WRITING RELATIONS Lee Maracle and a Model of Responsibility

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses how Lee Maracle's writing enacts a critique of the cultural biases that linger within mainstream feminist discourses. It argues that Maracle's texts offer an alternative model of responsible relational positioning necessary for the formation of a solidarity of differences, a space of inclusion theorized by François Lionnet as one of *metissage*.

The introduction questions the relevance of contemporary feminist theories to Native women's writing, and asks whether these theories privilege traditional scholarly approaches. The first chapter explores the climate of debates surrounding the essentialism and appropriation of Native women's writing, and introduces concepts of relational positioning and responsibility integral to Maracle's interruption of hegemonic systems of representation. Chapter two looks at I Am Woman as a text that identifies how historical, cultural and political contexts inform one's subject position. This chapter begins a discussion of how Maracle's autobiographical writing subverts traditional autobiographical tenets of unified identity, truth, and experience. Chapter three interprets the stories of Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories as articulating the various relations, or communities, that inform Maracle's subject positions and discusses the agency achieved through negotiations of communitarian responsibilities. The fourth chapter considers how Ravensong draws together ideas of relational positioning, responsibility, agency, and solidarity explored in Maracle's previous texts. The conclusion offers a brief summary, as well as some thoughts on my own position within this study of Maracle's work.

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Contents

# Acknowledgements

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## Introduction "The Calling Forth of Voices"

I speak in a language of words
formed of the actions of the past
words that become the sharing
the collective knowing
the links that become a people
the dreaming that becomes a history
the calling forth of voices

Jeannette Armstrong, "Threads Of Old Memory," Breath Tracks, 59

For at least two decades, Native Canadian women have been at the political forefront of the disruption of white representations of Native people. Métis writer Maria Campbell says that "writing from Native women has always been very exciting, right from the beginning, because that's where the political writing, and the really analytical writing, is" (Interview with Hartmut Lutz 48). The hybridity of their positions as writers, women, and women of color informs a critique that extends to racist and classist practices of mainstream feminisms, sexism within Native communities, and the cultural biases of the mainstream publishing industry. As women, however, their concerns have often been appropriated as part of the jurisdiction of white feminist movements. In fact, Native women have been approached, in many instances, as a feminist project or problem to be solved. And in their attempts to address this "problem," mainstream feminisms hint at their bourgeois origins.

It may be useful, at this early stage, to clarify my use of the phrase "mainstream feminisms." I use it to describe movements that have access to and make use of traditional modes of scholarship and channels of dissemination, the majority of which arise out of Western academic institutions. As a result, mainstream feminist movements are largely (but not, of course, solely) Anglo-

American, middle class, and heterosexual. The cultural biases that accompany membership in these privileged groups permeate a feminist tradition in which "the notion of gender has been abstracted into a universal category to meet the needs of a select few women" (Julia Emberley 86). Julia Emberley adds that even as the cry for equality issues from within the ranks of white middle-class women's movements, "class elitism and racial superiority are suppressed as the social factors which confer a relative privilege on this particular group of women" (86).

It would be an oversight not to recognize that a growing awareness among feminist writers of the complicated and insidious natures of oppression and privilege has prompted many feminists to question feminism's "belief in its own identity" (Trinh T. Minh-ha 96). In drawing attention to cultural biases, however, there is a tendency among mainstream writers to neglect the privileging of academic writing over that which does not conform to established modes of scholarship. Cheryl Johnson-Odim, for example, argues for the inclusion of "Third World" women's voices in feminist critical debates, yet seems to want to locate this process on the established ground of the academic mainstream. She suggests that to avoid ghettoization within the feminist movement, "Third World women must articulate needs through the crucial process of constructing a body of relevant feminist theory, which goes beyond mere criticism of First World women" (324). Although Johnson-Odim acknowledges the importance of cultural differences among women, she hints at a preferred means of expression of these differences.

Johnson-Odim's argument raises some important questions. First, she implies that the way in which "Third World" women have been expressing themselves up to this point has been inadequate, as it has not warranted designation as "relevant feminist theory." We must ask, of course, to whom this theory is relevant, and who will decide upon its degree of relevance. Here, the phrase "feminist theory" takes on the look of a closed book, a finished story to which no

revisions are sought But is there a particular way to be a feminist? Is there only one way to do theory? Secondly, Johnson-Odim's article implies that neither feminism nor theory involves "*mere* criticism of First World women " The subtle suggestion here is that it is preferable to compromise critical expression in favor of a less aggressive emphasis on "the things we have in common as women" (326)

The hierarchal ranking of worlds is itself problematic As Trinh T Minh-ha tells us, the derogative connotations attached to the inhabitants of the "Third World," exist "not so much because of the hierarchical, first, second, third order implied, as some invariably repeat, but because of the growing threat 'Third World' consistently presents to the Western bloc the last few decades" (98) [1] The threat to mainstream feminisms posed by the writing of many "Third World" (or "Fourth World," where Native peoples are said to reside[2] ) women lies in its challenges to the foundations of the story feminism has written about itself, for it is a story written from within a historical and scholarly tradition grounded in Western ideals of unity and progress

To assert that the prejudices inherent to this tradition linger in feminist writing is troubling, for it suggests feminism's collusion with a history that has traditionally excluded the experiences of women But it is important to recognize the source of this discomfort Feminist history, like the conventional history it has sought to revise, is an emotional investment And for feminists, who seek to establish an identity apart from that ascribed to women by patriarchy, the charge of exclusionary rhetoric hits a particularly sensitive nerve We are "after all, used to being the oppressed, not the oppressor" (Jeanne Perreault, "White Feminist Guilt"

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[1] Trinh writes that this terminology arose out of efforts by the Western bourgeoisie "to designate what was known as "the savages" before the Independences 'Third World' commonly refers to those states in Africa, Asia and Latin America which called themselves 'non-aligned' affiliated with neither the Western (capitalist) nor the Eastern (communist) power blocs" (98)

[2] This "Fourth World" is conceptualized by George Manuel and Michael Poslums in The Fourth World An Indian Reality (Toronto Collier-Macmillan, 1974)

226). For this reason, the inclusion of Native women's voices in feminist discourses has proven to be a complex and often emotionally wrenching process. Johnson-Odim's text is only one (and one fairly moderate) example of a brand of feminist writing that demonstrates a desire to assimilate the writing of women of color into the feminist mainstream even as it professes to acknowledge difference among women. As Trinh indicates, such feminist discourse is still a "conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them'" (67).

Writing by Native women has been crucial to a reevaluation of feminist discourses, and has contributed to a body of work that turns its attention toward an emphasis on difference: the diversity of the voices of gendered subjects positioned within specific contexts of race, class, and sexual orientation. And as Trinh has shown, this questioning of identity extends even into the sovereign realm of the individual, fragmenting the autonomous I of liberal humanist discourse into a subject "understood as multiple presence . . . not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face" (94). It goes without saying that the absence of an Archimedean point from which to compile composite theoretical sketches of a subject's "true face" has posed problems for traditional critical endeavors; for how are we who operate within the mainstream to approach difference without falling into the exclusionary traps of appropriation and/or essentialism? And if we, as women, concentrate on affirming our differences, how is it possible to construct a space of inclusion in which dialogue can occur?

It is from within this context of reevaluation that I undertake a study of Lee Maracle's writing. Since the 1975 publication of her autobiographical novel Bobbie Lee: Indian Rebel, Maracle has been an important contributor to the growing body of creative and critical writing by Native Canadian women. But like many other Native artists and theorists, her work remains strangely underrepresented within the

metanarrative of Canadian criticism. Particularly striking is the absence of close critical readings of her work among feminist postcolonial critics and theorists of feminist identity and autobiography. Critics such as Margery Fee, Barbara Godard, Agnes Grant and Jennifer Kelly have employed Maracle's writing in an effort to characterize features of Native Canadian women's writing in general.[3] But while Maracle's work, along with that of other Native Canadian women, is used to verify existing feminist theories of Native writing, there has been little study of its theoretical and critical implications.

Maracle's work focuses on the act of writing the self: the creation of personal and cultural narratives. In doing so, it challenges traditional Euro-American concepts of history, identity and the writing act, and reveals the prejudices inherent to them. The autobiographical foundation of Maracle's writing reclaims the first-person position denied to colonized peoples. The hybridity of her texts -- their conflation of traditional genres of theory, fiction, poetry and autobiography -- refuses to essentialize this I as belonging to a particular site or means of expression. Her examination of her hybrid position as a Native person, a woman, and a writer helps to explode myths of objective and cohesive identity, and turns the spotlight on the subjectivity of narrative acts. In doing so, she addresses the relevance of traditional feminist critical approaches to Native women's writing, new ways of approaching theory, and the creation of an inclusive writing atmosphere that refuses to delimit centers and margins.

This study focuses on Maracle's construction of a model of a hybrid writing self situated in the contexts of its various communities, a self that addresses its responsibilities to these communities. This responsible relational self is aware of how her subject position is informed by the communities she inhabits, and is

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[3] A special issue of Canadian Literature, titled Native Writers and Canadian Writing and edited by W. H. New, contains essays by Fee, Godard, and Grant.

conscious of the fact that her writing act involves a negotiation of the influences of these communities. With this understanding, she is better able to recognize, in turn, the effect her writing has on her communities. The responsibility of the subject lies in developing this awareness, but it also entails that she acknowledge the value of challenges to her understanding of her subject position. Maracle's writing demonstrates that the development of a responsible relational subject position is integral to the formation of a discursive space that considers the expression of differences as a valuable point of critical redeparture. One of the most exciting features of her work is her stategy of "coming to theory" through story.[4] In undertaking close readings of Maracle's writing in the context of contemporary feminist theories of identity, autobiography, and subject positioning, I hope to show how her disruptions of both the content and form of contemporary discourses add to them in a way that, as Homi K. Bhabha writes, does not "add up," "but may disturb the calculation" (305).

The first chapter provides a theoretical framework in which to consider the critical implications of Maracle's writing. It explores some features of contemporary feminist theories of Native women's writing, as well as Native women's criticisms of these theories. It also takes a closer look at concepts of the relational self and responsibility, and discusses how Maracle's work employs these ideas toward the formation of an inclusive atmosphere of *métissage*. The second chapter considers how I Am Woman uses strategies of autobiography to articulate the components of the relational self and enact a critique of hegemonic systems. It reveals how Maracle's text questions traditional autobiographical notions of cohesive identity, and situates the text within the emerging tradition of women's resistance autobiographies and their deconstructions of ideological "homes." The third chapter presents Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories as a fully realized autobiography of

[4] See Maracle's essay "Oratory: Coming to Theory," Essays on Canadian Writing 54 (1994): 7-11.

the responsible relational self. It looks at five stories: "Bertha," "Maggie," "Who's Political Here?," "Eunice," and "Sojourner's Truth." As I argue, these stories tease apart Maracle's "relations," or components of her relational self, in order to show how, together, they inform her subject position. In Sojourner's Truth, Maracle continues to emphasize the importance of responsibility to individual and group identity. The stories demonstrate that individual agency is realized within the community, and identify the paralysis that accompanies isolation. Chapter four looks at how Ravensong coalesces the "relations" and responsibilities of the self and sets them to work in the person of its protagonist, Stacey. The chapter traces Stacey's process of self construction: how she gradually positions herself within her communities, begins to address her responsibilities to them, and, in doing so, recognizes her calling as an agent of change.

Although I do not intend, in this study, to characterize Maracle's work as indicative of all writing by Native women, I realize that my use of certain interpretive and critical methodologies within an academic setting entails a certain degree of complicity with the very systems Maracle questions. Emberley writes that "the deployment of a rhetoric of resistance on the part of the investigating subject to the hegemonic destabilizations of colonialism often amounts to an elitist lament for the silence of the 'indigenous voices of the oppressed'" (72). But given this, I also take to heart Jeanne Perreault's suspicion that "the white writer's self-conscious concerns are not the most important thing" ("Touch the Matrix" 289). Maracle's work shows that what is important is to accept the responsibility to question stories of ourselves, and to remain accountable for the forms this questioning takes. Ultimately, those who opt for silence, as Maracle writes, "are not deserting anyone but themselves" ("Ramparts Hanging in the Air" 171).

# 1 The Self in Relation: Identity in Context

All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives.

Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, 204

I

Lee Maracle says that Native women's criticisms of white feminism are largely perceived as expressions of resentment aimed at white culture -- texts of "pain and rage" ("an infinite number of pathways to the centre of the circle" 169). While Maracle's own writing acknowledges the existence and validity of these emotions, she maintains that to focus on the anger and pain of Native women's writing overlooks its constructive power and devotion to critical thinking (169). But despite their communities' longstanding commitment to cultural critique, Native women continue to be listed as "missing women" who must be "brought into feminist research" (Jane Roland Martin 648). Even writers who, like Ann Russo, believe that feminism needs to actively "address the interconnections and intricacies of racism, classism and imperialism" (304) and "work with women of color as peers" to "build common grounds" (310), seem unsure as to where, or how, these common grounds are to be constructed.

Maracle's writing works toward the creation of an inclusive discursive space. It offers a critical model of relational positioning and social responsibility that provides an alternative to mainstream feminist discourses by revising traditional conceptions of creative and critical practice. Her work poses a specific challenge to a notion of authorial objectivity characterized by Donna Haraway as "a story that loses track of its mediations just where someone might be held responsible

for something . . . a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere" (187-88). In contrast, Maracle locates herself, as a writing subject, in relation to her historical, cultural and communitarian contexts. Her negotiations of her hybrid subject position as a writer, Native woman, and feminist foreground an awareness of her responsibilities to these intersecting communities: responsibilities that apply to both the product and process of writing. This political ethic of responsibility is at odds with the artistic and scholarly ideal of objectivity, in which "knowledge," "imagination," and "freedom" are perceived as rights, and are considered to be disassociated from the acknowledgment of privilege. Indeed, "freedom of expression" has become a volatile catch phrase in the debates over white writers' appropriation of Native cultures.

But as Maracle's texts show, a politics of responsibility opens more doors than it closes: within her narrative framework of the relational subject are possibilities for the intersection of communities of women and the opportunity for discussion within these spaces of hybridity and diversity. For example, in Ravensong, Stacey's concerns as a young woman intersect with those of Polly, a classmate from "white town." Stacey comes to realize, however, that she and her white contemporaries are unable to honestly or adequately understand each other's cultural communities despite their shared concerns. Part of the responsibility of writers within intersecting spaces, then, is to acknowledge those aspects of communities that do not intersect. This strategy, of course, runs counter to traditional theoretical discourse which, in an orientalist fashion, sees itself as bound

to "discover," and so lay claim to, all aspects of the object/subject under study [5]

Recognition of and respect for the inaccessibility of certain elements of other cultures is crucial to maintaining the even playing field of intersecting spaces Françoise Lionnet writes that "ambiguities allow gendered subjects to negotiate a space within the world's dominant cultures in which the 'secretive and multiple manifestations of Diversity' . . . will not be anticipated, accommodated, and eventually neutralized" (8) The intersecting "writerly" space of white and Native women is not an homogenized one where differences are absorbed into a common goal, nor is it a hierarchical place where white feminists may acquire "a more intimate knowledge of the oppressed" (Emberley 98) Rather, Lionnet theorizes the possibilities of an inclusive space through the concept of "*métissage*" a "site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages" (6) Maracle cautions that Canada's racist history will make the pursuit of solidarity a difficult process "A talk, an intimate talk, between an ex-racist and an ex-victim of racism," she writes, "is not apt to be pretty" (I Am Woman 182)

The subjects Maracle tackles are certainly not pretty In the texts I will consider -- I Am Woman, Sojourner's Truth and other stories, and Ravensong -- she writes of the violence born of sexism, racism and poverty But the critical power of her writing lies in its transformative potential Her stories' focus on the responsibilities of the individual to her various communities stimulates an awareness of context in the reader For the white reader, this awareness means

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5 The precepts and practices of orientalist scholarship are the subject of Edward Said's groundbreaking study Orientalism (New York Vintage Books, 1979) Said writes that, in contrast to the "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike" Oriental, "the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal " Said points out that "[k]nowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world . . . "[T]he Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual) The point is that in each of these cases the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks" (40)

recognizing complicity in and responsibility for the oppressive systems Maracle describes. The critical force of an aware positioning is described in Gloria Anzaldua's characterization of "*la mestiza*." Like *métissage*, *la mestiza* is "a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another" ("*La conciencia de la mestiza*" 377). Although at times a source of great pain, Anzaldua writes, "its [*la mestiza*'s] energy comes from a continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (379).

II

In order to set the stage for a discussion of the responsible relational subject and its contribution to *métissage*, I will explore some of the problems raised by feminist theories of Native women's literary production. I will also outline some current efforts to devise approaches to this writing that neither essentialize nor appropriate it. Essentialism is a practice that, for the sake of critical convenience, denies individualities and negates the articulation of differences between communities, and within them. Appropriative strategies are more difficult to identify, perhaps because discussions of appropriation inevitably wander onto the volatile ground of censorship debates. Native Canadian women, in particular, have focused on the appropriation of Native stories by Canadian writers. Appropriation may take the form of white portrayals of Native characters, white writers' adoption of Native personas, and their use of Native imagery and storytelling techniques. In feminist critical and theoretical writing, appropriation may take place in discussions of how Native women's writing can best be used to further existing feminist goals.[6]

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6 Anne Cameron's book Daughters of Copper Woman, a collection of stories told to her by elder Vancouver Island Native women, prompted this response from Ojibway writer Lenore Keeshig-Tobias. "I don't like, nor do I think it's right, how she has used these stories to give credence to her white feminist politics. These stories were not created for feminists at all" ("interview" 80). And although Cameron has stated that the book "is not *my* work, it is not a collection of *my* stories" (69), Marie Annharte Baker agrees with Keeshig-Tobias that the stories are "alter[ed] ... to fit a feminist agenda" ("Dis Mischief" 209).

The methodological tradition of mainstream critics of Native women's writing has tended to subsume the efforts of individuals into the genre of Native Woman. This critically-defined and homogenized speaking position is expressed by Bhabha as the perception of "the many as one", "that progressive metaphor of social cohesion . . . shared by organic theories of the holism of culture and community, and by theorists who treat gender, class or race as radically 'expressive' social totalities" (294). Placed in opposition to the heterogeneous discourse of the mainstream, this essentialized Other becomes an archeological site in which the theoretical digging tools of writers from various disciplines may be exercised. More often than not, these excavations "discover" Native women as teachers or spiritual mothers for white women whose own healing capabilities are felt (rightly or not) to have been negated through experiences with oppression.

A classic example of such an archeological endeavor is Barbara Godard's essay "Talking About Ourselves: The Literary Productions of Native Women of Canada," in which she attempts to use the oral narratives of Native women to "redefine the woman's text." "By showing how the oral text may be considered as literature," she writes, "I hope to provide arguments supporting the inclusion of many of Native women's cultural productions into the canon" (49). Godard recreates both the oral narratives offered to her and the contexts in which they were offered, providing evaluative remarks on the competence of the storyteller and the significance of the story. Her Native subjects are positioned in the role of "native informant[s]" (Spivak, "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" 229), praised as "culture brokers" who "provid[e] a window into the sacred and mak[e] sense out of the things that happen to us in our daily lives" (90-91).

Truly, this essay emerges as an exercise in "talking about ourselves," as it is more concerned with western spiritual deficiences than the literary and critical implications of the narratives in question. This appropriative strategy uses Native

women's narratives to establish individual authors as tokens; each is represented as the "voice of her people." As tokens, Native women become commodities for exchange. The critical use of Native women or culture comes to signify, for the user, a liberal understanding of the marginalization of Native women. For the token, it is a gracious inclusion into the feminist fold. As Emberley writes:

> There is an implied narrative in which 'marginal' experience becomes abstracted into a critical theory, in which the spectacle of marginality gains a certain currency in commodity exchange and is then returned to the Native, the marginal, the ethnic, as a legitimation of value: you are valuable precisely because of your labour as a sign. (164)

As signs, Native women have been assigned symbolic value as passive presences that affirm their value according to their ability to fulfil functional roles constructed by the dominant ideological apparatus.

Consequently, representations of Native women in the narratives of this apparatus tend to reaffirm the value of their assigned roles. In these stories, the image of Native Woman, the signifier, "does not lead back to the implied signified but rather to other images" (Goldie 68). These other images, as Margery Fee points out, are most often focused on "the identity quest of the bourgeois individual" (17). This quest necessitates, particularly in the resolution of Canadian national identity, the participation of a "spirit guide" or shaman.[7] Beth Brant indicates that Native women, as women, are particularly vulnerable to the dualistic construction of the female as either the sterile spiritual guide or the fallen woman, the "drunk and the slut and all these things that we've been called as squaw." But she also points out that often, white culture's recognition of the historical fact of its victimization of Native

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[7] Fee identifies nationalism as the predominant impetus for the use of Native characters in English-Canadian fiction (17). She argues that in addition to representing a return to the land that is comforting to Canadians facing "the disquieting potential of the twentieth century," reference to that which is Native assuages a fear that "if we don't believe in Indians, we will have to become Americans" (30).

peoples tends to perpetuate a "Native as victim" motif that solidifies the iconography of the Native as passive symbol, thereby negating the active participation of Native voices that do not reflect their symbolic roles (59).

As native (or Native) informants, Native women have traditionally been characterized as inhabiting that voiceless realm where objectified subjects await interpretation. However, Native women have long spoken out against the appropriative strategies of a mainstream that views Native culture as a symbolic field from which to draw. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias identifies the Canadian literary mainstream as having assumed a missionary role in regards to Native Canadian literature:

> Like their predecessors, they now know best how to present the Native image, the Native perspective, never dreaming, of course, that it is really their own perspective. And so a few canoes, beads, beaver ponds, and a buffalo or two are used to prop up the whore, the drunkard or the shaman. These romantic clichés and stereotypes, however, serve only to illustrate how they, the outsiders, see or want to see Native peoples. ("The Magic of Others" 174)

Keeshig-Tobias denounces not only the white re-telling of Native stories, but also the assumption of Native voices, the portrayal of Native characters, and the use of Native metaphors as censorship of Native voices for "the sake of the great white imagination" (174).

This calling to task of white writers' use of one of the hallmarks of Canadian literature has stimulated a backlash, particularly amongst feminist writers and critics. There are those who decry Keeshig-Tobias' admonishment as an infringment on the fundamental right of the artist to freedom of the imagination. Margaret Atwood acknowledges that writing about a group is done best from within it. She says that not only are writers outside of it prone to a well-meaning liberal tendency to

sentimentalize, and so misrepresent, its culture, but they also make themselves vulnerable to charges of sexism and racism (23). But because women are still "heavily socialized to please" (25), Atwood argues that Native women's challenge to white women to "move over" (Maracle, "Native Myths" 185) compromises women's hard-won creative rights by promoting guilt and a fear of being chastised. "The fear that dares not speak its name, for some women these days, is a fear of other women. But you aren't supposed to talk about that. If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. . . . Does it make sense to silence women in the name of Woman?" (25). Among other things, this rhetorical question is a plea for solidarity. It also, however, exhibits a common tendency, through an *ad absurdum* logic, to polarize and trivialize appropriation of voice debates into irreconcilable divisions of all or nothing. This is not only a trap set and sprung by creative writers who feel that their hands are being smacked by doctrines of political correctness, but also one that has divided feminist theorists.

