

(Re)Writing Home: Daphne Marlatt's *Ghost Works*

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DAPHNE MARLATT'S *Ghost Works* is a collection of three previously published travel writings.¹ In each of the texts, the autobiographical narrator travels both in space and in time: as she moves across oceans and continents to Mexico, Malaysia, and England, she also moves back in time, searching through her memories to find the ghost of her mother who continues to haunt her. "Each time," Marlatt notes in the preface, "i travelled in the company of different others but always, it turned out, in the company of my mother who had died in 1975, a few months before that first journey" (vii). Many critics have focussed on the narrator's search for her ghostly mother in these works. Barbara Godard, for instance, claims the narrator is searching for a "feminine archetype," a kind of ancient, idealized mother (492).² But I believe that the search for her mother is only one part, although certainly an important part, of a more complicated search. The sentence following the description of her mother in Marlatt's preface is, in my view, equally important: "Each work struggles with the notion of here, what being here means, what it includes or excludes" (vii). The publication of these works together foregrounds the different spaces the narrator moves through and the problem of home and place in these texts. If this collection is about a journey through memory, it is also about a physical journey through foreign and alien — or perhaps not so foreign and alien — spaces. Presumably, a traveller moves through space, across continents, in order to leave home behind. Or does she? Where is home? And what role does it play in the construction of the self? Does the traveller carry home with her as she travels? In two of the works, the narrator paradoxically both leaves home behind and returns to it, leaving Canada for her ancestral home in England and her childhood home in Malaysia. What then does "home" mean, and how does its meaning become troubled in these texts?

In "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty discuss the politics of home, family, and nation — concepts that they suggest can limit feminist analysis

if the terms are left unexamined, especially since related concerns often surface in discourses of the New Right (191-92). Martin and Mohanty discuss both the power and appeal of home (191) and its connection with exclusions and repressions (196). Although these feminist scholars focus primarily on Minnie Bruce Pratt's autobiographical narrative entitled "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," their comments also shed light on Marlatt's writing and rewriting of home in *Ghost Works*. According to Martin and Mohanty,

"Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself. (196)³

The word "home" echoes throughout *Ghost Works*: Running home (64). Rushing home (95). Feeling, or not feeling, at home (93, 97, 149). Being at home (108). Going home — to England or anywhere (108). Hereditary home (139). Flying home to keep her son safe (166). Going home where it's nice and boring (187). The ghost of a home (vii). Still-standing walls of home (137, 141). Homeless (170, 171). Home free (170). Although the three texts are heterogeneous, recording different places, times, and selves, incorporating within them various forms including poems, letters, and journal entries, there is a probing in all three texts of "home" and its different meanings. In these texts, home is the safe place, the protected space, the womb, the place the narrator wants to run back to for safety; it is also a word with an oppressive history, one she wants to run away from, or change, or reinvent. As the word "home" echoes and re-echoes throughout *Ghost Works*, it picks up layers of meaning, complicating the narrator's view of her self, her family, her mother, her nation, and her past.

Feeling at home

During a nature walk in "Month of Hungry Ghosts," the narrator's father says "he always feels at home here" (93). Although he is referring to a specific location — he is standing on a bridge over a brook — the narrator interprets the statement more generally, asking him whether he has ever felt alien, felt there were places he could not enter or was not welcome in. His answer reveals that there are few places where he would not feel at home. Although he mentions some discomfort, his casual answer suggests that he has not thought about this question very much. His an-

swer ends with his sense of freedom and detachment: although he felt some animosity when he filmed the Typoosum rites in an Indian temple, "he's never liked Indian temples anyhow" (93). Indian temples are not very important in his view; there is no troubling, perplexing barrier for the father here; he seems to move through space with relative ease. Any space that does not welcome him is not worth much time or thought. He seems to carry home with him.

