian and national—that are difficult to reconcile if one sees, as Davey does, the inscription of the lesbian as incompatible with national concerns.

As Marlatt began to identify more strongly with feminism and lesbianism in the early 1980s, her place in the context of Canadian poetics shifted. Davey suggests, in his entry on Marlatt in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, that her public identification with lesbianism in the 1980s "marked a sharp change in the political perspectives and implied readership of her writing" (742). Although Marlatt and her work became more closely aligned with *Tessera* than *Tish* during this time, the schism between her earlier and later writings is often overdetermined. Marlatt's work has remained consistent in its interest in proprioception and place, its tendency to blur the boundary between poetry and prose and its sophisticated language play.

Davey's main objection to the deployment of citation in *Ana Historic* is that Daphne Marlatt as "signator" manipulates and arranges the textual fragments to allow

Annie's overall quest for certainty about the causes of her mother's mental collapse to dominate her citation and organization of these voices; all the voices she cites are framed so as to contribute to her concluding conviction that she, Mrs. Richards and Ina were all victims of discursive alienation from their own and their mother's bodies. On the final non-numbered page, Annie's multivocal text offers *Ana Historic's* unequivocal meaning. (199)

Davey reads Marlatt's citations from historical, medical and scientific documents and her incorporation of multiple voices as contrived and cynical; what seems to be fragmentary is in fact arranged in a manner that builds towards the text's epiphanic conclusion. The "unequivocal meaning" on the "final non-numbered page" to which Davey refers is the poetic description of Annie and Zoe's lovemaking, which is set apart from the text through the absence of a page number, and which can be read both as the novel's ending and as a poem set apart from the rest of the text. He equates Annie's certainty, her assumption of a stable subject position from which to speak, and her affirmation of her feelings for Zoe with a monologism as reductive as the patriarchal forces against which she struggles. Davey's tendency to view the political only through the lens of the national or post-national leads him to read the ending of *Ana Historic* as apolitical. This is a misreading, since it implicitly excludes questions of gender and sexuality from national concerns, while simultaneously refusing to recognize the book's feminist and lesbian articulations as political.

While Marlatt invariably selects and arranges her citations and textual fragments to produce meaning, she recognizes the inevitable drift of citations as a site of political resistance, contestation and dialogism. As Barbara Godard writes in reference to Marlatt's poetry, "For Marlatt, truth is not singular, logocentric, but multiple, polyphonic. There is no single speaking voice, but many voices, many languages at play in her work. Without an author, the texts are unauthorized, subversive" ("Body-I" 481). Godard's observations of Marlatt's poetry are also applicable to *Ana Historic*. As Marlatt writes, "a book of interruptions is not a novel" (37), drawing attention to the dialogic fabric of the text and its subversion of the linearity and coherency of the traditional novel. *Ana Historic* does build towards a climax, both literally and figuratively, but this is about breaking into language, about the iterability of lesbian desire; it is a climax that must be written into existence. Here, the accumulation of fragments becomes a political and erotically infused practice through which the certainty of desire is written into language.

Although Davey objects to what he sees as a quest for unequivocal certainty in Marlatt's arrangement of textual fragments, Davey too strategi-

cally arranges quotations to promote his reading of the book as monologic. As proof of Marlatt's positivism, he traces the repetition of the words "as if," which he says occur more than twenty times in the book's 150 pages. Davey reads the phrase "as if" operating as a "site of transformation and reduction through which Annie converts various perceptions and memories into component certainties of a new interpretation" (202). Davey cites seven of these twenty-odd occurrences of the phrase "as if," but he removes them from their contexts and presents them to the reader as a monolithic, and monologic, block of citations. Davey cites *Ana Historic* as follows:

...don't be silly darling, i'm here, you see how silly you are—as if *saying* it makes it so. (11)

...tomboy, her mother said. tom, the male of the species, plus boy. double masculine, as if the girl were completely erased. (13)

...Ina, how you used to enter the North Van library as if entering a medieval cloister... (16)

...they crowded past her as if she were a bush, a fern shaking in their way. (42)

...the sort of grace i was meant to have as a body marked *woman's*, as if it were a brand name. as if there were a standard shape... (52)

...'so touching'...as if the male touch...required its polar opposite to right the world... (63)

...lighting up when he saw her as if she were a grouse flushed out of the bush... (102)

(Davey 202)

