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Article abstract

Daphne Marlatt uses a dramatic mode in her fiction about history to circumvent patriarchal language and create a feminist poetics of enactment. Performative moments in *Ana Historic* enable the revisioning of historical moments, which are re-enacted in the mind's eye of the protagonist. Exploring dramatic language, theatrical metaphors, and techniques of character building, Annie imagines a world outside of what is conventionally written about historical settler women and turns her focus on unwieldy female bodies – including the immigrant body, the hysterical body, the lesbian body, and the birthing body – to re-enact, rather than to document, a possible version of history. Theories of writing the body in text by Roland Barthes, Luce Irigaray, and others help illuminate Marlatt's dramatic mode, which offers a way of exploring characters who have been neglected or restrained within traditional literary and historical representations – particularly female immigrants to nineteenth-century Canada – and supports a feminist writing strategy within and against language. Marlatt writes what she senses is her body's language to signify beyond conventional systems of representation and to explore her characters' interiors.

# Dramatic Mode and the Feminist Poetics of Enactment in Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*

REBECCA WAESE

CANADIAN POET, ESSAYIST, novelist, and playwright Daphne Marlatt uses a dramatic mode in her fiction about history to circumvent patriarchal language and create a feminist poetics of enactment. The dramatic mode brings to life myriad new versions of history that are unruly, resonant, and subversive. Marlatt's writing invites connection and resonance through means deeper than, yet incorporated within, words, such as theatre, ritual, and poetry. Marlatt challenges and transgresses conventional boundaries of genre by utilizing conventions from drama and the theatre which can be seen in her early novels *The Sea Haven* and *Frames of a Story*<sup>1</sup> and most evidently in her better-known novel, *Ana Historic*. With a background in theatre studies<sup>2</sup> and, of course, poetry, Marlatt has long been conscious of creating experiences for readers that go beyond the text. Her writing strategies create experience in language rather than representing or framing it. While *Ana Historic* obviously cannot escape representation on some level — it still uses words on a page as a means of signification — its transposition of dramatic strategies to fiction works toward drawing focus inward and diminishing the conventional critical distance from which readers perceive a novel. Following a line of thought close to Stanislavsky's System, Marlatt positions her narrator Annie to imagine a sensuous embodiment of nineteenth-century Canadian life.

Performative moments in *Ana Historic* present opportunities for re-visioning historical possibilities. Through the deployment of a range of dramatic strategies, historical moments are “re-enacted” in the mind's eye of the protagonist, and a sense of life is breathed into the telling of the novel. A contemporary Canadian woman, Annie imagines a life for Mrs. Richards, an English schoolteacher who immigrated to Canada alone in 1873. Annie dramatizes Mrs. Richards, whom she names Ana, in her imagination and in her writing in order to experience

what life might have been like as a woman in the new colony. While a history book might have summed up Mrs. Richards in one line — “In 1874 Mrs. Richards marries Ben Springer and the Pattersons move to Moodyville. that is all that history says” (*Ana* 48) — Annie begins her imaginative work at the margin where the narratives of history typically stop. Annie looks critically at what is typically recorded in the history of the colony — “facts” from historical publications, measurements, building descriptions, newspaper notices, and comments about women’s nature — and what is omitted. She suggests, using the *theatrum mundi* metaphor, that history focusing on men’s activities dominates the stage while women’s history plays a silent role. The novel poses the question, what if speculation and imagination allow us to recover or inhabit that marginalized women’s history? Annie writes, “we live in history and imagination. but once history’s onstage, histrionic as usual (all those wars, all those historic judgements), the a-historic hasn’t got a speaking part. What’s imagination next to the weight of the (f)actual?” (139). Annie explores dramatic language, theatrical metaphors, and techniques of character building to bring focus to the physical and sensual lives of women in nineteenth-century Canada. In theatre, language is only the beginning of the actors’ communicative work. Words in a script are fleshed out on stage with gestures, sounds, embraces, and spaces between bodies. In *Ana Historic*, Annie imagines a world outside of what is conventionally written about historical settler women and turns her focus on unwieldy female bodies — the immigrant body, the hysterical body, the lesbian body, and the birthing body — to re-enact, rather than to document, in words, a possible version of history.<sup>3</sup> Theories of writing the body in text by Roland Barthes, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva further illuminate some of the techniques of the dramatic mode used by Marlatt in *Ana Historic*, as do translation theories of the body by Pamela Banting, Roman Jakobson, and Charles Olson. With Annie channelling the historical consciousness of Mrs. Richards/Ana in a way similar to how an actor develops a character following method acting from Stanislavsky’s System, Marlatt fuses elements of drama, history, and fiction into a female-centred poetics of enactment.

### Opening the Text: How to Break Through Representative Language

Barthes ponders a similar signifying conundrum of getting beyond language in *The Pleasure of the Text*: “How can a text, which consists of

language, be outside language?” (30). Barthes’s solution is to dismantle traditional discursive categories and to attack the structures of the language itself (the lexicon, syntax, punctuation, genre expectations) and the meta-narratives behind the text (30). Marlatt’s attack on the conventional novel is waged in at least two significant ways: in the language itself — which translates the body and eschews conventional sentence structure, delineations of time and place, punctuation, and capitalization — and in her incorporation of dramatic strategies in fiction, which can offer perpetual “present” moments in the text for its characters and even, on some level, for readers. As Annie dramatizes Ana’s consciousness, Annie enters history, and readers may feel, on some occasions, a sense of being present in both Ana’s and Annie’s worlds. Annie reimagines the past dramatically as part of her strategy of reclaiming history from conventional frames. She says, “but when you’re so framed, caught in the act, the (f) stop of act, fact — what recourse? step inside the picture and open it up” (56).