The narrator, on the other hand, cannot feel at home, even in — or perhaps especially in — her childhood home. A little work, she notes, would make her "feel at home" (97). But in the space she has come to visit with her sister and her father, a little work seems to be impossible. She is a princess again, locked in "a sealed fortress" where the servants "pick up after you, wash your clothes, cook your food, do your dishes, ad nauseum" (82, 97). For her, the mansion she grew up in is a site of profound conflict: twenty-five years later, the narrator is a woman Eng Kim serves rather than the child she chivvied along (79). The narrator struggles to find a language that can allow her to re-enter this childhood home, a re-entry that she expects will be painful, like the descent of the airplane that puts painful pressure on her ears and brings tears: "How can I write of all this? what language or what *structures* of language can carry this being here?" (82). She struggles to write anything at all (84, 99, 106), as though the place demands her silence, or demands only those words that give orders and command servants, words that mark complicity with the colonial structures of her childhood home, which is both literally and metaphorically up on the hill (98, 112, 122). Only new structures of language, structures she struggles to invent, can make her feel at home.

In an interview with Janice Williamson, Marlatt notes, "I don't think the conflicts of thinking women in a colonial situation have been adequately explored." Because colonial women were restricted to the domestic realm, she claims, they "felt the conflicts more deeply and saw the effects of colonialism on a day to day level more clearly than the men did" (191-92). Although she is referring to her mother in the interview, the daughter clearly feels the conflicts as she travels back to Penang. In "Month of Hungry Ghosts," the British colonialism the narrator hates (92) and the resulting separations (94) mean she cannot feel at home, and this dis-ease — the restricted movement and the split both from and within home — is also a split within herself:

O the disparities — how can I ever relate the two parts of myself?
This life would have killed me — purdah, a woman in — the restric-

tions on movement, the confined reality. I can't stand it. I feel imprisoned in my class — my? This is what I came out of. & how else can I be here? (79)

She wishes to step outside the rigid class structures of her childhood home, the household structures she thought she left behind when she moved to Canada. But how can she ever leave her childhood home behind if it is what she came out of? And if she does not, does she simply reinscribe the colonial structures she hates? The structures that keep her from feeling at home, structures that restrict both mental and physical movement, are still there, both in her surroundings and within her. There are still places that are off limits, unknown and perhaps dangerous spaces that she cannot enter: “Snake again signals offlimits, danger to me. I can't get past the snakes in my life” (82-83). She worries that the place will engulf her, stripping away the hard-won freedom of a “liberated” Canadian woman (99-100). At the same time, she cannot and does not want to keep the place at a distance, or her self at a distance from this place: if she does, she falls into what she calls “the colonial empire of the mind” (99). Most Europeans, she notes, do not live here; eating canned European foods, afraid to touch the soil, never walking barefoot for fear of hookworm or other diseases, they “camp out in a kind of defensive splendour that's corrosive to the soul” (99-100). The narrator cannot move with ease and feel at home the way her father does — or seems to, since his freedom, like that of other white Europeans in this colonial space, is based on an unacknowledged repression, an unacknowledged distancing from that which threatens and a physical restriction of bodily movement and bodily processes. This place is part of her past, a past she cannot and does not want to cut off, and which she struggles to reinvent. Unlike the Europeans who camp out, the narrator tries to work through and bring to consciousness, rather than repress knowledge of, the colonial and patriarchal structures of the past, place, and language — structures that are intimately connected. She does this in order to construct some sense of self, even if that self is ultimately fractured and split, and even if she will never quite feel at home.

Running, rushing, flying home

Often in *Ghost Works*, the narrator feels lost (eg. 12, 55, 131, 174, 186, 187). According to Godard, “Losing herself in order to find something is Marlatt's habitual approach” (490). But what exactly is the narrator trying to find? If she is lost, where is she headed? *Zócalo* begins with a

journey, an enigmatic dream sequence, a line of cars all headed in one direction. They are moving toward what seems to be a “centre (as if it were the heart of a continent, it isn’t)” (2) — thus, toward a false centre that is not the centre, not the central landscape. So which centre is the narrator actually headed toward? The sequence ends with the narrator “flying backward”; there is “very little room,” and they “must go back.” She flies down the road and finally “through the house” (7). If the sequence focuses on the home she has turned back to, the house at the end of the road, by the end of *Zócalo* we find another dream with a house, and this time her mother is inside (64–66). Before she arrives at the house, the narrator sees on the side of the road “daughter, mother, grandmother clustered together like so many berries on the one bush” (5). As Godard notes, the narrator receives puzzling instructions from the mother, who passes on the words of the grandmother: “The power of the sea and the power of dwarfs are acting together” (5–6). So how are these mothers and houses and enigmatic words connected?