Cumulatively, these fragments create the impression that Marlatt makes frequent use of the phrase "as if." However, when traced to their contexts within *Ana Historic*, it becomes apparent that the vast majority of "as ifs" occur when Annie poses a classically dialogic challenge to a patriarchal monologism that tends to position women outside nation, culture and history. *Ana Historic* pries apart dominant truth claims through citation, recontextualization and word play; the text's political message does not necessarily obscure its celebration of the potential of language to yield a

multiplicity of meanings, nor does its word play abandon or transcend the realm of the political.⁴ Although citations inevitably and necessarily break with their contexts, they must maintain an ethical and reciprocal relationship with their context.⁵ Davey recontextualizes the “as ifs” to conflate the assertion of lesbian subjectivity and desire with a monologism that is itself a product of his own recontextualization.

Davey suggests that Annie’s quest for certainty, demonstrated through the recurring “as if,” manipulates the textual fragments and drives the narrative towards an eventual retreat into the pre-Oedipal. Davey reads the poetic and erotic conclusion of the text as paradoxical in its placement of women in a space prior to the symbolic and apart from the scene of political struggle, and in its simultaneous enactment of a “desperate and political gesture” that grants “extreme authority” to Annie but offers “no ironic distance” from her (208-09).⁶ He writes that “the patriarchal order still stands. Annie has reversed her place within it, usurped its discourse of certainty, and with it the male prerogative to ‘love’ a woman” (209). Aside from the fact that Davey’s assertion that it is the male prerogative to love a woman casts love and desire in heteronormative terms, and embodies the very assumptions against which Marlatt writes, his reading raises several questions. Is Annie’s growing certainty of her desire for Zoe necessarily coterminous with the patriarchal order as Davey suggests, or does it offer an alternative? Are discourses of certainty necessarily patriarchal? Conversely, are lesbian discourses necessarily uncertain?

Davey criticizes what he sees as a lack of ironic distance in the book’s ending, but he doesn’t consider how a space of ironic distance between Annie and the narrative perspective might undermine the book as a coming-out text. In order to come out, one must adopt a “discourse of certainty” to construct and proclaim, however provisionally, an identity that comes out. As many queer theorists have noted, coming out entails constructing a teleological narrative that retrospectively reframes one’s experiences prior to coming out as leading up to the one’s proclamation of her queer/gay/lesbian/trans/bi identity. The coming out narrative is often posited as a transformative and epiphanic revelation, what Julia Creet calls a speech act that “describes a process of signification, of naming or categorizing feelings that had previously existed” (182). However, these narratives are projections that, in effect, mask an unstable self, one whose “undoing” is always a possibility (196). There is little room for irony in the coming out narrative, since its purpose is to consolidate the identity of the queer subject.⁷

Contrary to Davey's claim, the book's concluding segment does not position lesbian sexuality outside the symbolic order; rather, Marlatt writes the lesbian into language with phrases such as "hot skin writing skin" and "reading us into the page ahead" (unpaginated). The skin becomes a palimpsest, a tissue upon which the characters write and read into the future. Davey reads *Ana Historic* as monologic because of its political stakes, which he also interprets as a paradoxical retreat from the political, but his own active engagement risks foreclosing the book's political potential. Davey creates a new reading through his selective use of citation and frames Marlatt's challenge to patriarchal and heteronormative orders as monologic. This break with context, however, is not what Barthes might term "revolutionary." Rather, it counteracts Marlatt's own tactical recontextualization of language.

For Davey, the ending of *Ana Historic* represents both the appropriation of a male subject position and a retreat into a depoliticized pre-Oedipal realm. Some feminist readings also have difficulty accounting for the book's amorous ending. Tostevin's reservations have been well documented elsewhere; I want to focus instead on a reading of *Ana Historic* that was published in a journal peripheral to the field of Canadian Literature but central to discourses of the maternal in Canadian academic feminism. Rishma Dunlop's "Archives of Desire: Rewriting Maternal History in Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*" appeared in the *Journal for the Association of Research on Mothering*, an interdisciplinary humanities-based journal that addresses a variety of topics pertaining to motherhood. Dunlop's article reflects the tendency of some heterosexual-feminist articulations of the maternal to appropriate and erase lesbianism through their engagements with lesbian-maternal metaphors.

