

## Conversations with Readers: An Interview with Daphne Marlatt

Beverley Curran et Mitoko Hirabayashi

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Résumé de l'article

Daphne Marlatt speaks about her interest in conversation, oral culture, and the dialogic in writing. She describes her experiences collaborating with writers such as Betsy Warland and Nicole Brossard, arguing that writers always unintentionally collaborate with others. Marlatt speaks of herself as a feminist writer and resists defining women's writing. She speaks about *Ana Historic* as translation and as a narrative that negotiates space for stories forgotten or not yet imagined. She also discusses the woman-to-woman relationships in her novel *Taken*.

# Conversations with Readers: An Interview with Daphne Marlatt

SCL/ÉLC INTERVIEW BY BEVERLEY CURRAN  
WITH MITOKO HIRABAYASHI

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.

(final unnumbered page of *Ana Historic*)

WHAT IS IT,” Daphne Marlatt asks, “about the word ‘conversation’ that appeals to my imagination so much more than ‘discussion’ or ‘dialogue?’” (IC 7). Partly, she answers, the appeal of conversation is its informality, and its association with oral exchange: “conversation elicits her participation, creates an opening for her to speak: to beg the question if she so desires, to reword it, return it, transformed by her own perspective” (7). Marlatt’s interest in conversation extends to the dialogic in writing, to an enthusiasm for women’s writing which “strives to situate the reader in a participatory stance...by assuming *she the writer* is *addressing a feminine other*”(9).

Marlatt has engaged in collaborative writing with other women, although she might prefer a word other than ‘collaboration’ to describe that writing together. As she writes with Betsy Warland in “Reading and Writing Between the Lines”:

Collaboration is a specious term for the writing you and i do together  
...here, even here, hovering between third and second person pronoun,  
to choose second with its intimacy seems to me indicative of how  
i write with and to you. you my co-writer and co-reader, the one up

close i address as you and you others i cannot foresee but imagine  
 'you' reading in for. and then there's the you in me, the you's you  
 address in me, writing too. (80-81)

Locating reader and writer inside the text makes the connection with a community of women readers and writers explicit and intimate; "third person could be anyone when it comes to that" (*Salvage* 46), but:

'You' is a conduit, a light beam to larger possibility, so large it fringes on the other without setting her apart from me. Because we speak about 'her' in the third person, 'she' is where exclusion takes place. 'Feminist', 'lesbian' take on other meanings then, even other qualities as words — they suddenly objectify. But in the first or second person i see who you are, feminist, lesbian: your historicity, your meaning-potential is what i grow into. (*Readings* 132)

This is part of "finding a way to write her in, her and her" (*Salvage* 25) of finding a reader as intimate as a lover, a lover as intimate as a reader: "she who is you" (*Ana Historic* 129).

Given the "extensiveness of that cloth of connectedness we are woven into," how do we begin to "weave for ourselves the cloth of our life as we want it to be"?<sup>1</sup> We can begin, suggests Marlatt, "in the energetic imagining of all that we are." In her poem, "Litter. wreckage. salvage," she writes, "i want to imagine being in my element, she said," and begins the process of making space to imagine a new version of how to live, of a place and a body to be at home in.

In *Ana Historic*, the writer, Annie, asks, "what's imagination next to the weight of the (f)actual?" (139). Marlatt would counter that question with another, "And why isn't the imaginary part of one's life story? Every poet knows it is,

just as i know that in inventing a life... 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 possibility leak through into full-blown life. ("Fictionalysis" 15)

Marlatt's novel writes against a singular life/story line that ends in predictable closure; it is 'a book of interruptions' (and "a book of interruptions is not a novel" (37)), its narrative the transmission of a gap; another kind of story passed through the body: "mouth speaking flesh. she touches it to make it tell her present in this other language so difficult to translate. the difference" (126).

In *Ana Historic*, linear narrative is replaced by 'the moment of writ-

ing,' as transient as conversation, and the inevitability of closure by the anticipation of 'the next page even if it's not yet written.' In "musing with mothertongue," Marlatt had wondered, "where are the poems that celebrate the soft letting-go the flow of menstrual blood is as it leaves her body" (47)? Here, her novel resists closure, the period/full stop giving way to the period, "bleeding and soft. her on my tongue" (152). The ending of a story is fictitious; desire, like life, continues, and reads us 'into the page ahead.'