Marlatt’s dramatic mode in fiction works similarly to how Barthes’s *punctum* pierces the *studium* in photographs.<sup>4</sup> Barthes describes the *studium* of a photograph as the general theme that can be interesting to a viewer but lacks a compelling hook (26). The *studium* contains cultural and historical elements which may intrigue but do not arrest the viewer. Barthes suggests that a photograph which is all *studium* is a passive object; a photograph made up entirely of a *studium* may put forward interesting ideas, but because the ideas do not continue to live outside the picture, the photograph will not connect with the viewer and will remain representative. The *punctum* is the element that “will break (or punctuate) the *studium*” (26). It “pricks or wounds” the viewer (26). Barthes describes how the *punctum* affects him: “it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (48). It allows a vital quality of “what Barthes calls ‘life’ to pass through, to permeate the frame” (Gallop 153) and “create the adventure” (Barthes 20). Barthes describes the sensation of reciprocity that the *punctum* creates between the photograph and its viewer: “suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it” (Barthes 20). The *punctum* provides an opening in the photograph through which the viewer can enter or an image can leap from the page. In a similar way, Marlatt’s dramatic mode, which engages characters and readers in

a heightened awareness of role-playing, serves as a kind of *punctum* that breaks through the representative language of the novel.

Barthes describes a photograph without a *punctum*: “When we define the Photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not emerge, do not leave: they are anaesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies” (57). The dramatized bodies in *Ana Historic* do not stay “fastened down” or “anaesthetized.” Marlatt’s dramatic mode offers a way of exploring characters that have been neglected or restrained within traditional literary and historical representations — particularly, in this case, female immigrants to Canada in the nineteenth century — and works as part of a feminist writing strategy within and against language. A dramatic mode in fiction is particularly appropriate for liberating the story of Ina, Annie’s mother, who has been trapped twice: in language, and in a medical system that advocated electric shock therapy to treat women’s hysteria and depression. Annie imagines that her mother is alive again and interfering in the narration of her novel. She re-creates Ina in the way she was before she lost her imagination, memory, and the “will to create things differently” (150). Annie dramatizes Ina to prevent her from remaining “a character flattened by destiny, caught between the covers of a book” (150).

The deployment of a dramatic mode in the novel is, in part, created through writing that focuses on the body in the present moment. Marlatt’s bodily poetics build on the groundwork of women’s writing, or *l’écriture féminine*, introduced by French feminist theorists Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and others.<sup>5</sup> In *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un*, Luce Irigaray writes, “If we don’t invent a language for our body, there will be too few gestures to portray our history. We will weary of the same few gestures, and our desires will remain latent, and in limbo. Lulled to sleep, unsatisfied. And delivered over to the words of men” (213). While Sarah Harasym criticizes Marlatt’s writing for stereotypical representations of class and race and for resting on biological and essentialist claims of what constitutes a woman,<sup>6</sup> Marlatt’s work has been lauded widely for inscribing feminist and lesbian desire in a radical and corporeal way.<sup>7</sup> Marlatt’s writing style does not follow conventional rules of grammar and sentence structure. As Annie suggests in the novel, it translates “the words that flow out from within, running too quick to catch sometimes, at other times just an agonizingly slow trickle. the

words of an interior history doesn't include" (90). Writing from the body recuperates physical experiences, gestures, sensations, and desires that are missing from many conventional historical and heterosexual narratives. Marlatt writes what she senses is her body's language to signify beyond conventional systems of representation and to explore the interiors of her characters. She examines how words carry networks of associations, support teleological and phallogocentric values, and constantly divide, define, and contain. She deconstructs phallogocentric language to make the body of language she enters fit like a second skin.

### Translations and Transpositions

In *Body Inc*, Pamela Banting suggests that Marlatt does not represent, but rather translates the body through intersemiotic translations. Banting borrows the term "intersemiotic translation" from Roman Jakobson, who distinguishes between three kinds of translations: intralingual (within the same language, yet between different codes or registers), interlingual (between two languages) and intersemiotic (from one sign system to another) (Banting 11, Jakobson 261). Several acts of translation occur in *Ana Historic*. Annie describes the intralingual translation between her mother's English from England and the English spoken by herself and her sisters as children in Canada. She responds to heroic, masculinist language by translating it into a body-centred feminist poetics. Annie sees the determination of a logger in a photo and wonders how he is so utterly confident of his role and place in society. The caption under the photo reads, "*Bull puncher and oxen relax momentarily, sullenly conscious of their ability to get any job done, no matter how tough*" (56). She writes, "the woodsman look. Self-evident. the pose" (56). Marlatt then inserts a meditation written in lower-case and second-person of Annie's struggle to play the role of a woman with a unified and acceptable identity:

there was the look you gave yourself, the look you looked (like) in the mirror. making up someone who was not you but someone you might be. a desperate attempt to make up for the gap — between the way you actually looked in your blue dressing gown round and woolly in the mornings, your scrubbed shining cheeks, anger in two humps between your brows, hair fine as a baby's wisping away in the rush of porridge-making — the gap between that and how you meant to look, how you ought to look . . . caught between despair

at being nothing (“just” a mother, “just” a wife) . . . and the endless effort to live a lie. (56-57)

However, the most pertinent translations for the purpose of this study are Marlatt’s intersemiotic translations from the body to the text, and from drama and theatre to the novel. Jakobson defines intersemiotic translation as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal signs” (261). In *Body Inc.*, Banting extends Jakobson’s concept of intersemiotic translation to include translations between different media; words and images (paintings, photos, drawings); and between text and flesh (11). Drama is an intersemiotic element translated in Marlatt’s novel that Banting does not address specifically in her analysis, although she alludes to languages of the body such as dance (204). In some places in *Ana Historic*, threefold translations occur, from the body to dramatic explorations and into text.