Teresa de Lauretis addresses this phenomenon in *The Practice of Love*, where she suggests that the appeal of the "homosexual-maternal metaphor" for heterosexual feminists lies in its promise of an autonomous female sexuality. However, as she illustrates through readings of Kaja Silverman, Mary Jacobus, Jane Gallop and other feminists working within a psychoanalytic framework, access to this autonomous sexuality is "secured by erasing the actual sexual difference between lesbians and heterosexual women" (xvii). The homosexual-maternal metaphor joins desire to identification with the mother, negating lesbianism, and blurring "the already fraught distinction between heterosexual feminism and lesbian feminism, to say nothing of the far more consequential differences between lesbian sexuality or subjectivity and heterosexual female sexuality or subjectivity" (190). The blurred distinction between lesbianism and

feminism turns “lesbianism into the sign of an implicitly heterosexual female resistance and desire,” making lesbianism “still unimaginable today by obliterating its specific sexual and social differences” (192). In Dunlop’s reading of *Ana Historic*, and especially in her reading of the book’s concluding passage, this simultaneous appropriation and erasure occurs through the practice of citation.

Because *Ana Historic*’s treatment of lesbian desire is interwoven with its engagement with the maternal, it is easy to place the lesbian elements at the service of a maternal reading, effacing the lesbian subject from the narrative. In spite of the reference to desire in its title, Dunlop’s article focuses primarily on the maternal rather than the lesbian elements of the text. Focusing on the novel’s engagement with the historical marginalization of the female body, the maternal and women’s history, Dunlop makes only one reference to lesbianism in the midst of a detailed discussion of the maternal, implicitly framing lesbianism as a subcategory of the maternal. In the conclusion to her article, Dunlop summarizes the book as follows: “Indeed, Marlatt’s text is a subversive, feminine map of sound, a lyric embodiment of women’s histories, and a poetic rewriting and revisioning of the notion of maternity and the suppressed and oppressed stories of maternity” (71). While this is an apt summation of many aspects of Marlatt’s project, it neglects to account for *Ana Historic* as a lesbian coming out text. One might argue that this is an excusable omission; after all, Dunlop is interested primarily in the book’s engagement with the maternal and she published her account in a journal devoted to the topic of motherhood, not lesbianism. However, through her own practice of citation, she actively re-writes the concluding passage of the text in a way that places the lesbian under erasure. She concludes her article with an altered quotation from the last page of *Ana Historic*. Dunlop claims to be “reading aloud” as she writes, “speaking the final words of *Ana Historic*, in Marlatt’s imaginative, poetic words” (71). However, the words Dunlop reads and cites are not exactly the same as they appear on the final page of Marlatt’s text. Here is the quotation exactly as it appears in Dunlop’s article:

we give place, giving words, giving
birth to each other...it isn’t dark
but the luxury of being has woken you,
the reach of your desire, reading us into
the page ahead.

(71)

Dunlop's alteration of the quotation is striking when compared to the original in *Ana Historic*:

we give place, giving words, giving birth, to
each other—she and me. you. hot skin writing
skin. fluid edge, wick, wick. she draws me
out. you she breathes, is where we meet.
breeze from the window reaching you now, trees
out there, streets you might walk down, will,
soon. it isn't dark but the luxury of being
has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading
us into the page ahead.

(*AH*, unpaginated)

Dunlop positions this quotation in the service of her own maternal reading of the text without considering its context in the book. She even uses ellipses to remove aspects of this passage that would require her to read it as an articulation of lesbian desire. Dunlop omits “she and me. you. hot skin writing / skin. fluid edge, wick, wick. she draws me / out. you she breathes, is where we meet. / breeze from the window reaching you now, trees / out there, streets you might walk down, will, / soon.” To conceal the articulation of lesbian desire through ellipses ultimately works against Marlatt's desire to voice lesbian eroticism. Dunlop also alters Marlatt's line breaks, moving the word “birth” from its intended position as the second-to-last word of the first line, and giving it a more prominent position, where it anchors the second line. Marlatt begins the third and sixth lines with the word “out”: “she draws me / out.” and “out there,” emphasizing the act of coming out, of visibility, but these “outs” are placed between the lines of Dunlop's reading. As a poet, Dunlop is undoubtedly aware of the importance of line breaks and punctuation to the construction of meaning. Her erasure of the lesbian subject through her use of ellipses and her repositioning of line breaks to emphasize the maternal reflects the conflation of lesbian desire and the maternal that de Lauretis identifies in many heterosexual-feminist engagements with the maternal. While Marlatt conceptualizes the lesbian and the maternal as interconnected, she remains committed to writing the lesbian subject into language. The problem lies not with Marlatt's articulation of the maternal, but with the readiness with which Dunlop renders the lesbian, quite literally, elliptical in her own engagement with the maternal.