In April, 1996, and again in August, 1997, we talked with Daphne Marlatt at her home, then in Victoria, British Columbia, about her writing. In our first conversation, we talked especially about *Ana Historic* as translation, a narrative which negotiates space for stories forgotten or not yet imagined, as writing which makes the collaboration between reader and writer intimate and explicit. Annie collaborates with the language her mother used, and her own versions of it, and the responses of her friend, Zoe, her intimate reader. In each voice there are other voices, echoing and talking to each other. Annie's mind is like Marlatt's novel, 'full of other people's phrases; echoes of other people's voices,' out of which she can make her own story.

While our minds were full of our reading of *Ana Historic*, Daphne Marlatt's was full of *Taken*, the novel she had just finished writing. Her answers to questions about *Ana Historic* tangled that book with the one just written, the reading of one book a thread that led to the other waiting to be read. At the end of that first conversation, we asked Marlatt about what she was enjoying as a reader, and she answered, "I'm looking for books that take on really big questions about the nature of reality and what we're doing here and the phenomenology of our lives. What are we doing here? What's this all about? I think that those are questions that go beyond gender politics, and I seem to be drawn to those at the moment." They are the questions, too, at the heart of her own writing, and figured largely in our second interview with Marlatt in 1997 about her latest novel, *Taken*.

The threads of our first conversation wove themselves through our reading of *Taken*, and into the second conversation. Marlatt had talked about the juxtaposition of 'little pieces' as a way to extend the possibilities of narrative at that first meeting; in *Taken*, we read of a need for a new narrative, a

reaching for another kind of story, a listening way back in the body. And is this memory? Or fiction? How put together a narrative of brightly coloured bits turned, turning as if to focus, and the falling patterns then. (25-26)

*Taken* turns on the idea of a story that it is not exclusively one's own, but constrained by other and others' stories; that desire is complicated by complicity; and that like the past, 'the page ahead' is a palimpsest. Suzanne and Lori, her lover, break "the marriage script...the familial ties we each were meant to perpetuate" (*Taken* 77-78). But in spite of their conscious resistance to the destiny script, both are still susceptible to "the claiming currents of that mother-pull" (47).

The following shares some of those conversations between readers and writer.

### April, 1996

*BC/MH* We're interested in collaborative writing and what that does to authorship, and even ownership.

*DM* I've worked collaboratively a lot over the years in different ways when I was doing oral history interviews; working with Nicole Brossard<sup>2</sup> we didn't really exchange our work when we were doing *mauve and character* — we worked solely with the text; we didn't talk to each other while we were doing that. More intensively than that, working with Betsy Warland, and you saw the results of that in *Two Women in a Birth*, there we were, actually at some point sitting down at the same table and writing at different ends, or even sitting down side by side and writing — we would take turns, we would pass the paper back and forth. And all of that experience only confirms a sense that I have that all writing is collaborative anyway, and that when you're working that closely with someone else, you start to become familiar with how that mind works, and you begin to anticipate what that mind's going to do with the terms and strategies you present to it, so that you internalize part of that other mind, because it becomes another way of looking at what your own mind is generating.

Of course, your own mind is never your own mind, anyway: it is full of other people's phrases, echoes of other people's work. And all of that comes to play in the act of writing so that working with somebody collaborating with somebody makes the process itself clearer — because you embed that in this 'other' sitting beside you, but really it's happening all the time internally: the words themselves, divorced and sometimes not divorced, of people's personalities; the phrases that we carry around from childhood that are our mother's internalized voice are very much attached to our personality. The same with our father or anyone who was

very significant to us when we were children. And then you get your literary mothers, the writers you fall in love with, and whose work you try to get all of, and you read all of, and then those other voices become internalized and become another strand in your head.

*BC/MH* So in other words, writers unintentionally collaborate with others?

*DM* Yes, all the time — at least that's how it seems to me.

*BC/MH* When you are doing collaborative writing, where someone actually is reading your work, how much then are you writing as a reader?