Jakobson’s definition of intersemiotic translation is similar to what Julia Kristeva calls “inter-textuality,” which describes a transposition between sign systems.<sup>8</sup> A transposition between sign systems involves “the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one” (Kristeva 59). Within each transposition, Kristeva emphasizes that the thetic break is re-articulated anew: the thetic break being the point at which a subject emerges from the mirror stage and the semiotic to enter the symbolic and take up a position of identification (Kristeva 59, Oliver 2). As the thetic break is constructed, reconstructed, and deconstructed in different sign systems in a single text — for example, in Marlatt’s novel between the language from the body, poetry, written dramatizations, and fiction — it carries permutations of its passage from one sign system to another. Kristeva notes that a transposition from one sign system to another may use the same signifying material, such as language moving from an oral narrative to a text, or “different signifying materials,” as seen in “the transposition from a carnival scene to [a] written text” (59). She observes how a novel may contain “a redistribution of several different sign systems: carnival, courtly poetry, scholastic discourse” (59).

Marlatt integrates several signifying systems into *Ana Historic*: journal entries, historical descriptions, nineteenth-century poetry, songs, conversations, and dramatizations. There is play and exploration of Kristeva’s thetic positioning, as Annie inhabits herself, first, as a young girl, then as Ana Richards, and finally as her mother, Ina. At times,

Annie's enunciative positions are strategically blurred in the narrative; the speaking positions overlap and intersect, and slippages between subject and object lure a reader into occupying the consciousness of a character before a reader knows whose consciousness s/he is in: Annie's, Ana's, or Ina's. As Annie remembers what it was like to be in the body and mind of a little girl, she switches pronouns, and, with these, consciousnesses. Changing she/her to me/my, Annie occupies the body of her younger self with a leap of imagination, as an actor does while playing a part. This results in fractured or, as Kristeva puts it, "polysemic" enunciative positions in the text (59). Additionally, the omissions of conventional representations of dialogue, such as "Ana said" or "Ina asked," put the reader directly in active moments. In "Given This Body," Marlatt discusses her preference for enactment over conventional frames: "Once you say, 'she says,' you get the frame in there. I don't want the frame. I want it just transmitted straight" (77-78). In *Ana Historic*, the perspective switches seamlessly from an onlooker outside watching Ana write to Ana, inside her cabin writing in her journal, without conventional framing devices of "she said" or "Ana wrote" (54).

Early in the novel, there is another abrupt shift in Anna's speaking position. The passage begins with a third-person narration of a young girl who guards her sisters from the monster in the wardrobe and dramatically shifts to the first-person narration of the young girl who calls out at night to her parents.

who? her parents who went out leaving her alone to defend the house. her mother who . . .  
 my mother (who) . . . voice that carries through all rooms, imperative, imperious. don't be silly. soft breast under blue wool dressing gown, tea breath, warm touch . . . gone. (10)

Annie becomes young Annie hearing her mother's voice, smelling her breath, and feeling her touch (10). The shift in perspective effects a dramatization of sorts, short-lived yet evocative. For Annie, it is more than a memory; it is an active portal to her past. In dramatizing her younger self, Annie experiences the memory in the present again. Marlatt's technique of dramatization suggests that there is knowledge stored in Annie's body and sense memory that is evoked by words yet, on some level, elides description by them. Annie writes, "I-na, I-no-longer, i can't turn you into a story. there is this absence here, where the



words stop” (11). The limitations of the symbolic order are exposed as the dramatization allows Annie to experience her history in a way that privileges physicality and sensation.

Annie also dramatizes Ana Richards to imagine the kind of writing she might have written, or might have wanted to write. She is not convinced that romantic nineteenth-century poetry, with its “touch of the sublime, that nineteenth-century sense of grandeur” (20), would have suited the private and unsettling experiences Ana may have wanted to explore in her new home and her intimate sensory experiences. Annie conceives of the difficulties Ana would have had in adapting the conventions of nineteenth-century British poetry to her new home in Canada, where the flora, fauna, climate, and social environment would have been vastly different.<sup>9</sup> As an extension of the novel’s focus on physicality in language, Annie writes women’s bodies onto the landscape to conceive of the country newly, and as a place where women belong. She describes the soft cedar stump that she used to sit in with her sister as a womb (12), and has Ana imagine, upon the occasion of birth of the first settler baby in the colony, the scarlet autumn leaves as “lips all bleeding into the air” (127), greeting women and welcoming them to a country (and a language) in which they feel at home:

to be born in, enter from birth that place (that shoreline place of scarlet maples, since cut down) with no known name — see it, risen in waves these scarlet leaves, lips all bleeding into the air, given (birth), given in greeting, the given surrounds him now, surrounds her, her country she has come into, the country of her body. (127)<sup>10</sup>

Annie explores the traps, claims, and associations of patriarchal language and encounters what she expects Ana would have left out of her poetry: her living, sensing, and female body.