Daiva Stasiulis questions the validity of writing that positions itself within the context of a particular culture, suggesting that such positioning sets up cultural filiation as a criterion for determining the value of writing. She ascribes her own refusal to position her writing to her belief that "my argument must be judged on its own merits, rather than on the basis of my skin colour, ancestry, or any aspect of my multi-faceted social identity" (36). Stasiulis correctly identifies the danger in evaluating writing solely on the basis, for example, of its "Nativeness", for this practice promotes the sort of romantic essentialism to which Godard's essay falls victim. She does not realize, however, that this sort of credentialism is not a new phenomenon, but has traditionally operated as the foundation for construction of the literary canon. Works have gained admission to this privileged coterie precisely because of their generation from within the ranks of white male privilege. The attempt to redress such inequality simply by affirming the supposed existence of a

culturally value-free writing zone professes a belief in the existence, and value, of objective criteria that will independently determine what is good writing

When considering a writing life out from under the protection of this umbrella of objectivity, Stasiulis succumbs to the fallacy of either/or A politics that values the positioning of the writing subject would, she writes, confine white writers "to writing only about themselves" and "consign [them] to a whitewashed image of Canadian society, thus perpetuating a well-established tradition of ethnocentric and Eurocentric fiction-writing" (47-48) Oddly, this seems to suggest that if the white mainstream does not relate Native stories, nor will Native people And under this dualistic model, when they do write, Native women risk being relegated to the position of "otherness machines, with the manufacture of alterity as [their] primary role" (Appiah 35) But this slave/master relationship is only possible if the power imbalance and resulting definitive stereotypes of Native women's experience continue to be tolerated, and if that experience continues to be treated solely as an object of study Native women's status as "otherness machines" smacks of what Trinh calls "the policy of separate development," which means "that i am tolerated in my difference as long as i conform with the established rules" (87) These rules are white rules, rules that say "don't rock the boat " As such, "separate development" is a culture-bound concept, not, as Stasiulis seems to imply, an unavoidable outcome of Native women's expressions of difference

Separate development also means, as critical neglect of Maracle's work suggests, that participation in or consideration within postcolonial feminist theory remains the preserve of mainstream critics Granted, Maracle, along with Jeannette Armstrong and Maria Campbell, have been quoted as "resist[ing] an articulation between Native women's struggle and feminism" (Emberley 98) But this should not be surprising given the exclusionary nature of traditional approaches to feminist theory that advocate an either/or approach to their concerns and leave little room

for progressive mediation. Jane Roland Martin, for example, argues that in an effort to avoid essentialism and generalization through a "regimen of [white]self-denial . . . we walked straight into the trap of false difference" (631). Roland Martin's argument rests on a vision of theory that assumes the right to homogenize its field of study -- to render it passive and static for the sake of easy theoretical maneuvering. "If categories exist that do not conceal difference," she writes, "they will be so specific as to stultify intellectual inquiry. . . . Acknowledging that whatever categories we use will mask some differences, we can decide to use ones that uncover the differences we consider most important and that *best fit our practical and theoretical purposes*" (637 emphasis mine). This suggests a belief that differences exist as a category apart from the generating subject: that they exist in the same way as do objects uncovered during archeological expeditions. Trinh cautions that such an approach (as well as, I suspect, any theoretical construct), "does not *find* things, [it] makes them. And makes them up" (141).

Roland Martin's argument seems to be predicated on the absence of a speaking subject able to articulate her own position. Indeed, it is difficult for a speaking subject to squeeze in between the oppressive dualities of Roland Martin's discourse. Roland Martin's failure to recognize the contributions of speaking subjects contributes to her perception that diversity is "an assumption of absolute difference" that dictates "no intermingling of races or classes" (648). Certainly, no such intermingling occurs in her argument. Roland Martin's construction of a silent subject of inquiry leads her to conclude that "it is at the very least perverse to deny ourselves access to knowledge of them, and quite possibly self-defeating" (647). One must question, however, the delineation of this theoretical "self." Early in her article, she laments the "chilly climate" created by assertions of difference through which "we came to judge women's scholarship by a harsher standard than the one we applied to men's" (631). Isn't part of the mandate of feminist discourse,

though, to examine more closely the implications of its theory in order to avoid generalizing and orientalist rhetoric? Roland Martin's belief in the existence of objective standards prompts her to caution that to allow every woman to function as "her own historian" puts "the writing of history into the hands of one who probably does not have the knowledge or skill or mind-set to do it well [and] encourages a kind of amateurism that we can ill afford" (641-42). Presumably, this means that "doing it well" necessitates an adherence to an established vocabulary and methodology. In addition to recognizing the disturbing connotations of theorizing a proper "mind-set," one must also question to whom the pronoun "we" refers.

Sally Haslanger observes that advocates of this sort of traditional epistemology function as "collaborator[s] in objectification" (113):

> Because we live under circumstances of social hierarchy and are aware of the consequences of this hierarchy, the ideal of assumed objectivity would instruct us to collaborate in the existing patterns of objectification: we should view and treat the subordinate as subordinate. In short, our circumstances satisfy the background conditions under which assumed objectivity renders one a collaborator. (115)

I would argue that Haslanger's theory of the collaborative nature of assumed objectivity applies equally to creative and theoretical production. The authorial imagination is traditionally seen to be capable of objectivity in its fictional representations. In both creative and critical contexts, attempts to negotiate the boundaries of objectivity or imagination have tended to solidify into a pouting dualism, with authors perceiving themselves as restricted by a political correctness that says "if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." The problems encountered in negotiating these boundaries suggest that the solution lies, at least in part, in reevaluating an approach to art that imbues the artist with a God-given

right to assumed objectivity.

Although some Native women writers have issued a "hands-off" warning to white writers regarding Native culture and its symbolism, these writers certainly cannot be characterized as advocating an atmosphere of creative and critical segregation. Much of their criticism, rather, focuses on questioning the mainstream's "right to know whatever [it] want[s] to know" (Keeshig-Tobias, "The Magic of Others" 175). It is a focus that leads to the suspicion that the unmitigated "right to know" is itself a culture-bound concept. Entailed in the reexamination of literary strongholds such as imaginative objectivity is a recognition that a particular understanding of this concept may not be universal. Keeshig-Tobias questions, for example, "why God has given the white man such a broad, all-encompassing imagination? Why draw on Native society? They show us nothing new. They make no new discoveries. They simply embellish and prop up old stereotypes" (Interview with Hartmut Lutz 79). Maracle also suggests that white writers' use of Native symbolism signals a *lack* of imagination and a dearth of "knowledge of their own" ("Native Myths" 186). After all, this material is not, strictly speaking, "imagined", it comes from somewhere. And as all stories are locatable in ideological and individual contexts, the "imaginations" that produce them cannot be exempt from critical inquiry.

Feminist efforts to destabilize male-centered tradition have (with some exceptions of course) reclaimed the center for itself and established margins wherein dwells so-called "minority" writing. Norma Alarcon writes that "the most popular subject of Anglo-American feminism is an autonomous, self-making, self-determining subject who first proceeds according to the *logic of identification* with regard to the subject of consciousness, a notion usually viewed as the purview of

man, but now claimed for woman" (357).[8] But in "Yin Chin," Maracle casts doubt on this logic when she asks: "my gawd/ do North Americans never tire/ of claiming the centre/ of the universe" (156). Native women's challenges to centered knowledges mean that they are slow to be accepted as active participants in theoretical discussions. Their participation also often clashes with the role ascribed to Native women. Approached as teachers and healers, as facilitators of white self-education, their critical contributions are viewed with suspicion.

More recently, however, the stalling point seems to be an uncertainty of how to approach Native women's writing on the part of white critics who fear the impossibility of avoiding appropriative strategies. This can indeed be a paralyzing fear, one that can result in the conclusion that "anything we do is a violation" (Hoy 25). Jeanne Perreault identifies this phenomenon as "that old demon of liberalism: white guilt" -- a feeling of abjectness created by the "emotional (not intellectual) realization that one is complicit in sustaining the illusion of white superiority" ("White Feminist Guilt" 227). As such, this guilt contributes to an "annihilation" of identity that tends, unfortunately, to manifest itself in a "resistance to knowledge" and a shamed silence prompted by the fear of saying, or being thought to say, the wrong thing (Perreault 228). Ironically, this shame stimulates a belief in the sanctity and untouchability of Native women's work that marks a return to the romanticization of their narratives and a reluctance, for fear of reprisal, to

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[8]Jane Flax observes that "[t]he suppression of [marginalized] voices seems to be a necessary condition for the (apparent) authority, coherence, and universality of our own" (640). Alarcon responds that "[t]his may account for the inability to include the voices of 'women of color' into feminist discourse, though they are not necessarily under-represented in the reading list" (360).

undertake critical consideration of their writing (231).[9] Perreault observes that from this self-imposed distance arises "a grossly exaggerated sense of the absoluteness of power relations" (234-35) -- precisely the trap Roland Martin warns about. Roland Martin's solution constitutes a retreat from the problem into the safety of traditional methodologies, a position that leans toward the understanding of difference as division (Trinh 82). However, it is possible to reformulate the feminist identity crisis as an opportunity for new critical departures.

Dionne Brand suggests that complicity in cultural appropriation should be acknowledged as a critical category rather than as a personal accusation:

> [I]t investigates the positionings of the author within/without the text, and within the interaction of the text with colonial discourse, sexist discourse, racial discourse, etc., it challenges the author's anonymity, it questions the author's "interests" in the text; it proposes that the author is not innocent of these relations . . . and it locates the production of the text and the production of the author within practices of gendering, race(ing), class subordination, colonial subjugation, etc. . . . (18)

Taking responsibility for literary production does not demand that writers who consider the incorporation of elements of other cultures intrinsic to their story not do so because they are told not to by the cultures in question. It does demand, however, an accountability for that decision that moves beyond a fear of being chastised or a defensive reaction to "being publicly denounced" (Roland Martin 650), and closer to the realization that "a story is *not* just a story" (Trinh 133).

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[9] Keeshig-Tobias cautions against imbuing Native writing with this sanctity when she comments: "I think one of the most important things I want people to know is that just because something is 'Indian' or Native, doesn't mean it's good" (Interview with Hartmut Lutz 83). Métis writer Emma LaRocque speaks of the necessity of dialogue between white and Native Canadians, and asserts the right of Native people to "engage in a discussion about what this country is about. What Canadian is about, that we are as much a part of this Canadian culture" (196). It must be realized, however, that not all Native women consider themselves, or even want to be, a part of "Canadian culture" as it now exists.

As Maracle writes: "Use whatever you like to ground your story, intellectual Canada, but be honest. It is your story -- it is not about me" ("Native Myths" 186).

III

I have attempted, in the preceding section, to give some idea of the current climate of debates surrounding the relationship of Native women's writing to feminist theory. As later chapters will look at Maracle's texts to show how they offer a model of writing that contributes to a less exclusive vision of theory, I will, in this section, introduce concepts intregal to her development of this model: the positioning of the relational self and the responsibility of this self to its "relations," or communities. I will also briefly introduce some ways in which these ideas are set to work in Maracle's contributions to *métissage*.

Emberley writes that anti-racist work necessitates not only an emotional and intellectual commitment to a liberal anti-racist ideal, but, "more importantly, means taking a political position from which to argue that Native women's writings constitute a significant thread in the weaving and unweaving of our worlds" (25). This "political position" entails an equal commitment to scrutinizing the compulsion to essentialize the position of Native women. It does not require that white women silence themselves. Rather, it means cultivating a dialogic space wherein the active participation of all voices is acknowledged.

Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey theorize the agent of critique within this space as the "relational self." In this concept lies relief from the "Cartesian anxiety" of feminist theorists who, like Roland Martin, fear that relinquishing critical objectivity will plummet the critic headlong into the paralysis of total relativism (Frazer and Lacey 138).

> The notion of the relational self, in contrast to both atomistic and inter-subjective selves, nicely captures our empirical and logical interdependence and the centrality to our identity of our relations

> with others and with practices and institutions, whilst retaining an idea of human uniqueness and discreteness as central to our sense of ourselves. It entails the collapse of any self/other or individual/community dichotomy without abandoning the idea of genuine agency and subjectivity. (178)

Autonomy still exists for the relational self, although the definition of it is changed. For the relational subject, autonomy is served by an awareness of context that facilitates informed decisions regarding the most effective courses of action. In contrast, the equation of autonomy with the supposed ability to transcend circumstances binds the subject within a tradition that reserves the right to decide which ideals will be touted as objective ones, how these objectives are best expressed, and even who is qualified to express them. Because the relational self operates within the intersecting spaces of a number of communities, it is not restricted by a communitarian determinism in which interpretations are predestined by participation in a particular community. Instead, it "opens political theory to the conceptual framework of *practice*, which captures the ways which agents both act within and upon social structures" (Frazer and Lacey 180). As a critical subject, the relational self participates in a collective practice wherein the exchange of the multiple experiences generated by the juxtaposition of communities promotes new interpretations that alter the concepts and frameworks through which social reality is perceived (208). A politics of responsibility helps to ensure that all individuals have access to this collective practice, and that the critical insights generated from within a range of experiences are equally valued.

The responsibility of the relational self differs from the "dominant global denomination of responsibility" (Spivak, "Responsibility" 52). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes that responsibility is assumed as a guise for a paternal ethic of "Development," according to which "the rich nations collectively bear the

call of the ethical and collect to help the poor nations" (52). One may see traces of the impulse to "Development" and its manipulation of "elaborate and visible structures of public consultation" in feminist scholarship that focuses on "helping" Native women by devising strategies that would bring them into the scholarly mainstream. Spivak points out that scholarship itself operates according to an " ideal of academic responsibility" (19). She characterizes this ideal as a violent attempt "to control the turbulent flow of new and old thought," and a means whereby "the violence of Reason itself, drive[s] the continually differentiating text-tile of meanings into the shortest route to Truth" (54).