*DM* Very much. I think that reading is a very essential part of writing, and I don't mean reading other work; I mean reading what the words are saying on the page, because language has this incredible facility for saying more than our willful reading of it. And you can see that if you just accidentally misread something; you just transform a letter and the whole word changes<sup>3</sup> or you suddenly hear an echo with another word in a preceding sentence that you've never heard before and you see what the connection is. The unconscious plays a large part in writing and I suppose reading is becoming more aware of that.

*BC/MH* Because you're being kind of self-conscious, does this sense of a reader 'over your shoulder' mean you're also reading what you're writing, and thinking about your reader intimately?

*DM* Robert Duncan,<sup>4</sup> the San Francisco poet, did a wonderful drawing of his ideal reader, who was this woman sitting in a garden with a big, flowered straw hat and a cat beside her, and you think, oh, if that's Robert Duncan's ideal reader, this is very interesting! This is the 'internalized other,' the ear those words are aimed for. Actually, I wouldn't use that word because 'aim' is a narrowing, but it is the ear that is, as you said, listening over the shoulder, the ear that is constantly positing another way of hearing this.

*BC/MH* And maybe it makes writing more precise, because as soon as you look down at what you're writing, you think it can be interpreted this other way, you think, "That's not what I meant."

*DM* But that's where language is so wonderful to work with, because it's always larger than our intentions. It's always larger than our aims.

*MH* Are you conscious of collaboration as a feminist?

*DM* As a feminist, of course I become aware, as feminists have written about for a long time now. It's that sense of becoming aware of how the language that you are using is an expression of concerns that have been so male-centric, androcentric, for so many hundreds and hundreds of years. And that to write about the way I experience life as a woman meant that I had to undo a lot. I had to challenge and contradict in a most literal sense the values that were explicit in what literature is; in what poetic language is; in what subject is.<sup>5</sup> I suppose you could say in a sense you're translating; you're using the same language, translating in order to write women's experience but I also think now that there's another level beyond that — what is literally unspeakable about the way we experience what is.

Language is so based on polarities; Saussure talked about this and if you're reaching for a way of saying, of communicating experience that is outside of the bipolar, how do you do that in a language that is structured in such a limited fashion? How do you talk so you're representing both specificities, at the same time that both are immediately present; and if you're speaking in a language that, in order to define day, has to posit it as the opposite of night, or black as the opposite of white, all the way down the line? How do you do that? That's the struggle. That's what I find fascinating and I think that is, in the largest sense, the task of translation.

*BC* As a novelist are you wrestling with that?

*DM* Yes, I seem to be wrestling with that all the time with whatever I write these days. The form that I've found that seems the happiest one for me to work with is a piecemeal form. You take all these different pieces and you juxtapose them and it's what is left unsaid in the juxtapositions that is actually the whole of what is being said. In some ways I think what's fascinating about writing is bringing each little piece to the edge it cannot go beyond, and then putting it next to another edge and seeing what happens. So far, that's the only strategy I've worked out. It's very tricky: you can't really talk about women's writing because as soon as you start to talk about it, it evaporates. As soon as you try to define it, you limit all that it can become. And since every piece of writing — if you're really in the act of writing — is a constant becoming, then as soon as you start getting programmatic, or dogmatic, you destroy it. Perhaps we cannot speak of answers in terms of formulae; we can only try and enact them in the writing. But they are unspoken because they're being enacted: they're not nouns you can put out there on the blackboard.

*BC* In *Ana Historic*, there is this kind of a penultimate swell, this moment at a kind of unusual point in the story that starts to change the way you deal with the space in a book: the space is being changed in a way that gives less priority to places traditionally prioritized, like the beginning and, of course, the ending.

*DM* You talked about that scene that Annie writes between Birdie and Anna as heterosexual resolution, or it's cast in the traditional mode of heterosexual romance. Some critics who reviewed the book have written about the book as if that were the ending, which always surprised me. This is the climatic moment? Well, it's not. For one thing, it is entirely concocted. It's entirely an invention and the book is quite clear about that, but it's an invention that allows the narrator to take that step that she's having trouble doing all through the book. It allows her suddenly to translate herself. She even renames herself, and that allows her then to move into a new beginning which is the ending of the book, that is always left open as the new beginning.