The narrator’s desire for home — for its stability and centre, for the safe place to return to — is ultimately connected with the search for her ghostly mother. The first home is the mother’s body, and Marlatt implicitly connects the womb and the home at the end of *Zócalo*. In a seemingly simple exchange that highlights the difficulties of cross-cultural translation, the narrator asks the Mexican hammock-seller to write his name and address on the back of her dictionary. For the narrator, both name and address resonate with thoughts of a lost or forgotten mother. His last name, “Pech Pat,” highlights what is often obscured in English: “Pech, mi padre, Pat, mi madre, he explains, en Inglés, you write only the name of the father, no? Pero, además, you are the child of your mother, ¿m’entiende? (73). Last names in English obscure maternal origins, but the Mexican hammock-seller seems to know where he comes from. In response to her second query, “¿su dirección?”, he gives the narrator the address of an acquaintance, or in Spanish, “donmicilio conocido” (73). He spells the first word with an n, so that the Spanish word for “house” now contains the word “don” or gift. And the gift that the Mexican hammock-seller gives the narrator in this seemingly simple transaction is a lost mother recalled, something that is known (“conocido”) but that has been obscured in everyday English. The word for “address” in Spanish, “dirección,” picks up on the notion of coming from somewhere; if the narrator is often lost in *Zócalo*, in this exchange she realizes that finding herself is connected with movement backward, toward the home/womb she suggests we all come from and want to return to. Thus it is not only

a home address but also a "dirección"/direction that the Mexican hammock-seller has given her, toward this lost mother. The word "conocido" on the page prompts the narrator to meditate on some of the complex discursive and material connections that link home and womb, location and direction, birth and gift:

known, he writes, is known (give up you know) this house you fight up through, at centre, dark, hole at the heart of the field, "thup," little one, where the world disappears, reaching up through the dark, through mother & up, this branching growth, gift — ("in my father's house are many mansions") (73-74)

It is not surprising that the safe place is both the home and the mother's body, the protected space "under her mothering wing" (173). This first home is something the narrator returns to again and again in the text. But why the enigmatic words?

Godard links the enigmatic words of the native woman in *Zócalo* with a search for an archetypal feminine principle, an ancient goddess whose traces can be found in the temples, a goddess that seems to have been buried, written over by language (490-91), a silent feminine. But this reading of an "archetypal feminine principle" is somewhat troubling. According to Moyes, and as a number of recent critical articles suggest, "some of Marlatt's most recent texts and many of her statements about her writing risk centring feminist debate in terms of traditional symbols of femininity" (203). These symbols arguably posit a pre-existing feminine essence, and may be more oppressive than liberating. Frank Davey argues, for example, that a narrative of a "primal feminine" in *How Hug a Stone* "locates the human outside of social action in an archetypal pre-determination" (180). Lola Lemire Tostevin claims that Marlatt's writing involves a nostalgic desire for origins, including the desire for an originary maternal body (35). For Tostevin, this recourse to origins, as Banting summarizes, is "reductive, regressive and essentialist" (Banting 146). But perhaps this lost feminine, this feminine silence in Marlatt's work is not a pre-linguistic silence; perhaps, instead, it is a silence in the structures of language itself.

One of the subjects that has fascinated Marlatt is the "E muet mutant," the silent feminine *e* and writing in the feminine that Brossard discussed in a 1979 article in *Ellipse* (Williamson 183; Butling 120). In the early 1980s Marlatt was reading French feminist theory, including Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva. According to Marlatt, the excitement in reading feminist theory is "having names and articulations put to what

you've been aware of, but you haven't been able to articulate in any clear way" (Williamson 183). So issues raised by French feminist theorists were ones that were apparently on her mind when she wrote the texts collected in *Ghost Works*. In her interview with Williamson, Marlatt discusses the importance of the mother's body as the first landscape, the first memory, borrowing, it seems, Kristeva's concept of a pre-Oedipal repressed semi-otic language:

There is in memory a very deep subliminal connection with the mother because what we first of all remember is this huge body which is our first landscape and which we first of all remember bodily. We can't consciously remember it, but it's there in our unconscious, it's there in all the repressed babble, the language that just ripples and flows — and it isn't concerned with making sense.... The wholeness of memory, these early memories that suddenly flash upon you, probably has something to do with the earliest sense of a whole body image, and later, much later, a whole landscape. Anyhow, it's only later that we separate ourselves and everything into subject and object. (185)