Ana Historic's lyrical concluding passage is located in the centre of the final page and the words do not stretch to the margins as they do in the rest

of the text, suggesting that Marlatt wants us to read this final unnumbered page as a poem that both completes the text and stands apart from it. Marlatt is attentive in *Ana Historic*'s concluding passage, as she is in all her poetry, to line breaks and punctuation. She often uses punctuation to draw attention to the elliptical, or the elements of women's embodied experiences that have traditionally remained "between the lines" of the written (Marlatt "In-Between" 112). Through her use of parentheses and ellipses, Marlatt has developed a complex poetics of punctuation that is present in both her poetry and her prose. In an interview with Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy, Marlatt discusses the potential for punctuation and word order to convey meaning: "You can put things side by side and they have a very loose connection with a capacity for meaning-play and that's how I like to build my sentences; that's why I play around with the resources of punctuation like commas, dashes and brackets" (32). Marlatt suggests that the sentence's capacity for detour and the tendency of punctuation to facilitate multiple meanings have drawn her further into prose and into writing that challenges the traditional distinctions between poetry and prose (32).

The architecture of Marlatt's sentences, and her strategic use of ellipses, brackets and other forms of punctuation to generate layers of meaning contribute to her overarching interest in aspects of women's experiences. The parenthetical and the elliptical become metaphors for the bracketing off, marginalization and erasure of the feminine from the symbolic order. Annie, the narrator of *Ana Historic*, tells us that history is full of "bracketed ladies" (83). *Ana Historic* suggests a poetics and politics of punctuation. By not paying heed to the ways in which Marlatt uses punctuation and line breaks to take the reader on these detours and to generate multiple, polyphonic and often subversive meanings, Dunlop's reading forecloses *Ana Historic*'s political and poetic potential by placing the lesbian back between the lines of the written. In many respects, *Ana Historic* is a shared, reciprocal space for Marlatt and Dunlop, who both enter the text on common ground as poets and mothers. But the reach of reciprocity is limited in this instance through the alteration of the quotation. Given Marlatt's own utopian vision of the in-between as a reciprocal space between reader and writer, it is perhaps ironic that Dunlop repositions the lesbian ending between the printed lines on the page. This may point to the limited reach of the reciprocal; the space between the lines is also one of vulnerability, a potential site of negation rather than reciprocity.

Pauline Butling has offered a constructive meditation on the ethical dilemmas she faces as a heterosexual reader entering the lesbian text, and in doing so, exemplifies the kind of reciprocal reading practice that I am

advocating. Butling refers to the “participatory pleasures” of reading Marlatt’s poetry and the “political value of such a process” (167), but she also pays heed to the complexities of her own relationship to the text: “But how do I, a heterosexual reader, read these poems?.... If I conflate lesbian desire with any female desire (and thereby identify with the “i” of the poem) do I then appropriate the lesbian experience? How can all women share the process of empowerment without erasing differences?” (168-69). Butling is attentive to the text as a reciprocal space, and one to which she as reader bears an ethical responsibility. Seeking an answer to these questions, Butling turns to Nicole Brossard’s “From Radical to Integral,” in which Brossard identifies a common ground for the creation of “female culture” that is based on the specificity of particular experiences of marginalization (Butling 169). Through Brossard’s theorizing, Butling comes to understand her own experience of reading “Booking Passage” as “not a matter of identification but of recognition, even celebration, of new meanings of ‘woman’” (169).

Marlatt sees the space “between the lines” as a reciprocal one where the reader can enter the text through its resonance with her own experience. Texts are, invariably, open-ended and the reader actively shapes the construction of meaning, but this does not necessarily preclude the reciprocal, ethical and political stakes of reading and citationality as social practices. In critical readings of *Ana Historic*, the lesbian, both as political category and personal identity, is often deployed in ways that render lesbianism invisible or conceptually impossible. Davey sees the lesbian ending as incompatible with national interests, while Dunlop subsumes it within the heterosexual-maternal. Marlatt brings together national, ecological, feminist, maternal and lesbian concerns, and indeed these concerns are in fact intricately interconnected in her work. However, in critical readings of *Ana Historic* the lesbian elements of the text are both the object of criticism and the aspect of the book most easily marginalized. This demonstrates, by default, the importance of Marlatt’s attempt to write the lesbian into language, not only in *Ana Historic*, but also in much of her poetry from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Marlatt’s attempts to “write in lesbian,” as she suggests in “Booking Passage” (72), where she situates the articulation of lesbian desire in relation to a lineage of lesbian writing dating back to Sappho, might be read as an attempt to subvert the elision of lesbian desire in dominant representational frameworks. *Double Negative*, co-written with Betsy Warland, also takes as its focus the inscription of lesbian subjectivity. Together with *Ana Historic*, these writings undertake a challenge to heteronormative and patriarchal frameworks, but in the context of critical