I think what Annie's doing in that book is that she's trying to see her own life through a new lens and she isn't really sure what a new lens is until she gets towards the end of writing Anna Richards's story. Then it becomes clearer what that lens is; when you come out, you translate yourself into another sexual being and it makes all your previous life — especially if you've lived a good portion of your life as a heterosexual woman — it makes you see it all in a new light. And that's what Annie's doing as she picks up these pieces of her own history she begins to see differently. She begins seeing the lesbian potential through the scripts of heterosexual romance she's grown up with, and through all the constraints of Victorian sexuality, because that's what she's dealing with: the residue of that as it's passed down through the generations.

There's one scene with Zoe, where she talks about it being "a monstrous leap of imagination" (135) to think of Anna Richards and Birdie having this kind of relationship, but until she reaches that point where it's crystallized in the conversation with Zoe, I don't think she's even really sure what the nature of the resistance is to the constraints. And as that becomes clearer then she no longer sees as she did before that possibility. She's already translated herself into it and looks back and sees it. The climactic point in the novel is when Annie says her name, the name she gives herself, Annie Torrent, which internalizes all the negative wildness of her mother, her heritage, and makes it positive. She confronts her own desire, and she says to Zoe, *you*, you are what I want and she names it.<sup>6</sup> And once she names it, that's the end of that particular story which is the coming



to that point, and then a new story begins which the last page just suggests.<sup>7</sup> She moves from being the author who is on the sidelines, writing about someone else, to the author who takes responsibility for the enactment of her own life and she moves into enacting her desire which is the enactment of her life.

*BC* Walter Benjamin said, “no book is written for the reader”<sup>8</sup> that you don’t write for others; you write for yourself.

*DM* Well on one level, that is true, but only on one level. Because if you only wrote for yourself you wouldn’t be interested in having readers. You wouldn’t be interested in what the intersection is between that work which essentially and always does come out of your own life no matter how fictionalized it is, and other people’s lives. What would be the point of putting it out there for that intersection to happen?

The writing is only part of a very large process that goes well beyond the writing — I learn a lot from how other people read my work and what they bring to that work. Suddenly I can see that these experiences which could be kept to the pages of a private journal — and this is always the autobiographer’s bottom line — transcend that, because they become intermeshed with the concerns of a dialogue that is much, much larger. And the stakes of that dialogue are much, much larger than one individual life.

*BC/MH* As a reader — we call her a translator — Zoe’s changing the writer’s mind, or the way she’s thinking; to see what the significance of that scene Annie has written has for Annie herself; to change the story there needs to be a dialogue between the writer and reader.

*DM* As a single seer, we each have our own blind spots<sup>9</sup>; we each have the limitations of our own perspective and it’s only in dialogue with other perspectives, even in the colloquy of those perspectives, that we can get beyond what those blind spots are, what they represent.

What you are saying about Zoe being a reader who is also a translator is very interesting to me because that’s the image of an active reader: a reader who enters into the generation of the work. So then the last scene represents the author making love to her reader, which is perhaps what all writing is about — I mean as the ideal; as that which you’re moving towards.

*BC* Pamela Banting has pointed out the oral dimension in your written work.<sup>10</sup> Is this another way to have conversations with your readers?

*DM* You want to hear what the reader is hearing and reading. I find quite often there is a kind of peculiar aural element, a look, a feel of the words: a kind of ringing. Where I became more strongly aware of that was with *Ana Historic*, recovering my mother's language still living in me and going back. It's the immigrant experience; you come with — in my case<sup>11</sup> — not another language, but another dialect, and if you're a young person you try to leave that language behind as fast as you can, so you can assimilate, integrate, or whatever term you want to call it. But then it goes on living inside you somewhere. You know even though you cover it over, and you think nothing about those phrases, and you don't think in those words anymore, but then something happens that will trigger it and they all start tumbling out. That bond, that mother-daughter bond, is very much an oral bond; we internalize that voice so much. So I started to think of how oral women's culture is, and the kinds of information, the knowledge, that gets imparted orally. And you know it was never considered "important," in terms of a value system in traditional literature with a big L, to be written down, so there's a part of ourselves which exists in terms of our knowledge of life, of being, of relationships, of our body, that only exists orally for us. And then there's the translation of that into the act of writing.