When the narrator wishes to rush home, she is also rushing toward the body of the mother, the safety and security of that early union. In her final dream in *Zócalo*, she rushes toward home only to find that what she was looking for was her dead mother, the woman inside the house (64), the woman whose role it was to create a home. In "Month of Hungry Ghosts," the mother is likewise found in the house: she is *mem sahib*, "mistress of her own house" (88). But the name "*mem sahib*" itself suggests that as homemaker, as mistress of the house, she is always already implicated in the colonial order. According to Pamela Banting, Brenda Carr reiterates "that the term '*memsahib*' is a derivative of '*sahib*,' the white colonial male master of the household, and thus reflects the '*mem*'s subordinate status" (Banting 190).⁴ The caves the narrator explores in *How Hug a Stone* (167) and the temples in *Zócalo* (58-59) are womb-like enclosures. Indeed, a number of images in *How Hug a Stone* are ultimately connected with the mother's body: the stones (184), the seeds (186), the birds (161), the bones (167), the sea (167), the tombs (161), the blue veil (178, 181). The narrator's "homesickness," as Moyes points out, is connected with a longing for the mother's body, a desire for origins that can never be fulfilled.

So is there really an essential feminine principle that the narrator can get back to, a female body and a home that precedes language in this text, as critics such as Godard, Tostevin, and Davey seem to suggest? Perhaps the issues raised by Marlatt are not necessarily ones of an essential femi-

nine principle, but rather of a home and a maternal body variously constructed in the different languages of the places the narrator has travelled through. If the home and the maternal body are constructed in language, then there is the possibility of different constructions, different kinds of languages; and Marlatt's text certainly plays with language. In *Ghost Works*, Marlatt often investigates the etymological roots of words, for example, in order to unearth the historical meanings that still haunt the language and shape current meanings: "remnants of Old English, even *moth, snake, stone*"; "so familiar. *familia*. household servants" (135, 142). At the same time, local variations in language have the power to construct very different worlds in the text: "my childhood family had its language, covert because 'so English' in North Van. & my mother driven wild: why can't they teach you how to speak? when i brought the colloquial home, flaunting *real fine* with *me'n her*" (135).

In "Entering In: The Immigrant Imagination," Marlatt discusses the sense of linguistic disjunction she felt as a Canadian immigrant whose use of language was shaped elsewhere:

When you are told, for instance, that what you call earth is really dirt, or what you have always called the woods (with English streams) is in fact the bush (with its creeks), you experience the first split between name and thing, signifier and signified, and you take that first step into a linguistic world that lies adjacent to but is not the same as the world of things, and indeed operates on its own linguistic laws. (222)

This sense of linguistic disjunction is also evident in *Ghost Works* as the narrator travels through places that are clearly shaped by the languages she and others use to describe what they see around them. The self-righteous conversation of fundamentalist American tourists on an exclusive bus tour in Mexico, for example, all too easily shapes the Mexican landscape into a narrative that confirms their own narrow and ultimately imperialist world view: "History teaches us the ways of the Lord, he was saying, these Mayans now, great builders but —" (52). Although the tourists are there to observe, they are unable to see anything, finally, but a reflection of themselves (52-53). As Marlatt notes in "Changing the Focus," language is "the area of struggle" for her as a woman writer partly, she suggests, because it has the power to construct worlds: "there is the seductiveness of language, which holds the potential for saying anything, for constructing anything as 'real'" (130, 132). In *Ghost Works*, although the narrator cannot completely distance herself from what she considers the American tourists' "inan[e]" observations — "We'll never escape ourselves, she

thinks" (52, 53), and she worries, just a few pages earlier, that her own eyes are "irrevocably christian" (45, 47) — she works to become aware of the ways her vision has been shaped by her own history and the histories of those who have passed through places both with her and before her (cf. 16, 38, 42, 49, 56, 66, 67, 68). Unlike the American tourists, the narrator is aware of the seductiveness of language. She is also painfully aware of the difficulty involved in trying to understand or to be understood across linguistic, economic, and cultural divides (69-74). "¿Qué es r-e-y-l?" the Mexican hammock seller asks her, wondering about the meaning of an English word he heard "dos Americanos" use (71). The narrator's search for an answer to his question (does he mean a railing? a railroad?) suggests that what is "real" is simultaneously a fiction you hold onto, a movement through place and time, an attempt at interchange across tremendous gaps of history and culture, a translation, and a construction in language ("Auténtico he said (in the author's own hand)") (71-72).