### Living Writing vs. Representative Writing

Marlatt’s dramatic mode creates experience more than it represents experience. Marlatt began experimenting with immediate and experiential kinds of writing in graduate school. She wrote a paper on etymology for American poet Charles Olson that studied how conventional devices such as similes force readers to intellectualize experiences without feeling them (Banting 156). In “Human Universe,” Olson explains how writing, which depends on substitution and definition, can isolate read-

ers from more “active intellectual states” of “metaphor and performance” that allow them to feel the experience more closely in terms of their own relevance to it (164). Olson theorizes how writers are “led to partition reality” by seeking comparisons and reference points (164). Analyzing how similar or different one experience is from another, Olson suggests, cuts off a reader from feeling it. Aggrieved by the comparative nature of descriptions and similes, Olson maintains, “there must be a way which bears *in* instead of away, which meets head on what goes on each split second, a way which does not — in order to define — prevent, deter, distract, and so cease the act of, discovering” (164-65).

Olson’s solution lies in a “proprioceptive” poetics (Banting 156). In physiology, proprioception refers to the perception of sensory information that is mediated by nerve receptors throughout the body. Olson’s poetry is concerned with how the body mediates the sensory environment and feels an understanding of the world. Olson wants the body to feel something more than reported pleasures and experiences.<sup>11</sup> Influenced by Olson’s poetics, Marlatt also engages a proprioceptive method that she has developed into a female-centred poetics of enactment. Her writing “bears *in*” and draws attention to the experience inside bodies and consciousnesses rather than the words used to describe them. The deployment of dramatic conventions and strategies works similarly in *Ana Historic* through writing that owes more to evocation than description.

### Stanislavsky’s System and Marlatt’s Dramatic Mode

In much historical, or historically based fiction, characters are limited in their representations by the roles they play in the nation’s historical and imperial narrative. Women’s roles are all too often marginalized or one-dimensional. In *Ana Historic*, Annie studies Ana Richards in a way that an actor following Stanislavsky’s System would flesh out a character: by focusing on emotional truths and knowledge from the body. Marlatt describes Annie’s process of dramatization in detail as Annie embodies Ana Richards. After researching historical facts, Annie imagines Ana’s body. She holds the pen like Ana would have, and imagines what the other woman would have seen, thought, felt, heard, and feared. Annie conjures up far more than what would have been provided in historical records:

she was looking for the company of another who was also reading — out through the words, through the wall that separated her, an arm, a hand — and so she began, “a woman sitting at her kitchen table writing,” as if her hand holding the pen could embody the very feel of a life. as if she could reach out and touch her, those lashes cast down over blue (brown) eyes, the long line of nose, the lips doubting or pleased, that curve of a shoulder, upper arm, wrist at another table in a different kind of light. (45)

Annie draws on knowledge from the body to guide her into inhabiting Ana’s character. She focuses on physical details and connections. She imagines the space on the wall where Ana would have stared, lost in thought, looking for the right word. In a trance-like meditation on Ana’s subconscious, Annie begins writing as she imagines the character would have and encounters what she calls “the unspoken urge of a body insisting itself in the words” (46).

There are significant connections between Stanislavsky’s System in theatre and Marlatt’s dramatic mode in writing. Stanislavsky codified his influential system of acting in *An Actor Prepares* (1936) and *My Life in Art* (1924). Unlike Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre<sup>12</sup> or Charles Marowitz’s style in *The Other Way* (1999), Stanislavsky’s System is highly naturalistic and requires actors to live truthful moments in imaginary circumstances. Stanislavsky believed the actor must create the soul of the character. With the understanding that a script provides “only a few minutes out of the whole life” of a character (*My Life* 257), the actor is required to create a fuller life outside of the text that fills in the spaces. The task falls to the actor to “bring to life what is hidden under the words” (*An Actor Prepares* 52). To do this, the actor draws on physical impulses, emotional memories from his or her own life, and imagination. The actor develops what is known as a super-objective for the entire play and finds emotional and physical motivations to accomplish a series of smaller objectives. Attention to minute details is crucial in capturing physical, mental, and emotional realities. Actors translate desire, fear, and joy through gestures, resistance, and embraces. Stanislavsky insists that an actor “lives the part” rather than represents, or indicates, it: “His [the artist’s] job is not to present merely the external life of his character. He must fit his own human qualities to the life of this other person, and pour into it all of his own soul. The fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in an artistic form” (*An Actor Prepares* 14). Marlatt explores a

similar process in Annie's explorations of Ana. While Annie embodies, or impersonates, Ana — sits like her, speaks like her — she finds new ideas and inspirations about the character, as though Ana were 'real' and she had gone 'fishing' in Ana's subconscious. The dramatic mode adds flesh to the story. Annie senses the "skeletal bones of a suppressed body the story is" (29) and dramatizes the characters in it in order to re-enact what might have been through modes that extend beyond language.

In university, Marlatt acted in a number of plays, and her onstage experiences of discovering "what is beyond the self, outside the self" (Bowering 44-45) continue to inform her work. Her first play, *The Gull: The Steveston Noh Project*, a Canadian version of a Japanese Noh play, was performed in 2006 and explores through stylized drama, music, dance, and poetry the experiences of two brothers who return to Steveston, British Columbia, after internment during World War II. In an early interview with George Bowering, Marlatt describes how dramatic techniques help her, as a writer, come close to uncovering the "other": "Of course you cant experience being it. But you have to somehow let it in. You have to let that dark flood the stage, you have to turn off all the lights" (Bowering 45). Marlatt discriminates between acting that is characterized by stock theatrical gestures and imitative emotions, and acting that comes out of physical and emotional explorations and surrendering to the unknown. In her first novel, *Frames of a Story*, she differentiates between the two styles: "& when will I give up *acting* & step into the dark of the other?" (17; emphasis added). Annie creates Ana using recognizable techniques from Stanislavsky's System in order to tap into the unknown possibilities of the private life of an early female Canadian settler. Stanislavsky dictates that the body should be involved in the development of a character to avoid an over-intellectualized performance:

Our art demands that an actor's whole nature be actively involved, that he give himself up, both mind and body, to his part. He must feel the challenge to action physically as well as intellectually because the imagination, which has no substance or body, can reflexively affect our physical nature and make it act. (*An Actor Prepares* 70)<sup>15</sup>

Annie first conceives of the possibility of a sexual attraction between Ana and Birdie Stewart by imagining herself in Ana's body. Annie

speaks to Ana through second-person narration, placing the reader in Ana's character and recognizing the possibility of a historical lesbian love affair:

you turn intrigued, and your body turning in its long skirt, its fitted waist that hugs your hips, is caught in the act, you have caught yourself turning in Birdie's eyes. turning because of a spark, a gleam, your eyes are green (you had forgotten that) and you know them lit with the look of something you almost meet in Birdie's brown. you had not imagined — this / as history. unwritten (109)

By imagining intimate physical details — the feel of Ana's clothing, the "warmth and solidity" of Birdie's body beside her, the second glance at Birdie that clarifies the desire that runs both ways (139) — Annie enacts a possibility at odds with the heteronormative ideals of a nation's history. In this case, a scene is not performed *for* the reader's passive entertainment, but the reader is engaged in a performance (of sorts) through the second-person narration and the invitation to embody a physical poetics. Annie puts herself, with her contemporary experiences and her imagination, into role-playing the unwritten possibility of sexual love between Ana and Birdie. Through the process of dramatizing Ana's relationship with Birdie, Annie opens herself up to her sexual feelings for Zoe in her own life. While there are instances of more overtly theatrical public performances at other points in the novel (the ballet, the teenage girls performing for each other), Marlatt creates private and reflective opportunities in which the reader may accompany Annie in her dramatizations of Ina and Ana. These interiorized passages do not convey the sensation of a public watching a performance, but rather the quiet, inner sensation of an actor rehearsing the embodiment and inhabiting of another soul. As the reader follows Annie's imaginative work, her dramatic strategies offer engagement and connection that reach beyond the words that convey them.

Issues of fidelity concern Annie as she dramatizes historical characters. Annie feels a sense of obligation to Mrs. (Ana) Richards, along with "Mrs. Alexander, and Birdie Stewart, and Susan Patterson" (140). She says, "they all existed, they all really lived. i owe them something" (140). Zoe counters Annie's lament with "truth, I suppose? fidelity? she sneers. as if you were *impersonating* them"(141). By definition, to "impersonate" is "to invest with an actual personality; to manifest or

embody in one's own person; to assume the person or character of; to play the part of" (*OED*). Zoe suggests that Annie's impersonations of the historical characters can, and will, only be approximate because they are filtered through Annie's imagination before being enacted. After some deliberation, Annie decides that history and imagination should not be considered as opposite poles when creating a portrayal of a historical person. Annie recognizes the inherent difficulties of portraying herself — let alone someone else — with the plurality of inner contradictions, longings, and fantasies. Despite her mother's discouraging words, "you should've gone into theatre, not history" (22), Annie acknowledges that her way into history requires a dramatic mode. She asks, "what if they balance each other (it's one of those half-cloudy, half-sunny days) and we live in history and imagination" (139). Where a historian might leave out the imaginary and, as a result, construct a more contained and discrete portrait, Annie impersonates the mind and body of a historical character without allowing herself to dismiss her project, as others might, as indulgent speculation.<sup>14</sup> Annie writes the risk into her historically based fiction and indulges in speculations, creating splendid possibilities of alternative and subversive histories.

In theatre, an actor influences an audience member's interpretation of a character to a large extent.<sup>15</sup> Essentially, the actor is the medium through which a character, historical or otherwise, is portrayed, and the actor is inseparable from the dramatization. The actor uses his or her voice, body, memories, and imagination to create the rendering. While historians generally aim to erase their fingerprints from their written accounts of history, Marlatt uses the dramatic mode in her novel to illustrate that an objective distance when animating history in fiction is unattainable and undesirable. For Marlatt, imagination is a way of transcending the limitations of one body and one consciousness (Bowering 71) and embodying another. A combination of intersemiotic modes leads to more corporeal experiences of a historical character. Marlatt values the connection to the past that Ana's dramatization facilitates:

in inventing a life from Mrs. Richards, i as Annie (and Annie isn't me though she may be one of the selves I could be) invented a historical leak, a hole in the sieve of fact that let the shadow of a possibility leak through into full-blown life. History is not the dead and gone, it lives on in us in the way it shapes our thought and especially our thought about what is possible. Mrs. Richards

is a historical leak for the possibility of a lesbian life in Victorian British Columbia. (Bowering 204)

By dramatizing a possible life for Ana, Annie experiences a personal connection to a historical foremother. History is made personal to Annie through a dramatic mode and, for the first time, she becomes interested in Canadian history and women's roles in it. The dramatic mode creates a continuum by "intersect[ing] the present with the past" (Bowering 71). Annie had believed that history was "the real story the city fathers tell of the only important events in the world," and finally comes to ask, "where are the city mothers?" (*Ana* 28). After internalizing the idea that "ladies keep to the background" and "ladies *are* the soothing background their men come home to" (35), Annie redefines the patriarchal and heterosexist teleologies of history and rehearses an alternate mode through which the lives of the "minor players" can be portrayed. *Ana Historic* explores the continuum between three women in history in their "backstage" roles.