Our technological culture is moving so rapidly, via computer and the internet, to a reality that is always at a second remove. People get hooked for hours writing these little messages and blipping them through the electronic waves and they're not talking; they're not sitting face to face. They've completely lost touch with how body language functions as an element of conversation. The melodic of tonal structure and emphasis, what that says about how to read — I mean 'read' in the metaphoric sense — how to hear what is actually being said: all of that gets lost.

*BC* How can you as a writer find the way to differentiate, to make your orality palpable?

*DM* One way would be to use jargon, or special words well, colloquialisms for sure. But also what interests me is to knock different levels of language up against each other, to put the colloquial up against the written. You know, poetic language has a range of diction, for instance, that doesn't really operate in oral language which has a much narrower range. So I don't want to lose that; I don't want to lose the largeness of that range of words. But I guess the markers of orality are important to me because they point to the existence of that oral world; if you're really

writing that close to the bone, then the oral has to be part of that, because it's there in the way we think; it resonates inside our language all the time.

*BC* What about in terms of actual space? When you write, how much orality can you capture in just using the space; when you're dealing with a text and all the holes and spaces that are part of it?

*DM* It fascinates me. That's why I went to a long line in a certain phase of my writing. A line that looked like prose, but it wasn't the length of a usual body of text, and in it I was using punctuation musically, the way you use line breaks in poetry. And why does it fascinate me? Why does that running-on feel of it fascinate me? I think it's because it approximates the stream of perception which is constant. I mean if you just sit down to meditate, you know how constant it is because it wants to go on and on and on, and yet there's always something underneath: that which is completely other than that. So how do you get that in prose? That's the question. And in poetry the lines come out of silence — they are surrounded by silence — it's a clear marking on the page; and I find I tend to write prose in short sections, and the breaks between the sections are really significant because that's where that silence, or that other thing, the unspoken, the unspeakable, can vibrate in there. I play around with the page in various ways. For instance, dialogues are a bit like poetry because you can have interruptions between people. You can have 'what isn't said' be palpably there. But in narrative itself, it's much harder to do that so how do I do it in narrative? I think it's by juxtaposition again. It's by taking those little pieces and putting them up against each other.

## August, 1997

*BC* The final pages of *Ana Historic* are poised at the beginning of a relationship, almost before the beginning of a relationship, and are full of optimism and the possibilities that relationships offer, 'reading us into the page ahead.' But *Taken* turns on a different kind of story; desire is complicated by complicity: so many strands of old scripts compose us.

*DM* But they're just strands at this point. They're not whole ropes or whole threads, strands that we can never get away from completely — there will always be bits and pieces of them still functioning for us, but they don't have to be the ropes that tie us to those scripts.

On one level, I'm definitely writing against the destiny script in both novels which I see as a kind of imprisoning figure around the mother, but

obviously in *Taken* the daughter, Suzanne, is beginning to think about how she has inherited certain aspects of the destiny script. As I said, those scripts are really powerful and I don't know how much we can escape them completely. I think what we need to do is reconstitute them, break them apart. The fragments are so deeply imbedded in us, they have so much emotional resonance for us, that it would be a shame to lose them completely: you can't just throw them out. So I think the task, once you've broken them apart into those resonating fragments, is to reconstitute them so that you write a different story but with the same elements. The task is to think in a different way from the thought that the scripts represent, and that's always a challenge because we are so conditioned by the scripts that we fall into those habits of thinking without thinking about them...It's becoming aware of how to step out — first of all, it's becoming aware of what those habits of thought are, that are so deeply ingrained and then how do you reconstitute them? How do you break them apart and reconstitute them so that they can then generate alternative scripts, alternative stories?

BC The daughter can see more clearly the complicity that constrained their mother, but it was more difficult to realize that she was also constrained. It's so hard to see the scripts in your own life.

DM Yes, that's the emotional part that gets played out in the relationship between Suzanne and Lori. That's why Suzanne has to say to Lori, "You're right. We are complicit." When Lori says to Suzanne, "You're not so innocent, in all this," Suzanne can't respond to her, but by the last section, the last passage she's saying, yes, you're right: "We *are* complicit, yes" (130). We always are constrained by everything that has happened to us. We see through that so that no matter how much we empathize, there are these traces that we bring of privilege that can't be overlooked. Like, what kind of a position could a Canadian pacifist take during the Gulf War when Canada was selling components of the weapons being used, probably on both sides?