In *Body Inc.*, Banting refutes Tostevin's claim that Marlatt's writings are essentialist, suggesting that it is Tostevin herself who "ends up misreading, reducing and essentializing Marlatt's work" (146). While Marlatt's texts do involve traditional symbols of the feminine, Banting notes, "surely it is the task of the critic to make the effort to distinguish Marlatt's use of these symbols from their patriarchal connotations and to discover whether or not they do retain their patriarchal function within the context of the lesbian feminist text" (149). In a recent article, Julie Beddoes counters Davey's reading of a primal feminine in *How Hug a Stone*, suggesting instead that the "search for a mother who is both ghost and muse is a search for identity in language" (86). In Beddoes's reading of Marlatt's text, there is "no primeval mother who transcends the many versions of her in stories written by others. She exists only in the story of the speaker's desire for her" (87). What I wish to focus on here is Marlatt's emphasis on the importance of place in the construction of new meanings. As Marlatt suggests in a recent address, "Change the context and the words change colour" (Brossard and Marlatt 13). If the home is connected with the mother, the reverse is also true: the narrator's search for her mother is also connected with "what here means," with place and home. Her search for the mother, the first home, is grounded in the material of Mexican and Malaysian and British and Canadian soil. Moreover, these different places are always already constructed in language and culture, and her shifts from one place to another help her to see the gaps, the erasures, the contradictions in language. Marlatt searches these places as she searches the structures of language in order to figure

out how to (re)write home and the mother's body, to reinvent and to construct otherwise.

In *How Hug a Stone*, Marlatt connects motherhood and home with safety. Wondering whether she has put her son at risk, she only wants "to fly home with him, to keep him safe" (166). So if she cannot feel at home in Malaysia — or Mexico or England — perhaps she can rush home to Canada to escape feelings of dis-ease and alienation, the sense of dislocation she feels when even the familiar "doesn't quite fit," becomes unfamiliar, alienating (156).⁵ Perhaps her new home in Canada is a fixed centre, a stable place that offers safety and security, a safe place she can return to.⁶ However, if there is something protective and comforting in home and motherhood, there is also something deadly in them — in the cycle of motherhood, the traditions passed down from grandmother to mother to daughter. If the home, the "mothering wing" offers safety and security, there is also a cost. In order to provide the mothering wing, the mother had her "wings clipped" (176). The passing on of motherhood may also be part of the cult of death (173). And perhaps this safety — and even the centre itself — is simply an illusion. What if there is only a black hole at the centre (173), a "blue/black hole ... folding in on itself" (179)? According to Susan Knutson, Marlatt originally appended a bibliography to *How Hug a Stone*, and the sources listed confirm a theme of harvest sacrifice. One related entry in Marlatt's notebook on *How Hug a Stone* is quite revealing. As she alludes to ancient rituals of death and rebirth that appear in the text, Marlatt notes a change: "Sacrifice of son refused" (Knutson 37-38). Motherhood seems to demand a sacrifice. As Knutson sees it, the "motif of sacrificing the son is the *raison d'être* behind the narrator's fear that she has put her son at risk in bringing him on her quest" (38). But unlike Mary of the Blue Veil, the narrator will not sacrifice her son (181). Something in the cycle of motherhood, that clipped wing of motherhood that provides home and also produces a threat, must be refused.

Still-standing walls of home

According to Martin and Mohanty, the desire for home is connected with a desire "for synchrony, for sameness." There is a tension, they claim, between this desire and "the realization of the repressions and violence that make home, harmony, sameness imaginable" (208). In *Ghost Works* this desire for home and sameness, and the violent repressions that are required to uphold this sameness, are metaphorically represented in the "still-standing walls of home" (137, 141). Although this phrase only ap-

pears a couple of times in the text, walls themselves are everywhere. In "Month of Hungry Ghosts," for example, the defensive splendour that corrodes the souls of Europeans in Malaysia is connected with the walls they erect to keep themselves from being contaminated by the frightening difference of the outside world. Although Martin and Mohanty do not discuss *Ghost Works*, again their analysis is helpful here: "What emerges," they write, "is the consolidation of the white home in response to a threatening outside" (204). In Marlatt's work, the white Europeans' private hedges, the locked and bolted doors, and the iron schedule of the house are all walls the settlers erect as they live in "armed defensiveness against even the earth" (99). In contrast, the narrator wants "to break down the wall" that separates her from Eng Kim, but the walls are strong and the task is difficult, almost impossible: despite all her efforts, both past and present, she "ha[s]n't quite figured out how" (98).