### **Positioning the Reader: Fractured Subjectivities in a Colonial Nation**

One of the novel's more effective dramatic strategies of connecting history to the present is the way in which Annie positions the reader in multiple roles using second-person narration. The reader is alternately "you" as Ina and "you" as Ana, while remaining "the reader." These direct addresses give the reader the sensation of inhabiting Ina and Ana at different times. A sense of doubleness is common in Stanislavsky's System, in which an actor is both him or herself and the character he or she plays at the same time. Actors draw on emotions from their lives with a simultaneous awareness of spectators watching them do it.

A sense of a doubled, or fractured, identity is not unusual for immigrants; both Ana and Ina are, at once, British emigrants and Canadian immigrants. Ina's national identity revolves around an England in which she briefly lived. Ina was born in India, where her parents were stationed, before moving to boarding school in England and, later, re-locating to Canada (*Ana* 98). "Home" for Ina is illusory; it is not located in a country but in familial customs and memories. Ina's past is similar to Marlatt's parents' past: Marlatt's mother was born into a colonial medical family in India and met Marlatt's father in Malaysia after completing an English private school education (*Entering* 220). Marlatt's father

was from a military family and lived in India, Malta, and Malaysia before immigrating with his wife and children to Canada. As a child in Penang, Marlatt was accustomed to “a colonial multicultural situation” where five languages — English, Malay, Cantonese, Tamil, and Thai — were spoken by her family and the people who worked in her home (220). Marlatt’s mother, like Ina, shifted from the role of *memsahib* in a colonial household to the role of a housewife in Vancouver where she emphasized English values to her Canadian daughters (Banting 179, *Entering* 220)<sup>16</sup>. Marlatt, like Annie, was particularly attuned to the language and culture in North Vancouver because it was dramatically different from her colonial childhood in Penang: “It seems to me that the situation of being such an immigrant is a perfect seedbed for the writing sensibility. If you don’t belong, you can *imagine* you belong and you can construct in writing a world where you do belong” (*Entering* 222). Years later, Marlatt referred to her colonial childhood in Malaysia as a “phantom limb” that was “not quite cut off . . . and wanted acknowledging” (221).

Interestingly, David Krasner tells us that a conflict of cultural identity lies at the heart of the method actor’s soul in *Method Acting Reconsidered* (30). Many of the American method teachers, including Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, and Paul Mann, describe how they reconciled traditions of Judaism with American assimilation (Krasner 30-31).<sup>17</sup> Some of the most successful contemporary method actors, including Al Pacino and Sidney Poitier, draw on a doubled sense of cultural identity, from Italian-American and African-American contexts respectively. Method acting encourages actors to draw on their life experiences; a doubled or split cultural identity can be useful on stage in portraying a character with similarly complex identity formations. Through Marlatt’s dramatic mode, the reader follows Annie’s sense of cultural indeterminacy as the character explores Ana’s and Ina’s histories.

Annie looks to history for a semblance of the fractured subjectivity that she experiences in postcolonial Canadian society. She comes up against hegemonic heterosexual and patriarchal narratives that present uncomplicated performances of national idealism. The conventional performances of colonial settlers, against which Annie writes, obscure any ambivalent feelings of dissent or anxiety that deviate from the ontology of the early colonial nation. While Annie’s novel is limited to a



white female settler's perspective, it is sensitive to ways in which white female settlers were complicit with power dynamics of class and race in early Canadian history.<sup>18</sup> Through the dramatic mode, Annie imagines how Ana might analyze her own performance of a colonial white woman — quaking with fear as she walks by two Siwash men in the woods — for her inherited and stereotypical assumptions about race (41-42). The confrontation is further complicated by the notion that Ana's fear is not instant but gradual; she talks herself into feeling the fear after conjuring up the stories that have circulated among the settlers. Annie explores how Ana rehearses the fear, which, on some level, she finds titillating, “as they crowded past her as if she were a bush, a fern shaking in their way” with “foolishness quivering through her legs” for the rest of the day (42). Zwicker suggests that the stereotype of terror in the confrontation of a white colonial woman and Siwash men is never, as Bhabha argues in “The Other Question,” far from the stereotype of fetish (168). Ana's confrontation with the Siwash men depicts how gender, race, and sexuality complicate the white colonial woman's “desire for and fear of miscegenation that underlies the colonial nation” (Zwicker 168).

Ana is witness to the “first white birth” at Kum-Kum-lee, later called Burrard Inlet (126-27). In terms of imperial history, the moment symbolizes the birth of the white nation, yet the novel does not reproduce the values of this new nation uncritically. Annie goes beyond the historic significance of this occasion for the empire to imagine how Ana herself, not a white male historian imbued with colonial values, would have recorded it; Ana through Annie's eyes saw “not the ‘first white child born on Burrard Inlet’ but a woman's body in its intimacy, giving birth” (131). Ana, through Annie's contemporary imagination, views the event as the birth of women's expression and begins to conceive of the possibility of women controlling their own sexuality, even though this idea would have been at odds with the imperial view of a new nation.