The responsible relational self seeks to undermine the dictatorship of objective Reason and Truth by focusing instead on the divergent truths of situated subjects. But this focus does not, as Spivak argues, entail "confessional descriptions" of subject positions. Rather, "[t]he burden is to look at the structure of the subject that produces the theory ("A response to 'The difference within'" 209). A responsible positioning recognizes the influence of various cultural contexts on authorial intentions, and on the forms these intentions take. "[We] carry the responsibility of intending," Spivak writes, "even as [we] speak" (216). This statement echoes Jeannette Armstrong's assertion that "everytime we speak we have [a] responsibility. Everything we say affects someone, someone is hearing it, someone is understanding it, someone is going to take it and it becomes memory" (29).

Maracle's work demonstrates that responsibility entails a recognition of context. Such an awareness precludes the characterization and appropriation of others' experiences by an "objective" critical persona that seeks to place itself outside all communities in order to try to define them. Political engagement, both in historical and contemporary contexts, is one of the major features of Maracle's writing. Hers is an engagement with various hybrid spaces that stimulates

recognition of the political nature of the product and process of writing. Maracle's politic articulates her responsibilities to the cultural, artistic and domestic communities in which her writing takes place. She does not approach the politicization of these communities in isolation. Instead, she demonstrates how they intersect with each other, and addresses the political implications of their intersections by locating her discourse precisely within the spaces produced by their overlap.

The autobiographical nature of much of her work also problematizes the separation of Maracle as author from the characters she authors. Consequently, it is difficult to undertake a discussion of her subject position apart from a discussion of the subjects she creates within her texts. It is possible to say, however, that Maracle's work, in the contexts of both the act of writing and what is written, exists as an agent of interruption within the intersecting spaces of her communities. The possibility of insular communal narratives is constantly disrupted by intrusions from other communities, and genres interrupt each other constantly. It is from within this space of interruption and ambiguity that Maracle's theory of responsibility emerges as a means to agency and critical purchase. Weaving its way through her work, it recognizes those alternate viewpoints brought to light by the inevitability of interruption, and provides a means for a critique of her contexts.

In I Am Woman, Maracle's responsibility to her Native community is her impetus for questioning the exclusivity of the "white women's movement" (21). However, her burgeoning feeling of responsibility to address feminist concerns nevertheless inspires her to undertake a similar questioning of the sexism that informs, among other things, Native men's treatment of Native women. Similarly, in Ravensong, Stacey engages in an ongoing critique of her Native culture, and that of "white town," from within the space in which these communities intersect by constantly juxtaposing their philosophies. The novel demonstrates that intersecting

spaces are where responsibilities to varying communities clash to generate new meanings and reexaminations of those established cultural institutions previously accepted as givens.

The intense hybridity of Maracle's writing would seem to position the relational critical subject within Bhabha's formulation of liminal spaces. Bhabha describes hybridity in "minority" discourse as an articulation of "the perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life, it is an instance of iteration . . . through which all forms of cultural meaning are open to translation because their enunciation resists totalization" (314). This ability to interrupt places hybrid narratives in "that place of the 'meanwhile' . . . that speaks betwixt times and places" (309). "In-betweenness" is a useful way in which to visualize how the interruptive narratives generated by a focus on relational patterns can create spaces that avoid dualistic constructions. However, "in-betweenness" also implies the existence of a definable space of separation between communities; to be in-between is to be neither in one place nor the other. Maracle identifies the peril of being caught in-between as that of isolation. For example, the protagonist of "Bertha," caught between traditional Native and white colonial cultures, is paralysed, and unable to act in either. In contrast, Maracle advocates a position that occupies the space in which communities overlap.

The ambiguity that arises from efforts to stake out Maracle's relational speaking position becomes important when attempting to visualize a context for it that does not collapse into dualisms of inclusion or exclusion, assumed objectivity or rampant relativism. Lionnet's discussion of *métissage* brings us closer to what this context looks like.[10]

I rely on *métissage* as an aesthetic concept to illustrate the

[10] It is interesting that the English language has no word for *créole* or *métis*, an absence Lionnet attributes to an Anglo-American prejudice against hybridization (14).

> relationship between historical context and individual circumstances, the sociocultural construction of race and gender and traditional genre theory, the cross-cultural linguistic mechanisms that allow a writer to generate polysemic meanings from deceptively simple or seemingly linear narrative techniques (29)

Certainly, the intersection of historical and contemporary contexts applies to a novel such as Ravensong. Its young protagonist finds she must write herself, as in a palimpsest, over the historical and contemporary narratives of her Native community, and also those of a white community that places different and increasing demands on her. The autobiographical voice of I Am Woman faces a different but related set of concerns, having to negotiate the demands of genre and audience as well as the expectations that, for example, feminist and Native audiences have of Native women's narratives. As Maracle writes in this book, "being a writer is getting up there and writing oneself onto everyone's blackboard" (9).

Within a space of *métissage*, the play of specificities and focus on relational patterns provide the foundation for a "project" toward a kind of solidarity that "constitute[s] different ways of talking about the same thing on a personal, racial, cultural, or textual level" (246). Lionnet's vision of solidarity recalls Emberley's image of differences "braided together so as to overcome the intolerable hierarchies of sexual and racial differences reproduced by the consolidation of an all too self-consciously upwardly mobile feminist power" (98). *Métissage* interrupts the traditional "all for one and one for all" mentality of solidarity to recast it very loosely as an activity undertaken for the common purpose of political action (Lionnet 6).

Maracle's short story "Who's Political Here?" challenges the traditional ideal of solidarity. Its protagonist, committed to her domestic responsibilities, is chastised for her supposed lack of solidarity with her husband's political cronies

even as they refuse to acknowledge the importance of her work in the home. Native women writers have expressed a belief in the possibility of a more inclusive solidarity in terms of the existence of certain "universals." As Armstrong writes, "I think that when we start looking at what we are rather than at which race, what sex, what colour . . . I think we start to come to those universals . . . we can cross those cultural and racial and social . . . gaps" ("Telling It" 49). In her preface to Sojourner's Truth, Maracle writes that in her hybridization of European and Native storytelling techniques, she sought out "stories from my life, my imagination and my history that contained an element of the universal" (11) in order to spark her readers' initiative to become "architect[s] of great social transformation . . ." (13). She approaches a bit closer to a position from which to address this transformation in her reaction, as a heterosexual person, to homophobia: "[m]y sense of humanity is violated if another human being is offended . . . It has nothing to do with lofty principles of support for one's fellow human being . . . when someone speaks out against racism they are not supporting me but defending their own perfect right to be" ("Telling It" 171). A situated subject who expresses a belief in universal goals seems, at first glance, to be contradictory. But as Lionnet writes, the ambiguities present in these kinds of statements signal a commitment to praxis, to the common goal of a solidarity of differences.

The hybridity of Maracle's texts helps to place them within the inclusive space of *métissage*. And as a Métis, Maracle's individual racial history may also be seen to contribute to her inclusion in this critical context.[11] But as Emberley writes, "[t]he Metis, specifically Metis women, have lived the aberrancy of socio-symbolic dispossession that the morphologies of critical theory valorize as a textual

[11] My discussion of Maracle's Metis status was written with the misunderstanding that Maracle's father was white. But in a recent interview with Jennifer Kelly, Maracle states that her mother is Métis, and her father Salish (73). This is borne out in the early pages of Bobbie Lee. Although Maracle writes of her memories of her white "dad," she also indicates that "[o]nly Ed and my youngest brother are dad's kids" (25).

mode of intervention into the colonial ruses of power, knowledge, Truth and History" (164). To determine critical positioning by virtue of filiation, then, runs the risk of redesignating the writer as sign. To do so would acknowledge Maracle more as a living symbol of the intersection of Native and white communities than as an active subject capable of exploring her own critical position. In fact, Maracle's politics has more to do with her experiences growing up, as a Native person, in a poor urban neighborhood, than with her genetic makeup.

Maracle stresses that her responsibility as a Native woman writer to her communities stops short of convincing white colonial society of "my validity as a human being." As a woman of color, she resents being put into the position of having to "'teach,' to ' sensitize [feminists],' or to serve them in some other way" (20). Before undertaking readings of Maracle's work, it is important also to consider the responsibility of readers to texts. Spivak writes that traditionally, this was translated as the "ideal of academic responsibility . . . to give an objective account of an argument with textual demonstrations, and subsequently to evaluate it, on its own terms as well as by the standard of an impartial judgement" ("Responsibility" 19). The alternate ideal, of course, suggests the responsibility of the reader to respond to the call of the text bearing a methodology free of hegemonic preconceptions.

But as Spivak points out, "responsible" action "is undertaken in response to a call (or something that seems to us to resemble a call) that cannot be grasped as such" (23): there is no way for readers to be sure that the call they are being responsible to is actually the call put forth by the text. The focus of the reader's responsibility must shift, then, from answering what is an unknowable call to maintaining an awareness of her complicity in systems that inform her response. Operating within this awareness, the critic -- and I include myself here -- must recognize, in her action, "the risky night of non-knowledge" (Spivak 25), for concealed in this night is the possibility that the call she is answering is in fact her own.

## 2 I Am Woman: The Inward-Looking I

I speak of a history
pieced from a jigsaw of flesh
torn from dumb tongues
Under my skin
blood beats along roadways
barred with DO NOT ENTER signs,
walls of small scars
I will not return to silence
Do you hear me?

Joan Crate, "The Poetry Reading," Pale as Real Ladies, 18

I

Maracle's Bobbie Lee: Indian Rebel, first recorded as a spoken narrative and transcribed for publication in 1975, is a courageous text in its laying bare of the effects of colonization on Native people. It is also important by virtue of its existence as written text. As Jeannette Armstrong writes in her foreword to the expanded version, writing was not considered a useful tool in the struggle of Native people in the 1970s (15). In writing the book, Maracle rejects the apathy, the "admission of insignificance [and] self-erasure" (10) that afflicts the externally-defined subject, in favor of the agency of self-definition. Bobbie Lee is a chronological narrative of Maracle's beginnings along the mud flats of Vancouver, her experiences on Toronto's skid row, and her involvement in the burgeoning Native rights movement of the 1960s and 70s.[12] It is also a frank exploration of the obstacles that white patriarchal Canada erects in the paths of Native peoples, and particularly Native women. As such, it is a painful text for the white reader, who must acknowledge her complicity in racist and sexist systems that have barred Native women from access to fundamental "human rights" and so defined them as less than

[12] Bobbie Lee was expanded for reissue in 1990, and it is from this expanded version that I quote

human.[13]

Although it is important for the white reader to recognize her complicity in hegemonic systems, to discuss such a work solely in terms of the guilt feelings it inspires in its white readership is to subscribe to a universalized notion of colonization that sets up oppositional and inarticulate camps of subaltern rage and white guilt. Subjects trapped within this dichotomy cannot escape the realms of the oppressed or the oppressor (Smith and Watson xiv). The shrinking spectre of white guilt thrives in the shadow of these cultural monoliths, and, in Bobbie Lee, Maracle indicates how easy it is for the oppressed to sink into apathy in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. But Maracle's text also demonstrates how an effort toward a relational positioning can break this spell.