The "still-standing walls of home" are perhaps most fully explored in *How Hug a Stone*. In this text, the walls are especially connected with the structures of family that govern behaviour. In the short entry that begins with the title "These Still-Standing Walls of Home" (137), there are no physical walls. In fact, my first reading of this section left me somewhat puzzled. All the narrator seems to focus on here are family members, family photographs, pollen, and baggage. So where are the walls?

In fact, the walls are precisely drawn in the description of family members and the structures of family that are intimately connected with home. At the end of this section, the narrator mentions the photographs and describes their function: "my grandmother giving back my early self to me in photographs she foresees drained of meaning in strangers' hands" (137). This gift, recalling perhaps the earlier description in *Zócalo* of the Mexican hammock-seller's house as "donmicilio" spelled with an *n*, "'don,' gift, house" (73), is double-edged, both a gift and a burden. How is the granddaughter to interpret the photographs? There seems to be only one possible meaning handed down: either the photographs are meaningful within the context, the circle, the structures of family and home, or they are drained, empty, cast out into strangers' hands beyond the protective walls. If cast out, perhaps the story of the narrator's early self, her past, will also be drained and left devoid of meaning. Does the grandmother's gift foreclose a different interpretation, or multiple interpretations? The logic of family and home implied in the grandmother's gift seems to be binary: either the narrator accepts the gift of her past with the "baggage" of family attached, or she is cast out beyond the walls of home into strangers' hands, her self drained of proper meaning. She is respon-

sible for continuity in the family; after the grandmother dies, the narrator has a place, a role to play, and this role is necessary to ensure the continuity of the family story. The gift of a photograph — a picture of her as a child, a representation of her body in its infancy — is particularly appropriate, since it is a bodily inheritance that is handed down from grandmother to mother to daughter within the family. The wall is there, the gift seems to say. On which side does she choose to stand, inside its protective walls, or outside in the dark, cast out into meaninglessness?

The family line is clearly harsh and repressive, as shown in the section entitled “grounded in the family.” The narrator’s step-brother, who knows how to categorize “every flower in all four directions contained by a brick wall,” is also, not surprisingly, an expert in family places and categories. Luring the bodies of moths with a light,

he wants to *fix them in their families*, he wants them wing-pulled-open, pinned on a piece of cotton, mortified. as then, i protest this play as death — despite his barrage of scientific names, his calling to my son, you game? as if he held the script everyone wants to be in, except the moths. (133; emphasis added)⁷

Interestingly, it is her son who is asked to join the game. Is this why she may be putting him at risk? What if he is allergic to his hereditary home—could the pollen in the air kill him? Or what if he isn’t, and he joins in the moth game, the family game? What if he follows the script? The fact that the moths are placed in different categories, or different families, suggests in the end a very superficial difference. No matter what their respective positions are, the moths are really reduced to sameness, fixed in their positions, pinned, wing-pulled-open, mortified. The “still-standing walls of home” are erected to keep family members fixed in place, the “familiar”/“*familia*” (142) safely locked inside, but the cost is tremendous. For the narrator, the walls of home that protect, giving family members a place and a name, are also walls that categorize, fix, and kill.

The dream of family sameness is not just the step-brother’s dream. It is also the grandmother’s dream, as she hands her granddaughter a photograph with the self firmly fixed on the page. This fixing power of the photograph is supported by another bodily fixing in the text: the narrative of the mother’s coming out at eighteen suggests a bodily script that must be followed if the daughter is to remain within the protective walls of family sameness, of home. Her mother at eighteen looks beautiful, “a *dream*” (143), her dress lovingly described by the grandmother as the mother’s body reinscribes the heterosexual and upper-class script, her

wedding and her simultaneous abandonment of her own desires described on the following page. The mother's body follows the script and thus upholds the walls of "a great house" (144), the walls of home. The dream, the narrator notes, is "*her* dream," the grandmother's dream, "the one my mother inherited, *her* dress, my mother lending her body to it. as i refused, on a new continent suffocated in changing rooms thick with resentment: you don't understand, *everybody* wears jeans here & I *want* a job. refusing the dream its continuity" (143). The narrator refuses to uphold the walls of home; she refuses to participate in the dream of family unity and sameness with everyone pinned, fixed in her proper place. As much as possible — although, like the moths, she may not be completely free to choose, or to step outside scripts altogether — she refuses to let her body become part of the old script.