The novel is not predominantly concerned with the landmark events of colonial history, but with how contemporary readers like Annie might represent and examine history. Annie imagines the different performances Ana would have given and how those performances would carry the values of the time in which they were performed. Annie imagines how Ana Richards practises the role of a young widow in her colonial society in order to secure the freedom she needs to immigrate to

Canada, live alone, and hold a job. Annie sees Ana Richards coaching herself before confronting the father of an impudent male student. “Remember it’s a role, a part to play,” she tells herself. “Mrs. Richards, if you please. A woman of some authority, surely” (97). Annie dramatizes the performances in order to assign cultural significance to particular moments in history and, in the process, learns about her own society’s limitations. While the Siwash men and Ruth, Mrs. Patterson’s “Siwash woman” (69), are represented as inscrutable and described in terms of noble savage stereotypes — representations in keeping with the colonial perspective suited to Ana’s time — Annie’s critical thinking suggests an ontological shift in the area of sexuality. Where Annie imagines how Ana would fear *and* desire miscegenation with the Siwash men, she recognizes a similar feeling of fear and desire in her own lesbian relationship with Zoe. The novel ends with Annie’s leap as she presents herself to Zoe and realizes, “terror has to do with the trembling that takes you out of yourself” (152). In writing the possibility of a lesbian sexuality for Ana, Annie disrupts the expected heterosexual trajectory of her own life. Where Ana’s fate was marriage, and Ina’s was death, Annie chooses Zoe, in what Zwicker calls “a parodic rewriting of the continuist national narrative” (167).

### Words Move the Body, Bodies Move the Words

*Ana Historic* conveys a theatrical sense of orality. The reader discovers near the novel’s end that the text has been read aloud by Annie to Zoe at a writer’s workshop in a local café. As the reader hears Annie reading the novel to Zoe, the text is reconstituted as an oral performance. The sounds of the poetic prose encourage a reader to feel Marlatt’s physical impulses within it. As Banting observes, the translation from the body to language requires a composition of the body: “Learning a new language you are compelled to curl your tongue, roll your ‘r’s, pull down deeper into previously hidden recesses of the throat, thrust your lower jaw forward, experience your lips, click your tongue, activate your shoulders, eyebrows, hands, even implicate your hips” (Banting 18). The attention to sound in the novel makes one think about the bodies behind and within it making the sounds. On the back cover, George Bowering urges readers to “read it out loud” and “make oral history.”<sup>19</sup>

Marlatt explores several aspects of orality: she experiments with how the cadence of a line creates its own momentum and leads to a decon-

struction of the conventional meanings of words. Annie's memory of the word *wardrobes* leads to "wordrobes" and a recurring meditation on how language conceals meanings (*Ana* 9, 61). Marlatt parodies oft-spoken beliefs about women from the 1950s and places them in italics for ironic isolation. She contrasts the different accents and colloquialisms of Canadian English and British English (17). Annie catches herself uttering sayings that belong to her mother, her husband, and her critics. Language is pre-conceived; phrases echo and recur, leading the speaker to pre-existing and ready-made meanings. In a language full of word traps and pitfalls, where women's experience is related through male norms, all words are quotations to some degree. Annie explores the echo quality of language: "words, that shifting territory. never one's own. full of deadfalls and hidden claims to a reality others have made" (32). *Ana Historic* suggests that the language people use in dialogue has a rehearsed quality similar to scripted lines that an actor memorizes and performs. Characters may choose *how* to say something but to some extent, not *what* they say; they play roles and follow scripts. Annie finds that much of her dialogue is unoriginal and does not resonate with what she means to say. When she catches herself saying, "my very words" (23), she realizes that it is actually her mother's phrase that she repeats. Later, Annie imagines that her husband, Richard, would not understand the way she has approached her project of inventing Mrs. Richards. She thinks he would say, "this doesn't go anywhere, you're just circling around the same idea — and all these bits and pieces thrown in — that's not how to use quotations" (81). She comes to realize that all the words she can possibly use are not her own: "(and what if our heads are full of other people's words? nothing without quotation marks)" (81).

The novel examines the performances of language at the etymological level. With a feminist perspective, Marlatt pursues etymology to deconstruct meanings and attitudes that are buried in words and to explore how words beguile and control the speaker. By paring words back to their origins, Marlatt acknowledges certain performances of deceit and assumptions that have been integrated into language. Although Marlatt's penchant for etymology has been criticized as a search for origins that demonstrates a dependence on patriarchal authority,<sup>20</sup> Marlatt unpacks words not to find an answer, or an origin, but to introduce multiple directions that exist within a word so as to create new associations and to allow the word to perform differently.

Marlatt's deconstructions continue the work of feminist etymologist and theologian Mary Daly, who made "ovular" rather than "seminal" contributions to the field with her publication *Beyond God the Father*. In *Ana Historic*, Annie recalls her astonishment as a girl to discover that the French word for vagina is actually masculine, "le vagin"; years later, she discovered that it derives from "sheath, the cover of a sword" (63) and realized the phallic origins of the word for her own female genitals. The novel's etymological searches reveal the masquerading qualities of the language.

Many of the words Marlatt uses to describe communication, in the novel and in her poetry, connect with the body's physicality. In "musing with mothertongue," Marlatt explores the intimate connections between the language of communication and the language of the body (46). Her list includes

matter (the import of what you say) and matter and by extension mother; language and tongue; to utter and outer (give birth again); a part of speech and a part of the body; pregnant with meaning; to mouth (speak) and the mouth with which we also eat and make love; sense (meaning) and that with which we sense the world; to relate (a story) and to relate to somebody, related (carried back) with its connection with bearing (a child); intimate and to intimate; vulva and voluble; even sentence which comes from a verb meaning to feel. (*Touch* 46)

These powerful correlations position the reader to experience communication in a physical way beyond conventional narrative. In "Touch to my Tongue," Marlatt meditates on an unpublished essay by poet Alexandra Grilikhes called "Dancing in Animal Skins" (*Touch* 36). Grilikhes saw the act of reading poetry as a "shamanic act" where "the poet dances in animal skins to evoke in you what longs to be evoked or released" (qtd. in *Touch* 36). The poem is not fully realized until it is performed for a reader and involves the reader in a connective moment. Grilikhes believed "the performance of the poem *is* the poem" (qtd. in *Touch* 36). In a similar way, Marlatt's novel only reaches its potential as an artistic form when it engages the readers in its oral and physical performance of the past.