writings on Marlatt, the radical potential of these discursive maneuvers is sometimes circumscribed.

Notes

- 1 Those interested in tracing the contours of this debate should look at Dennis Cooley's "Recursions Excursions Incursions: Daphne Marlatt Wrestles with the Angel of Language"; Frank Davey's "Words and Stones in *How Hug a Stone*"; Barbara Godard's "Essentialism? A Problem in Discourse"; Lianne Moyes' "Writing the Uncanniest of Guests: Daphne Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone*"; and Lola Lemire Tostevin's "Daphne Marlatt: Writing in the Space That Is Her Mother's Face."
- 2 The question of context is an especially critical one for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered writers, whose forms of literary and artistic production have often been taken out of context and recirculated by the religious right in an effort to create a backlash against queer forms of cultural production and to promote the censorship of such works. In this respect the decontextualization and recontextualization of articulations of "queer desire" risks doing real harm to queer communities and cultural expression.
- 3 As iterative practices, translation and citation both transmute and transform meaning, and both carry political and ethical stakes. In reflecting on her own process of translating poet Nicole Brossard's *Mauve*, Marlatt writes, "Translation is about slippage and difference, not the mimesis of something solid and objectified out there. [...] Even though i begin with a text that is another's, how i read that text or what that text seems to be saying will occur in an indeterminate space between it's author's vision and my own" ("Translating MAUVE" 69). Marlatt's formulation of the space between the author's vision and her own in which her translation emerges is reminiscent of the reciprocal space between writer and reader that she formulates in "The In-Between is Reciprocal." Marlatt sees translation and citation as generative of new meanings, shifting contexts, and opportunities for word play.
- 4 The "as ifs" in *Ana Historic* might be read as a necessary counter-narrative to the "what ifs," the threat of patriarchal violence that Annie and her sisters already understand as children when they play in the woods "exchanging what-if's" (12): "what if the boys came down from their fort in the Green Wood with slingshots and air gun? would their own string bows and crookedly-peeled arrows hold them off?...but what if the boys...what if the men tried to bulldoze their woods?" (12). The persistent threat of the "what if" makes the appropriation of a discourse of certainty, arguably represented through the recurring "as if," politically urgent.
- 5 Derrida reminds us of this in his open letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon in *Critical Inquiry*, in which he criticizes them for failing to account for the "determined context" of his discussion of apartheid (158). Here Derrida argues that one must take the "grammatical, rhetorical and pragmatic specificity of the utterance" into account, and that to neglect to do so is politically irresponsible (158).
- 6 In "Daphne Marlatt's '*Ana Historic*': Queering the Postcolonial Nation," Heather Zwicker convincingly argues that the ending of *Ana Historic* is in fact imbricated, albeit ironically, with national political interests. Zwicker reads the ending of *Ana Historic* as a parodic reproduction of the heterosexual marriage plot. In this way, the text "mimic[s] the continuist narrative of the nation in a way that lays bare its desire to harness the labour of women in to its self generation" (166). By recasting the "marriage" as a lesbian union, and replacing reproductive heterosexual sex with non-reproductive lesbian sex,

the text becomes a parodic rewriting of the national narrative (167). Although Zwicker does not mention Davey's reading, her article implicitly challenges his assumption that Marlatt retreats from national, historical and political concerns in her novel's concluding passage (*Post-National* 209).

- 7 Diana Fuss locates a similar paradox underlying the coming out narrative, and suggests that coming out entails a "movement into a metaphysics of presence, speech, and cultural visibility (4), but this act of coming out, of proclaiming, establishing and coming into an identity, paradoxically locates the subject as outside to other communities. In Davey's reading, Annie's coming out locates her, and by extension the text, outside of national interests.

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