Bobbie Lee does not manufacture authority by reproducing conventional essentialist rhetorical strategies, it is not a simple wholesale indictment of Canadian society, nor does it romanticize the Native resistance movement. Instead, the critical power of the text lies in its subversion of these homogenizing tactics to expose the fragmented and unstable position from which the narrator speaks. Bobbie Lee's autobiographical I identifies her instability and uncertainty as resulting from the intertwined and competing forces exerted on her by the dominant society and her own communities. Her feelings of instability are expressed through a constant reevaluation of her own speaking positions, as well as those of the social/political contexts in which her voice is located. The text's emphasis on the articulation of its

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[13] Under the Enfranchisement Act of 1869, the autonomy of a Native woman was subsumed under that of her husband. Should a Native woman marry a non- Native or non-status Native, she would lose her Native status. Should she marry a Native from another band, her children would belong to her husband's band alone. She was also excluded from inheriting land rights upon the death of her husband. The Indian Act of 1876 solidified and extended the reach of her oppression in its legitimation of "Indianness" solely through a male line of descent, and in assuming the power to "stop the payment of the annuity and interest money of any woman having no children who deserts her husband and lives immorally with another man" (quoted in Emberley 88). Julia Emberley notes that, despite the 1985 passing of Bill C-31, designed to eliminate such discriminatory practices, "the power to define and contain the legal subjectivity of 'Indian-ness' still rests with the state" (88).

protagonist's position within public and private contexts challenges the essentialism and self-erasure of the subaltern on which hegemonic systems rely

Maracle's inward-looking autobiographical I sees how the internalization of racist and sexist systems contributes to negation of the self. In the shadow of these monolithic systems, Bobbie Lee feels "useless" (97), as if her life is beyond her control, and retreats into emotional self-exile. The response of the self-exile is a refusal to respond, an apathy compounded in Bobbie Lee's case by drugs, alcohol, and a self-preservatory cynicism that manifests itself in her acknowledged racism against whites. Native and white male dictates of Native womanhood and the pressure exerted by her revolutionary acquaintances to join their struggle on their terms leave her feeling "ignorant and isolated . . . sucked into this thing I didn't understand" (160), essentially without a voice. Her struggle for self-definition eventually leads her to writing, where she discovers that "in the books written by revolutionary writers, lessons could be learned, society could be both understood and changed" (205).

Maracle's 1988 publication of I Am Woman, a continuation of her autobiographical life narrative, further establishes the written word as a site of resistance by focusing the gaze of the autobiographical eye even more intently on the role of the writer and the texts she produces. At the conclusion of Bobbie Lee, we see agency reclaimed in the emergence of the self-conscious writing subject. In I Am Woman, an unconventional hybrid text of "theory and philosophy" (Maracle, Interview with Hartmut Lutz 171), this subject turns her agency to the purpose of cultural critique. She establishes her presence, and that of her text, as an interruption in the discourses of mainstream communities rather than as a decorative accoutrement to them: "not a rose in your lapel/ . . . an annoying dandelion" (IAW 7). Written from the traditionally unvalued position of the economically poor Native woman, the text challenges conventional textual and

cultural paradigms of unity, authority, and accountability. Its strategies of interruption, instead of confirming the established points of literary order, redefine the writing subject as a locatable voice responsible to the communities in which it is located. To better understand the subversive nature of the content and form of this work, it is important to experience it in the contexts of autobiographical writing.

The tradition of autobiography has established it as a genre of privilege. Employed within the western canon to mark distinguished careers, it has depended on the assumption of its writers and readers that the exploits of certain autobiographical I's are of interest to a large audience. The demand for a window into the experiences of certain I's betrays readers' desires to acquire truths that may offer a formula for success and the possibility of becoming, themselves, worthy of an autobiographical undertaking. More often than not, however, the truths put forward by autobiographical success parables represent nothing more than the particular ideals of the white western male subject, a subject whose societal privilege has traditionally extended to authority over textual representation.

The privileging of the male autobiographical author(ity) has resulted in the presentation of the particular ideals of privileged male subjects as representative of universal human ideals. Existing as hallmarks of the triumph of the individual over adversity, the objectified ideals of many autobiographical texts posit a universal human essence, what Sidonie Smith calls an "essential self" (Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body 8). In ascending to "the brilliant space platforms of the powerful" (Haraway 190-91), the autobiographical I assumes an omniscient gaze that purports to identify not only the truth of its own essential self, but also that of the essential self of humankind; or, perhaps more appropriately, mankind. Although the ideology of an essential humanity enjoys a long tradition in mainstream literature as a whole, autobiography is its most effective medium, for autobiography has the

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The privileging of the male autobiographical author(ity) has resulted in the presentation of the particular ideals of privileged male subjects as representative of universal human ideals. Existing as hallmarks of the triumph of the individual over adversity, the objectified ideals of many autobiographical texts posit a universal human essence, what Sidonie Smith calls an "essential self" (Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body 8). In ascending to "the brilliant space platforms of the powerful" (Haraway 190-91), the autobiographical I assumes an omniscient gaze that purports to identify not only the truth of its own essential self, but also that of the essential self of humankind; or, perhaps more appropriately, mankind. Although the ideology of an essential humanity enjoys a long tradition in mainstream literature as a whole, autobiography is its most effective medium; for autobiography has the

power to transform life into lesson-bearing myth. The life of the individual autobiographical subject assumes the mythic stature afforded symbols of successful society. But as Smith writes, this myth-making process is inherently "imperious and contradictory" in its belief that, although "all 'I's are ontologically identical, rational beings . . . all 'I's are also unique" (8).

Tradition locates human essence in an ahistorical vision of agency that suggests that everyone, by virtue of their humanity, has equal opportunity to act. But there is also a subtext to agency that takes for granted that all individuals should not only act, but also act toward the achievement of the same fundamental goal: an idea of success modeled on the rags-to-riches motif of the white (North) American Dream. The Dream is sanctified as humanity's Dream, as God's Dream for humanity. Agency thereby becomes tangled up with morality, for those who "choose" not to act, or not to act in prescribed ways, are identified as defective -- as lazy, uneducated, or immoral. This "god-trick" (Haraway 191) is performed in autobiography by a rhetoric of autonomy, rugged individualism and unmitigated agency in celebration of an identity -- personal and societal -- in which reason, order, and coherence prevail. Similarly, the valued form of the text is one that exemplifies these qualities and, in turn, establishes them as elements of "good" writing. Good lives, like good texts, subscribe to a teleological notion of progress that rewrites the past into a smooth and steady chronology in which past, present, and even future successes are justified.

Given the traditional symbolic role of autobiography, individuals and texts that do not further the conventional ideology of identity are not considered good autobiographical material. And even though the theory of universal human essence would suggest that all individuals are privy to truth and so should be equally valued as autobiographical I's, we find, as Smith and Julia Watson indicate, that "yet, all are not 'I's"(xvii). The autobiographical celebration of homogeneic ideals of

privileged male individuality reveals a prejudice against subjective and communal experience. the worlds of the irrational and emotional body, of ambiguity and heterogeneity, are both usually categorized as domains of the "primitive" and of woman. In order for the mythic narrative of the rational universal I to continue, disruptive articulations of the bodies excluded from the myth have to be silenced. In this silencing, those too "colorful" (Smith 10) to blend in are denied membership to that which is considered universally human.

I Am Woman contributes to an emerging autobiographical tradition that has engaged in a disruption of what has been, up until quite recently, a totalized narrative. Autobiographies written by "illegitimate speakers" have a tendency to destabilize the foundation of the genre (Smith and Watson xx). I Am Woman certainly takes its place as part of this destabilization process. In form and content, it controverts what Derrida has called "the law of genre," and brings to the fore the latent "counterlaw" he identifies as existing in the impossibility of maintaining genre limits. Advocates of "counterlaw," those who willfully stray beyond the limits of genre, risk "impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity" (Derrida, "The Law of Genre" 204). This risk is experienced in a very practical way by subaltern women writers, whose bodies themselves are marked by these textual labels.

Occurring from a body marked by gender and race, whose articulations exist, in a sense, outside genre, I Am Woman locates itself in a position of risk. The risk is intensified by a hybridity that controverts the law that "genres are not to be mixed" (Derrida 203). But there are other risks involved as well. Maracle's critique of the various communities to which she belongs exposes her to what Trinh calls "triple jeopardy", her position as critic leaves her open to charges of "betrayal" from the Native, feminist, and artistic communities in which she is positioned. Risk is the driving force of this book, and it is Maracle's acknowledgement of her responsibility, as an artist, to take this risk, that provides the framework and

reasoning for its diversity of expression. She writes:

> As mature adults, we are responsible for cleaning up the mess in which we have allowed ourselves to become enmeshed. . . We must respond to our conditions of life to change them. This change does not amount to taking the same old story and putting the words in the mouths of brown faces to be properly parotted by them. It amounts to finding a way to loosen the grip that colonialism has on us. (IAW 118)

To risk is the responsibility of the artist. But if Maracle's text demonstrates the pain involved in a self-aware positioning, it also indicates that the risk of pain is necessarily implicated in agency. For the writing subject, I Am Woman offers the possibility of creative and critical purchase free from the paralysing dualism of objectivity/relativity. It puts the relational self through its paces, positioning and setting the self to work as a responsible agent of critique that not only operates within a space of *métissage*, but also problematizes the communities that inform this space.

The relational self of Maracle's text may be seen as a clear example of the critical *praxis* alluded to by feminist theorists of autobiography and subaltern woman's writing in general. Its articulation of the writer's responsibility to "find a way" via the political act of textual creation concretizes Lionnet's "aesthetic concept" of *métissage* (29) and Frazer and Lacey's "conceptual framework . . . of *practice*" (180). Maracle makes it clear early on that her emphasis on her experiences as a colonized subject is not simply a rhetorical strategy, but a political necessity, an acknowledgement that "racism is for us, not an ideology in the abstract, but a very real and practical part of our lives" (IAW 2). Her affirmation of what Frazer and Lacey term "social reality" (188) establishes a critical ground at the same time as it avoids the pitfalls of the objectivity/relativity dichotomy.

Maracle's text shows the mutable and subjective nature of "reality": how

perception of it varies according to the perceiver's public and private circumstances, and how these circumstances undergo constant change as a result of experience, age, and variances in societal value systems. At the same time, it acknowledges the very real effects of the pressures of social systems on individuals at any given time. Maracle suggests that it is necessary to position the critical voice within a historical framework in order to gain a proper understanding of the influence of existing systems, and that it is in this understanding that political agency is achieved. "Before I can understand what independence is," she writes, "I must break the chains that imprison me in the present, impede my understanding of the past and blind me to the future. Without a firm understanding of what our history was . . . I cannot understand how we are to regain our birthright as caretakers of this land and continue our history into the future" (IAW 49). Maracle's invocation of "birthright" extends beyond the particular rights of Native people to the fundamental right of human beings to just treatment. Although particular concerns may vary according to positions of individuals, it is crucial that these concerns not be marginalized as belonging to "special interest groups." Solidarity is not charity, and Maracle stresses that the possibility for widespread political change lies not only in respecting and addressing the particular rights of oppressed on a large scale, but also the right and ability of the oppressed to author their resistance. "Change," she writes, "is not tolerating injustice. It is not about friendship. . . . It is about personally taking on a different view of the world. No one supports me because I need it, but because they are against the racial inequities built into this system, and those inequities violate white people and coloured alike" ("Ramparts Hanging in the Air" 171-72).

Throughout I Am Woman, Maracle appeals to the existence of fundamental human rights, identifying her oppression at the hands of colonial society as a denial of "my validity as a human being" (16). History reveals the hypocrisy inherent in

the liberal multicultural elite's manipulation of this right -- an effort which seeks to reclassify individuals as "person[s], absent of nationality or racial heritage . . . without difference" (IAW 105). Such "sameness," Maracle writes, "amounts to everyone else's obliteration but your own" (105). Here, Maracle identifies the challenge facing white feminist critics who approach Native women's writing with the intent of charting out a space of solidarity. Although she does not deny that solidarity is possible, she cautions against assimilative strategies that would subsume her writing within that of the white mainstream. Rather, she suggests that a move toward solidarity may involve leveling the playing field: "reduc[ing] yourself to a shadow" (106). Her aim is not to silence white voices; rather, she champions a "revolutionary approach to literature" (Interview with Hartmut Lutz 177) that entails an awareness and reconsideration of the critical constructs and biases that privilege white voices.

I Am Woman is an important text in that it illustrates the impact the racist oppression of Native people has on Native women, as women, both within and outside of Native communities. She does not shrink from chronicling and problematizing her encounters with the ambiguities that reside in a critical approach that must deal with the spectre of divided loyalties and class conflict. Similarly, white critics are confronted with the task of recognizing and problematizing the gaps that necessarily exist between our experiences and those of the writers we consider, even as we are tempted by the paradigm of artificial closure. Maracle's text challenges readers to find a way to discuss occasions of resistance that neither falsely isolate such occasions nor bury them under an essentialist theory of Native women's writing.