BC *Taken* begins with the word 'ghost' and we encounter many versions of it throughout the novel: the phantom sliding across the cinema screens; the ghosts lurking in photographs; the other stories, the ghost stories that run alongside the rational conversations of the colonials. But especially, there are the persistent ghosts of our memory. Suzanne sifts through photographs and correspondence looking for clues to the identity of her parents, who they really were. Are we looking for something in these things we cannot read or have not read, or are they looking for us?

*DM* Language seems a translation of what we actually experience. Like a translation, it can only carry across so much; it can only bring into being in language so much. There's a lot that stands outside of language because it stands outside the systems of thought which allow us to recognize anything. And it's often written in the body; it's kept in the body, in the cells, in the neural sheets of the brain, and it's a kind of residue that language can't reach. Sometimes we're fortunate enough to have dreams that put things together in a way that allows us to recognize these. Or we go through great grief or trauma of some kind that flips us out of our habitual modes, so that we begin to recognize what these pieces are and can see them and put them together... What I think of as ghosts are what haunt us, what lie outside the systems of thought that we've been trained in.

*BC/MH* Are you starting with the idea that it is impossible to tell the story, in the way traumatic memory holds stories we can't tell yet?

*DM* I don't know if I'm starting with that. I know that exists. I know also that as a writer I'm getting more and more interested in finding a way of writing that will bring in more of what haunts it, of what lies outside the conventionally linear that allows us to see only a slice of it. This slice and that slice. I don't know how one would write about the future. What you said about the future, that 'the page ahead' is "a palimpsest like the past," as the page we just left behind. I really like that, but there's also the unforeseen. I think there's a lot of not just the unseen but the unforeseen and that the two are associated. So how do we reach that, given that we can only write what we recognize?

I think that there are traces of energy that actually assume forms that we can't see — and this is where I start sounding really spectral! — but I'd like to be able to talk about that, too. Maybe this can be explained by collective unspoken memory, but when I was doing research for the prisoners of war for this book, I found the material so potent, so powerful... My experience as I was reading it was that I was there, that this wasn't anything foreign or unknown to me; that I knew it. But I have no way of knowing how I would know it except that it was the unspoken of my parents' experience. That there was anxiety about their friends, which of course I have no memory of, and they never spoke about the war, about that part of it, except in very brief exchanges like, "Why do I have a godmother but not a godfather?" "Well, your godfather died building the Burma Railway." Small factual things, like this. So I don't know if that was something that I just picked up as a child even though I didn't know what it was all about or what was going on. I have no memory of that. I've

been working for quite a while with the idea of the unspoken. Women's experience until recently was the background; it was what was never acknowledged. And now we've been making it the foreground; we've been foregrounding it over and over again, so it's now visible. We can now recognize it. And we have all kinds of language for talking about it. But then what about that area that lies beyond the human? You know, the interdependency of all beings: the ecosystem?

I think we don't look enough at our relationship, the relationship between our bodies and everything that surrounds it. The air we take in, the very water we drink, the food we eat: all this becomes part of our own bodies, so even though we tend to think of ourselves as these isolated, self-contained creatures, we aren't. We are much more permeable than we think. I focus on the woman-to-woman relationship in *Taken* in the context of woman-to-island relationship; in the woman-to-sensual environment that's almost as important a relationship for Suzanne as the relationship with Lori.

*MH* Is there any possible relation besides woman-to-woman that captures the intimacy of the relationship between mother and child?

*DM* I think it's possible for that to happen in a woman-to-man relationship, too, but I think it's difficult because of the different ways in which men have been conditioned emotionally. They are conditioned in our society to be much less emotionally aware than women are, and so I think it's an unusual man that one can have that sense of interbeing with.

*BC* Speaking of men, remember in *Ana Historic*, when the boy is born and feels at home, at once, something like —

*DM* Yes, right, indigenous.