Home free

Perhaps the narrator can never be free of home, can never be "home free" (170). Perhaps there is no *ur*-mother to get back to, no self before language, no mother without home, no home without walls. In *Ghost Works* the scripts, the structures of language, are always already there. But it may be that these structures are not all bad: "without narrative," Marlatt writes, "how can we see where we're going?" (131). If she cannot escape the structures of language, colonialism, home, she can rewrite them: "so as not to be lost," she notes, "invent" (131), "narrative is a strategy for survival" (184). She may be able to get to "the limit of the old story, its ruined circle" of family sacrifice, family fixing, family walls — the structures of home that repress and exclude. Like the homeopathic pills that cure because they are doses of the disease itself (155), the word "home" can be made to work against itself, breaking down its own structures, breaking down the walls that produce the dis-ease. It may be possible to reclaim or reinvent that which

was subversive in her [mother's]: imagination, that *mad boarder in the house of the mind, which alone can prevent a house from being built on safe, practical & boring foundations* (Sagan). that winged thing that flies off the handle, leaps out the window... (176)

By reinventing "home," by refusing "to keep to the house [she] was meant to inherit," by breaking her word and with it, the old words, the old order (115-16), she may be able to "speak what isn't spoken, even with all the words" (182). In ghost writings that cross borders and investigate places, Marlatt can begin to "probe the house of the self, haunting its

narrow construction, breaking down its oh-so-edified walls" (viii). She can begin to rewrite home and with it her mother, her self, and her world.

NOTES

¹ The three travel writings are *Zócalo* (Toronto: Coach House, 1977); "In the Month of Hungry Ghosts," *Capilano Review* 16-17 (1979): 45-95; and *How Hug a Stone* (Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1983). I would like to thank Shirley Neuman for her incisive comments on an earlier version of this paper, and John C. Ball, and Linda Warley for helpful editorial suggestions. Partial funding for this paper was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

² See also Carr, Clark, Dragland, Knutson, Lane, and Tostevin, for example.

³ Minnie Bruce Pratt's account appears in Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (New York: Long Haul, 1984), 11-63. For an excellent survey of recent postcolonial and feminist theorizing concerning the concept of "home," see George, particularly Chapter One. Like Martin and Mohanty, whose work she cites, George suggests that "the basic organizing principle around which the notion of the 'home' is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. Home is a way of establishing difference. Homes and home-countries are exclusive" (2). According to George, "homes are not neutral places. Imagining a home is as political an act as is imagining a nation" (6).

⁴ According to Banting, Carr makes this point in an unpublished paper entitled "The Western Woman and 'the Colonial Empire of the mind': (Re)constructing the Memsahib as (M)other in Daphne Marlatt's 'In the Month of Hungry Ghosts'" (1992). George emphasizes the authority and power available to white British women in colonial situations. What was defined as mere "house-keeping" in England, for example, was recognized as an important contribution to the imperial cause in the colonies: the memsahib was setting up a British home in Empire (39-41). Noting that the term "memsahib" literally means "madame boss," George writes: "the English woman's challenge, her duty even, is to keep this strange and unmanageable territory under control. Her triumph is to replicate the empire on a domestic scale — a benevolent, much supervised terrain where discipline and punishment is meted out with an unwavering hand" (50).

⁵ See Moyes's article for an interesting and useful discussion of "Freud's haunted house" in *How Hug a Stone*. For Moyes, Freud's analysis of the *uncanny* provides a connection between the familiar and unfamiliar, the *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, the "home-like" and the "un-home-like" that sheds light on what Moyes calls "home-sickness," the longing for home in Marlatt's text (211-14).

⁶ In a 1979 interview, Marlatt says that Vancouver "is the only place that I feel I really belong; this is the only city on the continent that feels like home" (Bowering 32).

⁷ For a different reading of this passage, see Moyes 207.

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