II

Having said this, I will turn my attention to specific ways in which Maracle presents her interlocking responsibilities to her Native and feminist communities, and how these responsibilities inform her commitment to artistic agency. Early in

the text, she states unequivocally that although a "European" readership is "inevitable," I Am Woman is situated within and intended for her Native community, and particularly for the women of her community (11). To white readers who do not see themselves addressed by the text, she offers that "it is not because I intend rudeness -- you just don't concern me now" (11). Maracle is concerned with her responsibility to educate her own communities to plant the seeds of realization among her readers that the current predicament of Native people is neither natural nor hopeless. But this is not an easy lesson, as it depends on Native communities' recognition of their complicity in "the ways of the settler," and of how the "distortion and deception" of the colonizing mentality have become "an integral component of the culture of some of us" (45). Maracle positions herself as also having been complicit in oppressive systems, stating that she has written articles "with just the kind of strictures that today sicken me to think about" (21). In addressing her complicity, she demystifies it and reveals the guises under which it operates in order that it may be recognized, and, if not avoided, at least dealt with.

"Hate," one of the poems interspersed throughout the text, reads: "Blinded by niceties and polite liberality/ we can't see our enemy,/ so, we'll just have to kill each other" (13). Infection with the liberal ideology of the oppressor is a lethal sickness. For Native women, it results in a killing off of Native and female identities in pursuit of a homogenized "human-ness" that racism and patriarchy have put out of reach. Maracle recounts a "traitorous" presentation in the late '70s, during which she claimed that "it mattered not that I was a Native woman." She apologizes in the text for not having taken responsibility for her womanhood, but does not toss off the incident as simply an embarrassing anecdote in the category of "if I knew then what I know now." Instead, she affords her disclaimer a historical significance as a point on a continuum of learning and self-awareness. Although Maracle, along with other Native women, had at that time rejected silence in favor of political action,

"the woman question still did not exist for us" (17). The internalization of colonial ideology is presented as a far more dangerous adversary than its external manifestations. Maracle emphasizes over and over that victims are made, not born, and places much of the burden of this making on a racist educational system. Residential schools are the most notorious, but by no means the only, perpetrators. Maracle condemns mainstream schools and universities as "ideological processing plants" (113). purveyors of an ethic of acceptance and acquiescence, not to mention a falsified, if not erased, Native history. But this indictment is by no means a justification of a victim mentality. Although the school system does everything it can to "make [Native people] fit," it does this "only for the willing" (94).

Colonialist indoctrination bends Native women under the double burden of racism and patriarchy, renders them "non-existent" (16), and offers them an identity characterized only by absence. Maracle writes that "the dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath Native man, comes the female Native. The dictates of racism are thus that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women" (20). It wasn't until the early '80s that feminism, indeed womanhood, began to exercise some influence on Maracle's life. She discovered, however, that the mainstream women's liberation movement and its quest to deliver women from the boundaries of their sexuality had little to offer Native women, whose sexuality had been negated by mainstream society, and within their own communities (18). She writes that Native men, under pressure to conform to a sexist society, explain away their suppression of Native female sexuality as a recourse to "tradition" and its alleged prescription of female passivity.

> How many times do you hear from our own brothers, Indian women don't whine and cry around, nag or complain. At least not "real" or "true" Indian women. Embodied in that kind of language is the negation of our femininity -- the denial of our womanhood. And, let us

> admit, isn't there just a little coercion to behave and take whatever our brothers think "we have comin'" without complaint beneath such a remark? (20)

Maracle exposes this version of "tradition" as a fiction perpetrated by a colonial system that seeks to control the disruptive dark continents of Native societies and female sexuality by assigning them passive spirituality rather than active political agency. Maracle writes that Native men, afforded higher social status than Native women, exercise the only control afforded them by a racist society and consign Native women to the realm of asexual spirituality.

She does not presume to speak *for* Native men, or try to unravel the psychology behind their oppression of Native women. As a woman, she feels unable to responsibly represent the concerns of her community's men. In her opening remarks to I Am Woman, she states that "the fate of Native men is . . . the subject of another book. A book that will be written by a man that needs to be whole" (3). However, her experience of the perils of the internalization of racism do provide her with insight as to how oppression may cause its victims to oppress.[14] She focuses this insight on the situation of Native women, and in doing so once again raises the issue of complicity, invoking the responsibility of this community to address its oppression. "Women kid themselves that traditionally we were this way or that way . . . In the name of tradition we consent to all kinds of oppressive behavior from our men" (24).

The same fictive tradition that contributes to the oppression of women within Native communities also colors some mainstream feminist encounters with Native women writers. In these encounters, there is a similar fetishization of that which is seen to represent the primal and exotic. Native women's voices become a source that,

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[14] In Bobbie Lee, for example. Maracle writes that for a long time the only way she was able to deal with her racist and sexist treatment was to turn the tables, to cultivate racism against whites and withdraw emotionally from men.

once appropriated, can be manipulated to reflect this stereotype and used to inject a modicum of spirituality into critical proceedings.[15] But even though Native women's voices tend to be assimilated by some feminist work as representing a lost yet essential element of the universal female voice, when those voices speak, they are sequestered within the category of the "marginal." Maracle offers the example of her own restricted participation in the feminist movement.

> I am not now, nor am I likely to be, considered an authority on women in general by the white women's movement in this country. If I am asked to write, my topic is Native whatever and like as not, the request comes replete with an outline and the do's and don'ts of what I may or may not say. Should I venture out on my own and deal with women as a whole and not in segregated Native fashion, the invitations stop coming. (21)

It is difficult to decide what to make of such loaded phrases as "women in general" and "women as a whole," although, admittedly, they are likely approached with more caution now than they were seven years ago. It is unlikely that Maracle intends to sanction a homogeneous frame of reference, given her text's focus on self-conscious positioning. The passage likely points to a disparity between white and subaltern speakers within feminist discourses that allow mainstream white speakers to exercise a liberal objective gaze while validating Native female voices only when they fulfill their prescribed function. Maracle emphasizes that her intent is not to establish membership in the "white women's movement", and she subtly implicates the homogenizing strategies of this movement in her assertion that she "would look just a little ridiculous sitting in their living rooms saying 'we this and we that'"

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[15] In a 1990 interview, Emma LaRocque discusses the tendency of the mainstream to project its own version of what is Native onto Native subjects, and then use those stereotypes as if they had been provided by the Native subjects themselves (Interview with Hartmut Lutz 192-94). LaRocque is the author of Defeathering the Indian (Agincourt: The Book Society of Canada, Ltd., 1975).

(21)

I Am Woman includes a story told to Maracle by her grandmother that relates a conversation between Maracle's great-grandfather and a "black robe" -- a jesuit missionary. During the course of the conversation, "black robe" attempts to convince Maracle's great-grandfather that her grandmother should attend residential school. It is a story that helps to pinpoint the cause of faulty communication between mainstream and Native communities.

> Black robe seemed agitated. He spoke fast and later, the girl learned from her father's account to her mother that he never repeated his listener's words as we do (very rude). She heard everything black robe said only because her father had spoken in the old way. He was careful to repeat black robe verbatim, to show respect for the speaker's vision of truth and to ensure that no misunderstanding or distortion of his words occurred. (79)

"Black robe's" function as a allegory of mainstream discourses brings to mind feminism's missionary tendencies -- its attempt to rescue Native women from their "relatively powerless communities" (Johnson-Odim 324). Like the "black robe," this brand of feminism often assumes that the subaltern are voiceless and professes to offer them a voice; but it also stipulates that this voice must revise its own language to more closely resemble that of the dominant discourse.

In the context of Maracle's story, language moves beyond the speaking of different sounds. It also involves a way of speaking, a protocol that dictates the responsibility of the listener to the speaker. It demands that, before speaking, participants show that they respect and understand the words of other speakers, even if they do not condone them. Of course, it is impossible in the context of critical writing to repeat everything said by others on a particular subject. But as I have discussed in the previous chapter, the failing of mainstream feminisms, with regard

to the perceived "problem" of Native women, is that they seldom employ Native women's writing in their efforts to answer these womens' concerns. Consequently, these concerns tend to be universalized as a desire to join the mainstream. In Maracle's story, the old man's assertion of a speaking protocol different from that of "black robe" leaves "black robe" feeling "agitated." In a sense, Maracle's responsibility to Native women, as a writer, is to agitate -- to disrupt and interrupt mainstream discourses by repeating, "verbatim," the effects of their colonizing strategies so that they will be forced to acknowledge and take responsibility for them.

One of I Am Woman's more powerful episodes of interruption takes place in the story of Rusty. For the reader, the story seems to appear out of nowhere, even though elements of its telling underlie Maracle's previous discussion. Maracle herself defines the disturbing quality of Rusty's story as that of an unannounced and unwanted guest. And although she is unwilling to expose herself to the intensity of its pain, she cannot ignore her responsibility to acknowledge it and to ensure that responsibility for it is claimed. In beginning the story, she writes: "To tell the truth, Rusty, I didn't ever want to know your story, but since you gave it to me and I don't know what else to do with it, I am going to give it back to the honorable public responsible for its authorship" (52-53).

Rusty's story speaks of racism and sexism in their most horrific forms. It begins at home, with one of many scenes of domestic violence. As a child, lying in the dark, "trying by the sounds to know who is getting hit," Rusty feels "paralysed" (55-56). She eventually witnesses her abusive white stepfather rape her mother, but instead of reaching out to her in the days following, Rusty is once again silenced by a confusion brought on by conflicting emotions. Numbed by the meanness of her surroundings, the memory of her mother's rape is "absent of any compassion for her" (58). Her paralysis results in her inability to "fight back" when, after her mother's death, her stepfather returns to rape her (60). Following this incident,

Rusty resolves to "avenge my womanhood, my youth" by leaving "a trail of broken white boys . . . strewn behind me" (60). She discovers, however, that "what they wanted from Native girls was not the same as what they wanted from their own" (60).

Filled with self-loathing, Rusty turns to alcohol and meaningless sex, and only after she hits rock bottom does she realize the root of her feelings of hopelessness. "Jeezus, Lee," she tells Maracle, "I think we hate ourselves . . . . There is no 'white trash' kickin' at us anymore -- we are doing it to ourselves" (62). But the legacy of internalized racism is powerful, despite her new-found awareness, Rusty ends up replicating her mother's abusive relationship, this time with a Native man. Once again, violence, and a paralysed "silence," prevail (66). At Rusty's funeral, Maracle sees her "lying there[,] [a]ll the fight knocked out of her" (68).

Rusty speaks of the kind of things that "we don't really want to remember or even know about" (53). But as Maracle demonstrates, a responsible politics of positioning demands that we "know" and "remember" even when we want, as even she does, "to be somewhere else" (59). The desire to remove oneself from an oppressive reality is signaled by an interruption in Rusty's narrative in which an unidentified voice, that could belong to her or to Maracle, speaks of its wish to create a happy ending: "I meant this to be a tender love story that came true. A fantasy of two people battering down the walls that separated them and erecting an arc -- a bridge -- to unite them." But by the end of the short passage, an air of hopelessness creeps in as the voice laments that "the walls became reinforced with steel . . . [and] I dare not tamper with steel" (65). Rusty's fate seems determined by the fact of her oppression. Crippled by abuse, she is unable to escape the societal dictate of "intense submission" (60). Rusty's suicide, her final attempt to exercise control of her self, is also the ultimate expression of her submission and defeat.

Rusty's story speaks of the consequences of psychic alienation. She is a sexual

object denied her sexuality, a Native person forced to withdraw from the men of her community, but denied her womanhood. Stripped of agency, "silence became the structure of the prison"(IAW 66) erected by oppression.[16] In telling Rusty's story, Maracle undermines this prison of silence. Maracle's agency is derived from her responsibility to her subject position, a responsibility that expresses itself in the political acts of retelling her communities' stories and her situated critique of the prejudices that author them. In her responsibility to address the social reality of her subject position, Maracle avoids the paralysis of the non-position of simple relativity, and claims for herself a critical autonomy. As she writes, "[a] critical examination of the history of settler society is in order. Likewise, a critical examination of our society is in order" (118). Frazer and Lacey refute the existence of autonomy as a "myth" exploded by the fact that individuals are "fundamentally relational subject[s]" (27). I would argue, however, that it is possible to conceive of autonomy apart from its traditional sense of objective separateness, and that it may be revised to reflect the agency of the relational self. In exercising an autonomy informed by her relational positioning, Maracle is able to undertake an informed critique that recognizes a number of influences in that she neither wholeheartedly accepts them nor condemns them out of hand.