*BC* In *Taken*, it's the otter. The baby boy feels at home because he's been born into a world where everything has been designed for him, been waiting for him. But the otter's feeling at home seems to be an expansion of terms: a different feeling of home.

*DM* Yes, because it's a non-human feeling at home. Do humans ever really feel at home? That's the problem. We think constantly. We're constantly assessing, evaluating questioning. It's an important motif for me. It keeps coming up. That sense of being totally present. And totally present on a body level, not just on a mental level.

*BC* You've collaborated with photographers in your works,<sup>12</sup> and *Taken* has a photograph on the cover, and so many descriptions of pho-

tographs within. You've disrupted the sense of the photographic image as a frozen moment by saying that there are threads reaching out from that moment; there is always something larger than the moment 'captured' by the camera.

DM Yeah, if you read closely enough you can get beyond the frozen surface. But also you have to be reading for what isn't in there, too. Because the frozen moment is a lie, and in that way it's equivalent to the script.

BC There's a lot of the cinematic in the novel, too.

DM Cinema is fascinating. I mean, you can read cinema very much in terms of what it says about a period and a social milieu, a cultural milieu, and since it's made up of a series of frozen images that are flicked through really fast, they're called 'the flicks', it works to disrupt the frozen moment. But it does that by imposing a narrative which is then another version of the script. So I think that the interesting thing about cinema is not just the light, not just the image on the screen, but watching that light beam that's projecting it and seeing all the motes of dust dancing — I want to write about that at some point.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> from "Self-Representation and Fictionalysis," 17.

<sup>2</sup> In *Sounding Differences: conversations with seventeen Canadian women writers*, Daphne Marlatt tells Janice Williamson of reading parts of Brossard's 'E muet mutant' in an issue of *Ellipse* (23-4 [1979]), and that "the thing that drew me to what Nicole was doing was her writing always as a woman in the process of *writing*" (183).

<sup>3</sup> In *Taken*, Suzanne reads her mother's letters to her father during the Second World War, written "against his absence, against fate to bring him close" (13). Her mother, Esme, writes how thankful she is that "you are not sleeping on the benches or in camp in S," and Suzanne thinks, "What benches? I see only the bombed-out church," only to wonder a few pages later, "Had she written 'beaches' and i simply read 'n' for 'a'? Sleeping on the beaches an image of dereliction, image of an army in rout. Abandoned in either case" (16).

<sup>4</sup> In her essay "Difference (em)bracing" (1989), collected in *Readings From the Labyrinth*, Marlatt lists Robert Duncan as one of her mentors: "Through Robert Duncan's prose poems & Charles Olson's essays, i remembered my original delight in the extendible and finely balanced nature of the sentence ungoverned by line breaks ( a different sort of sprawl). Duncan led me to Gertrude Stein and her play with emphasis...Duncan led me to H.D. too" (136).

<sup>5</sup> As Marlatt writes in "musing with mothertongue," "so many terms for dominance

in English are tied up with male experiencing, masculine hierarchies and differences (exclusion), patriarchal holdings with their legalities. where are the poems that celebrate the soft letting-go the flow of menstrual blood is as it leaves her body? how can the standard sentence structure of English with its linear authority, subject through verb to object, convey the wisdom of endlessly repeated and not exactly repeated cycles her body knows?"(47)

<sup>6</sup> "so, Annie Torrent — she took my hand — what is it you want?" (152).

<sup>7</sup> See epigraph to this interview, written on the last (unnumbered) page of the novel.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin's actual words (in translation) are: "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener." From "The Task of the Translator" in *Illuminations*, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Those 'blind spots' can haunt our memory, the ghosts of what we have not come to terms with: "Maybe ghosts have something to do with presence and absence, both...Blind spots... Maybe ghosts have something to do with our blind spots" (*Taken* 104).

<sup>10</sup> See "The Reorganization of the Body: 'musing with the mother tongue'" in Pamela Banting's *Body, Inc.* 197-212.

<sup>11</sup> Daphne Marlatt was born in Australia in 1942. After spending her childhood in Malaysia, in 1951 her family immigrated to Vancouver, Canada.

<sup>12</sup> With Robert Minden in *Steveston*, and Cheryl Sourkes in *Touch to My Tongue* and *Double Negative*.

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