## Endings

*Ana Historic* concludes with a cluster of endings that resist conclusion. Under the subtitle *Not a Bad End*, Annie hypothesizes an ending to Ana's story in which Ana chooses Birdie Stewart over Ben Springer. In doing so, Annie boldly imposes an alternative version of history on Mrs. Richards. Ina's story ends not with Ina's smothered spirit from electric shock therapy but with Annie's torrent of anger. Annie, infuriated by the doctor's method of treating Ina's "hysteria," suggests that it is wrong that women's narratives in history are pre-empted to always end in a similar way, in marriage, childbirth, or death: "that fiction, that lie that you can't change the ending! it's already pre-ordained, prescribed — just what the doctor ordered — in the incontrovertible logic of cause and effect" (147). In taking the last name Torrent, Annie leaves Richard's claim, separates herself from the Ana Richards of history, and creates a new identity that inscribes both her anger and her passion.

Marlatt writes the reader into the final embrace of Annie and Zoe. The reader becomes, in a blurry way, absorbed into Annie's and Zoe's lovemaking and into their newly found desires. The reader is called upon to join their intimate bond:

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 . . . the luxury of being has woken you, the reach of your desire, reading us into the page ahead. (153)

The reader can move in and out of the scene; into the "you" that Zoe intends for Annie, and into the "you" at his or her own desk and window, turning the pages of a sensuous history and future. The reader witnesses the labour of a different kind of birth: of a novel, a new form of dramatized history in fiction, and a poetics of enactment and connectivity.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See “Given This Body” (Bowering 38, 44).

<sup>2</sup> See “Given This Body” (Bowering 44).

<sup>3</sup> Marlatt described to George Bowering how she tried to write about childbirth in an earlier text, saying “I wanted to re-enact it in language” rather than “document” it (Bowering 64).

<sup>4</sup> See *Camera Lucida* (Barthes 49).

<sup>5</sup> In the 1970s, the work of feminist theorists, including Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Mary Daly, and Julia Kristeva, proposed the development of a women’s writing that would eliminate the inferior status of women that was reflected and generated in language. Marlatt also draws on the work of feminist writers from Quebec, which supports the idea of a “pre-syntactic” woman’s language (*Touch* 48).

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Harasym criticizes Marlatt’s equation of women and sexuality, as well as her privileging of l’écriture féminine, which Harasym suggests does not look critically at the ethico-political concerns which re-iterate and separate “first” and “third” world constructions of women (116).

<sup>7</sup> See Barbara Godard’s “Body I: Daphne Marlatt’s Feminist Poetics” and Heather Zwicker’s “Daphne Marlatt’s ‘Ana Historic’: Queering the Postcolonial Nation.” Marlatt connects language and the female body in “musing with mothertongue” (*Touch* 48).

<sup>8</sup> Because “inter-textuality” has been used to describe “a study of sources” in a single work, Kristeva prefers the term “transposition” which she uses to describe more than one signifying system in a work (60).

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Atwood explores similar issues in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*.

<sup>10</sup> I do not have the space here necessary to discuss the essentialist implications of a feminized landscape in more detail. While linking menstruation and gestation with the Canadian woods makes, perhaps, too easy a correlation between motherhood, women, and nature, Annie meets such an equation with the subversive possibility that Ana may not mother, should she swerve from her expected trajectory and choose a life with Birdie Stuart as a lesbian in the 1870s.

<sup>11</sup> Barthes also champions a proprioceptive poetics in *The Pleasures of the Text*. He writes, “The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas — for my body does not have the same ideas I do” (17).

<sup>12</sup> See *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*.

<sup>13</sup> Stanislavsky’s examples are based on a masculine model. See Krasner’s *Method Acting Reconsidered* for further analysis of Stanislavsky’s masculine bias and its effects on female actors (13, 112), including Elizabeth Stoppel’s chapter, “Reconciling the Past and the Present,” and Sue-Ellen Case’s “Feminism and Theatre.”

<sup>14</sup> In “Self-Representation and Fictionalysis,” Marlatt asks, “why isn’t the imaginary part of one’s life story?” (204).

<sup>15</sup> The playwright and director also influence the process of interpretation.

<sup>16</sup> Banting expands on Marlatt’s cultural background and linguistic exposure in *Body Inc.* (179).

<sup>17</sup> In addition to the Jewish-American context, Krasner describes how African-American and Italian-American method actors draw on their “double consciousnesses” as sources of “inner, personal conflict” (31-32).

<sup>18</sup> Marlatt produced some less critical constructions of race in her early piece “In the Month of the Hungry Ghosts” (1979), which Sarah Harasym explores in “EACH MOVE MADE HERE (me) MOVES THERE (you)” (120). Harasym isolates dichotomies that she suggests perpetrate Manichean allegories of race and class.

<sup>19</sup> 1988 Coach House edition.

<sup>20</sup> See Harasym's "EACH MOVE MADE HERE (me) MOVES THERE (you)," and Tostevin's "Daphne Marlatt: Writing in the Space That Is Her Mother's Face" (36).

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