In I Am Woman, Maracle undertakes an overt and radically self-conscious positioning of her writing self that may be seen to adhere loosely to what Sidonie Smith calls a "politics of fragmentation" (Subjectivity, Identity and the Body 156). I say "loosely," because although "fragmentation" does subvert the traditional ideal of a unified self, its visual image carries tricky connotations of separation -- of fragments existing separately and autonomously. Maracle's writing is strongly

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[16] Frazer and Lacey argue that this kind of silence is the major peril of a strictly communitarian position. "[i]n the socialization model of communitarian personhood, the woman who lives in a sexist and patriarchal culture is peculiarly powerless. For she cannot find any jumping-off point for a critique of the dominant conception of value: her position as a socially-constructed being seems to render her a helpless victim of her situation." (151)

situated within her experience as a Native woman, but it is an experience that is influenced by and influences her participation in several intersecting communities. Her interactions within her Native community are informed by her feminist concerns, and vice versa. Her position as an economically poor Native women who has learned from experience that "intellectuals prefer truth with its clothes on" is complicated by her realization that "I am an intellectual," and thus complicit in the workings of a class of which she was once "dismissive" (123).

As a fabric composed of interwoven threads of influence, Maracle's text stands as an example of the concept of *métissage*. As such, it avoids the assumed objectivity of the traditional unified autobiographical I, and also skirts what Judith Butler theorizes as the reification of the psychological alienation of oppression: "If oppression is to be defined in terms of a loss of autonomy by the oppressed, as well as a fragmentation or alienation within the psyche of the oppressed, then a theory which insists upon the inevitable fragmentation of the subject appears to reproduce and valorize the very oppression that must be overcome" ("Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse" 327). Smith agrees that an autobiographical practice of "reified multiplicity" may be seen to be counterproductive, a splitting of the subject "beyond usefulness" that nullifies political action and dissolves any point of critical departure (156).

III

As has no doubt been evident, I find it extremely difficult to deal separately with concepts of responsibility, relational positioning, and agency, and it is a difficulty that makes me wonder whether such a separation is possible, or even desireable. Trinh argues the illusory nature of separating the subaltern female subject into discrete identities of "ethnic" and "woman" (104). It may be similarly impossible, in Maracle's text, to theorize positioning, responsibility, and agency as discrete concepts, they are mutually-informing, as are the communities that

influence the writing subject. Lionnet writes that within a space of *métissage*, ambiguity is reclaimed as a strategy for exposing rhetorical conventions (16). It is a strategy that enables Maracle's point and method of departure in I Am Woman to evade fixture within official scripts of universality or radical embodiment, the public or the private.

Maracle positions her text at the intersection of the public and private. She writes that "[f]ew writers are willing to pre-state their personal feelings about things before subjecting them to the cold light of analysis. I do not believe my opinion is free of bias and the preceding words are my particular biases" (IAW 132). Her politicization of the textual/cultural intersection of public and private places the body, its cultural and physical construction, at ground zero: the point of political detonation from which cultural shock waves emanate. Smith writes that "skin has much to do with autobiographical writing" (128). In fact, the look of the body, how it looks physically *to* the world and how it looks *at* the world, influences the look of the text: why and how it was created, in addition to how it views, and is viewed by, the body politic. As agent, subject, and object of relational positioning, the body becomes the site of subversive ambiguity.

> Bearing multiple marks of location, bodies position the autobiographical subject at the nexus of culturally specific experiences, of gender, race, sexual orientation, and health among them, and at the nexus of 'micropolitical practices' that derive from the cultural meaning of those points of identification. The very complexity of this experientially based history can be used to challenge, disturb, and displace the neat categorizations (and fragmentation/unification) of bodies. (Smith 130)

Bodies inscribed with marks that identify them as culturally "abnormal" are viewed as a threat to the stability of the body politic -- a possible source of

contamination of established cultural and textual societies (Smith 130).[17] The threat is intensified when the bodies themselves are seen to be contaminated by hybrid identities. Maracle demonstrates that her identities of Native, woman, and writer are considered mutually exclusive by some segments of her Native community, as well as by elements of the white mainstream. But her threat of subversion may also lie to some degree in her genetic hybridity. Lionnet argues that "[t]he Métis, specifically Métis women, have lived the aberrancy of socio-symbolic dispossession that the morphologies of critical theory valorize as a textual mode of intervention into the colonial ruses of power, knowledge, Truth and History" (164). Maracle, however, does not use her Métis-ness as a critical inroad. The narratives of both Bobbie Lee and I Am Woman indicate her social reality as that of a Native woman. It would therefore be problematic to appropriate her Métis status in an effort to construct her as a sort of theoretical icon, especially when she herself does not discuss it. Métis writer Marie Annharte Baker warns that "[to] look only at racial mixing and posit some ideology that might make sense of it is suspect," as it manufactures "criteria of 'very Indian,' or 'not so Indian'" that negate the difficult struggle of maintaining an Indian identity (115).[18]

The threat of the hybrid body is present also in the hybrid text and its refutation of the norms and mores canonized by the mainstream textual community. Maracle writes that "[t]he women of the world are re-writing history with their bodies" (IAW 182), an act that involves rewriting the look of the collective textual body. I Am Woman is comprised of autobiographical passages and critical commentary, stories that may be fictional, autobiographical, or a combination of

[17] Maracle notes that Canadians perceive this threat not only in terms of Native efforts to reclaim ancestral lands and rights to self-government and education, but also in their challenge to recorded history and its vision of the country's inception (IAW155-56).

[18] Baker makes these comments in reference to Hartmut Lutz's Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors, adding that "I was glad to have been left out of this collection because of the emphasis on discerning 'how Indian' each writer was" (115).

both, with poems inserted at points throughout. These forms constantly interrupt and blend with each other, and at times it is difficult to know where one ends and the other begins. The book spans topics ranging from homosexuality to Marxism, from Maracle's tender address to her lover to a scathing indictment of the Canadian educational system. Consequently, the tone of the work is startlingly variant, changing drastically, on occasion, from page to page. At times dreamy and reflective, Maracle is also overtly confrontational, neither being the standard approach of cultural criticism.

But this is not a standard text. Maracle translates her responsibility to her communities as being necessarily wrapped up with the writer's responsibility to herself "to be faithful to [her] view" (4), and to develop a methodology that best represents that view. For Maracle, the hybrid text helps to address the interwoven responsibilities of the autobiographical agent who is both writer and written, representative of both self and community. Hybridity speaks to the problem of how to "squeeze one's loved ones [and one's self] small, onto the pages of a three dimensional rectangle, empty of their form, minus their favorite colors and absent of the rhythm of the music that moves them" (1-2).

I Am Woman reveals that the challenge of the relational self entails a personal coming to terms with the act of writing as one that is accomplished from within the body as well as with it. This process examines methodology -- how she says things as well as what she says -- and the motives that inform it. Maracle acknowledges that to remain faithful to her vision of the text, she employed, to an extent, the practice of "artistic license". "I have taken both the stories of my life, the stories of others' lives and some pure fabrications of my imagination and re-written them as my own. The fantasy of these stories lies less in the distortion of the facts of them, then in their presentation" (4). She states her disbelief in the non-fiction label attached to autobiography, yet feels compelled to apologize "[t]o the family of the grandmother

that I removed from the pages of history to combine with the teaching of another family's grandmother." This grandmother, like Rusty, is identified as a composite of women Maracle has known (4-5). In making public what in traditional autobiography and other so-called non-fiction writing constitutes the author's private manipulation of the narrative, she undermines, and thus politicizes, the distinction between public and private methodologies.

The hybridity of I Am Woman is also evident in its appearance on the page. A number of different typefaces are used, and, on a couple of occasions, poems are written by hand. The text contains typographical errors, and displays unconventional grammar and sentence structure. In a review of Sundogs, Maracle's first novel, Laura J. Murray makes note of "stylistic problems" and inadequate copyediting. She offers that "[i]t is no shame to seek editorial assistance," and hopes that "Maracle gets some for her next novel so readers are not distracted by typos and petty errors" (135). At the risk of overanalysis, I would suggest that the issue of editorial practice is not as straightforward as it might seem. Caren Kaplan writes that the relationships between artists, editors, markets and critics are never nonpolitical, especially in the context of what she calls "testimonial" autobiography (122).[19] Dennis Maracle is identified as the publisher of I Am Woman, and it is possible that a decision was made to produce the book privately as a means to skirt the mainstream publishing system and ensure creative control. It is also possible that financial resources played a part in this decision. In any case, the style and appearance of the text raise questions, consciously or not, about the standard usage of language and the privileging of this standard within the textual community. Rather than viewing that which is not standard as a distraction to be overcome, it is possible to conceive of

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[19] Kaplan's model of "testimonial" literature owes a great deal to Latin American women's *testimonio*. One of the more celebrated examples of testimonio is Rigoberta Menchu's I Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala, ed. and introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. Ann Wright (London: Verso Editions, 1984). Originally published as *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchu y asi me nacio la conciencia* (Barcelona: Ed. Argos Vergara, 1983).

such variances as challenging conventional standards -- a revaluation of what is considered important in writing.

As an autobiography and cultural critique that challenges in various ways the conventions of both genres, I Am Woman exhibits the errant and culturally disruptive writing practices of Kaplan's outlaw genre of testimonial literature, and of what Smith calls the "autobiographical manifesto" (Smith 154-55).

> Critique in this instance is motivated by an autobiographical subject's desire to contest dominant discourses surrounding the subject, discourses through which the subject is objectified in strategic difference making and rendered abnormative. Moreover, the subject in this instance of the autobiographical manifesto speaks as a member of a nonhegemonic group or counter-public sphere, and that group too has what Mikhail Bakhtin suggests is its own 'social dialect,' its language/s . . . Psyche, sociality, language converge to link consciousness to critique. (Smith 161)

Smith and Kaplan write that the autobiographical manifesto, or testimonial, works to deconstruct "the literary construction of 'home'", a familiar and comforting narrative space "that links the individual to the universal" (Kaplan 130). For Maracle, writing began out of a feeling of homelessness, excluded by virtue of her subaltern status from the home erected by the literary mainstream, she was also, by her own assertion, in a state of self-exile from her womanhood and her Native community (IAW 15). Quite literally "not at home in [her own] body" (Smith 128), she was also experiencing a sickness that threatened her life. She writes that "I did not mind dying but I started to wish that I could have done more for my community. That was about when I started to live again" (6). I Am Woman is at once the deconstruction of the home erected by hegemonic discourses, and the writing of a new home for/by the hybrid body and text: a home located in the act of writing. As a

subject who reflects her relational positioning through the creation of a hybrid text, Maracle is able to write her way out of the dilemma of "suicide and utopia" (Lionnet 247) in which the critic is paralysed by the competing pressures of a deceptively comfortable universalism and a hopeless determinism. Built on continually shifting ground, the blueprint of this new home is subjective and its materials permeable. It is not, however, entirely comfortable, nor is it stable. Its shelter is the "undecidability and indeterminacy" of *métissage* (Lionnet 6) an inclusive, rather than enclosed, space wherein writers are responsible for maintaining a constant critique of the individual homes they build for themselves, and a continual examination of how these homes affect, and are affected by, the homes of others.

I Am Woman shows that although in risk there is agency, there is also uncertainty. Maracle invites her readers to take on this risk through a process that involves a critical examination of how we perceive our call to responsibility.

> Canadians have not sat down with themselves and asked, "What do I want to do here? Am I in solidarity with this or that because I actually want to effect a change in the world? Am I doing this because I disdain injustice in the country committing crimes against their own people? What relationship does solidarity activism have to me? Why am I doing this?" (162)

These questions also permeate Maracle's fiction, in its continued exploration of the complex and painful relationship of responsibility and complicity. Her ongoing process of construction and deconstruction of home questions the materials and methods that constitute the foundations of cultural and textual homes. And as advocates of an inclusive space of *métissage*, writers are faced with the often frightening responsibility of forsaking their comforts in pursuit of the possibilities offered by an uncertain future.

# 3 All Her Relations: The Community of Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories

i am on the other side of the rainbow
picking up the pieces of days spent waitin for the poem to be heard
while you listen
i have other work to do

Ntozake Shange, For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf, xvi

I

Barbara Christian writes that the Euro-American feminist "race for theory," although it may acknowledge the women of color in its midst, seldom addresses the complexity of their lives: the fact that differences of history, culture and class give rise to varying concerns (342). And often, as Maracle demonstrates in I Am Woman, the ways in which these concerns are expressed and dealt with in writing by women of color do not correspond to the notion of progress expressed by mainstream feminist methodologies. The feminist "intellectual revolution," according to Marian Lowe and Margaret Lowe Benston, is directed toward "get[ting] closer to the truth" of a shared feminist world-view that is "simply different" and resides within feminists' "status as outsiders" (58-59). As we have seen, Maracle's writing exposes the exclusionary nature of the sort of feminist rhetoric that posits a cohesive truth or world-view, and it calls into question the applications of such rhetoric to the varied life circumstances of Native women. When Lowe and Benston, for example, advocate that feminism, as a whole, maintains an outsider status, does this not push Maracle and other women writers of color to the margins of the margin? And what is the relevance of their call for "more emphasis on scholarship" (57) to Native women's articulations of modes of resistance given the

culture-bound dictates of scholarship?[20]

In her collection Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories, Maracle continues to explode the myth of "simple differen[ce]" through stories that reevaluate concepts of truth, experience, and a common world-view (be it feminist, Native or white), and deconstruct the ideological homes these concepts help to build. It is an autobiographical text, but not in the sense of satisfying the primary condition of what Barrett J. Mandel calls "true autobiography": the effort to "convey . . . that 'this happened to me'" (53). Nor does it correspond to Louis A. Renza's definition of "autobiographical fiction," wherein "the writer can deliberately adopt a persona behind which he conceals references to his own life" (292). In several stories, Maracle does create fictional protagonists. In others, however, she makes direct references to her personal circumstances. The autobiographical nature of the collection lies in each story's representation of particular elements of Maracle's hybrid experience as a Native woman writer. Together, they act as a continuation of her exploration of the literary and critical possibilities offered by a politics of positioning, a process that began with Bobbie Lee and I Am Woman. In this chapter, I will explore how the narrative possibilities of resistance available to the relational self are put to work in Maracle's stories, and, specifically, how she situates this self in terms of her responsibilities to the women of her communities.

Maracle's protagonists are the tools she uses to tease apart the intricate web of responsibility. She separates the false strands spun by a sexist and racist society, those that ensnare and constrict, from the naturally-existing strands that tie, not bind, the individual to her communities and that act as bridges connecting these

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[20] There are many instances in which a correct mode of feminist scholarship is alluded to, even when the particulars of its methodology are not addressed. In her effort to "situate women's studies" within a "transdisciplinary model" of scholarship, Susan Sheridan appeals to Susan Magarey's idea of "a distinct approach to intellectual inquiry," and the selection of "techniques and procedures according to their usefulness in illuminating a particular field of knowledge . . ." (69). One must ask what distinguishes such an approach and to whom it is useful.

communities, buoying her up. Maracle's protagonists are faced with the challenge of making this distinction. Their struggles reveal strategies through which they can resist entrapment in society's web, but also indicate how easy it is to become entangled in it. Not all of Maracle's characters are successful in avoiding the trap of complicity. Indeed, she undermines the mutually-informing icons of the Native female victim or transcendent spiritualist[21] by writing characters that both succeed and fail -- whose resistance enobles them even as they harbour within themselves elements of an oppressive culture. Neither wholly tragic nor heroic, they experience victory and defeat not on a grand metaphoric scale, but within the home, the neighborhood, and the self.

The stories themselves succeed in exposing the fact that many recognized modes and facilitators of resistance -- scholarship, organized activism, even community support -- are simply not options for some Native women. They reveal the value system that privileges high-profile forms of resistance over those "hidden" within the domestic sphere or within communities the mainstream chooses to keep out of sight. Laura Marcus writes that the emphasis on positioning emerging from feminist theory signals a "return to the subject" that may reflect "a positive reclamation of agency, identity and subjectivity -- or . . . a sense of crisis, doubt and uncertainty about 'identity' -- a defensive response to 'the sheer difficulty of living with difference'" (11). For many feminist writers, the "difficulty of living with difference" is coming to grips with the shortsightedness of some of their theories. For Maracle's protagonists, however, this dilemma is experienced on a more personal, practical level, for it is experienced in the first person.

In her introduction to the anthology Spider Woman's Granddaughters, Paula Gunn Allen characterizes the "Indian novel" as "a long story, composed of a number of short stories" (20). She writes that the composition of story "cycles," as

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[21] What Paula Gunn Allen identifies as the "holy victim" (30).

folklorists have dubbed them, originates in oral tradition. Cycles refer to "a number of stories that cluster around a more or less central theme and often feature particular characters and events" (4). In this light, it is possible to approach the text of Sojourner's Truth as a long story. The autobiographical elements of the short stories contained within it are important to the structure, or identity, of the book as a whole. Although each story stands on its own, it is possible to conceive of them as working together to create a larger autobiographical text. Maracle's stories give voice to communities, or segments of communities, that together inform the subject position from which the book was produced. As such, Sojourner's Truth stands as an autobiographical portrait of Maracle as a relational self, with all her "relations" exposed.[22] The separate treatment of each relational position within a larger autobiographical project points to identity -- that of the text and of Maracle as writing subject -- as a "multiple presence" (Trinh 94). The theoretical concept of multiplicitous identity is here made visual in the differentiation of stories under titles. But although these stories are, in a sense, separate, their separateness is not that of the "ideology of separatism" that characterizes "difference" as "division" (Trinh 82). Rather, the stories function as various perspectives of the book's autobiographical vision, as facets of the autobiographical I. As Trinh T. Minh-ha tells us, different stories of the self, the i's that create the I, can neither be subsumed by a unified identity, nor isolated. Maracle's stories demonstrate the artificiality of efforts to disconnect or universalize the stories of different individuals or groups of individuals.

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[22] My use of the term "relations" is adopted from Thomas King's explanation of the phrase "all my relations" in the preface to his anthology of Native writing of the same name. He writes that "all my relations" is an English translation of a phrase familiar to North American Native peoples. " 'All my relations' is at first a reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. More than that, 'all my relations' is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner (a common admonishment is to say of someone that they act as if they have no relations)" (ix).

The book's manifestation of multiple presence offers multi-layered possibilities for resistance to totalizing visions of identity. Just as it shatters into facets the smooth crystal of the traditional I, it also refutes the essentialization of female and Native identities. The multiple perspective of the faceted eye allows Maracle to explore -- as young and old, writer and mother, wife and lover -- how her different and overlapping perspectives exist simultaneously to inform her narrative of identity. Similarly, her articulation of her responsibilities to her communities in this work is multifaceted. As Maracle's experience inhabits each of the communities she represents, she is able to responsibly portray the specificities of their workings, furthermore, the challenges of her protagonists are also her own. In other words, she uses her experience to fulfil her responsibility, as a writer, to lay bare and deconstruct the stereotyped identities that the dominant culture has foisted upon the subject positions she represents.

II

In order to examine Sojourner's Truth as an autobiographical text made up of individual forays into the facets of a relational self, it is necessary to establish that the text can, in fact, be read in the context of autobiography. In some cases, the claim to autobiography is easily made, as in the retrospective "Yin Chin," or when Maracle relates her participation in a women's writing group in "Eunice," or the experience of a young mother in "Who's Political Here." In these stories, among others, readers are given the clues of proper names: those of Maracle, her children, husband, or colleagues. But Maracle is not the old alcoholic cannery worker of "Bertha", she is not the young girl who loses her defiant sister to the winter in "Maggie", and she is not the white man examining from beyond the grave the trials of his abused Native wife in "Sojourner's Truth." After all, as Phillipe Lejeune writes, "[a]utobiography (narrative recounting the life of the author) supposes that there is *identity of name* between the author (such as he figures, by his name, on the

cover), the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about" (12).

Lejeune stipulates that the sanctity of the "autobiographical pact" leaves no room for "coquettish[] . . . guessing game[s]" (13); nor, it would seem, does his parallel "fictional pact." The latter calls for an "*obvious practice of nonidentity*" and an "*affirmation of fictitiousness*" which necessitates, among other things, that the author and protagonist not share the same name (14-15). Lejeune does acknowledge the reciprocal influence that genres of autobiography, biography and fiction have on each other, especially in contemporary writing. However, his project insists on the formation of discrete genre models.

> The majority of games in which contemporary autobiographers indulge are the timid echo of the investigations of modern novelists into narrative voice and focalization. Justified timidity: in fiction one risks nothing, one can break identity and put it back together, allow oneself all points of view, give oneself any means. The autobiographer finds himself confronted with the limitations and contraints of a real situation, and can neither deny the unity of his "I," nor go beyond his limitations. He can only pretend. (37)

Lejeune's juxtaposition of the autobiographical constraints of "reality" with the "omniscience and 'nonfocalization' . . . possible only in fiction" (45) walks a well-worn path. On it are situated theories that universalize the "reality" of the unified I and those that use the notion of the possibility of omniscience in fiction in order to assert the writer's right, or even duty, to assume it. If the autobiographer is bound by the limitations of her identity, the fiction writer is bound by a duty to, if not transcend them, then at least ignore them.

More interesting, perhaps, is Lejeune's earlier castigation of writers who coquettishly engage readers in guessing games as to whether the narrative voices of fictional or autobiographical texts are "real" or not. The dictionary definition of

"coquette," "a woman who flirts insincerely" (Random House Webster's Dictionary, 1993 edition), suggests that Lejeune views writing that contains narrative ambiguity as inconsequential, silly, womanly.[23] More important, however, is the connection made between ambiguity and insincerity, or falsehood -- the idea that writers who do not respect the autobiographical and fictional pacts set out to deceive their readers. This, of course, invokes notions of sincerity, or truth, that operate traditionally on several different levels: autobiography, like history, is factual, and so represents truth, and although made of entertaining lies, fiction, if it is good, reveals a universal, omniscient truth; the writer tells the truth by identifying the genre of her text, the text, once identified as belonging to a genre, must remain true to the framework of that genre, and finally, there is the portrayal of the essential truth of a self, or of a group -- the portrayal of a "true woman" -- a "true Native," the "true" Lee Maracle.

The stories in Sojourner's Truth self-consciously instigate the games that Lejeune correctly interprets as threats to the discreteness of genres. In her preface, "You Become the Trickster," Maracle identifies her stories as arising from "my life, my imagination and my history" (11). The idea of life as imagination *and* history, together with a life writing that reflects the conflation of the two, further destabilizes the already shaky pillars of history as the objective, factual account of

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[23] Much could be said about the use of the word "coquette" and its equation of femininity with deception, Lejeune's pejorative use of a feminine image, as well as his use of the word to signify a characterization of women's writing as foolish flirting within a structured male domain. However, the fact that the text I use is a translation of Lejeune's work may be significant here. I acknowledge that alternate translations may or may not lend themselves to the same interpretation.

past events,[24] yet it also undermines the supposed purity of the imagination, an ideal made, it seems, of much sturdier stuff. Gunn Allen argues that Native storytelling, and particularly that undertaken by Native women, disturbs the western tradition in which "'creativity' is thought to be a personal talent, arising without respect to the cultural matrix the creator lives in" (23). "If you write out of your consciousness," she writes, "[you] must of necessity include your experience" (21). In Maracle's stories, autobiography (as a history of experience), and fiction (as the lies created by the imagination) escape their boundaries. In a short preface to her story "World War I," the story in the collection that strays farthest from an autobiographical context, Maracle writes: "this one isn't fiction, it happened, even if it didn't" (133).

Maracle does not discount the fact that stories, both European and Native, explore the existence of truths; the very title of her collection suggests a concern with "Truth(s)." She characterizes her stories as amalgams of "European" and Native storytelling techniques. Although they make use of "traditional European metaphor and story form," they move away from its claim to "inherent truth" in favor of "merely pos[ing] the dilemma" ( "Preface" 11-12). Consequently, the lessons readers take away from her stories may "not necessarily [be] the lessons [she] wish[es] them to draw." Even so, Maracle writes, "all conclusions are considered valid" (12). This assertion shifts the focus of storytelling from objective and universal truth to situated and provisional truths. It echoes Gunn Allen's observation that "stories . . . exist within the minds of the audience as much as they exist in the mind of the storyteller. Context defines significance as much as fictional

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[24] Trinh writes that historians have been questioning the validity of "History with a capital H" for several decades. "Like the anthropological study whose information may always be reordered, refuted, or completed by further research, the historical analysis is nothing other than the reconstruction and redistribution of a pretended order of things, the interpretation or even transformation of documents given and frozen into monuments. The re-writing of history is therefore an endless task, one to which feminist scholars have devoted much of their energy" (84).

elements such as characterization, plot, setting, stance, style, and language do" (5).

Maracle's stories' resistance to closure and focus on the hybrid subject have much in common with postmodern writing's interrogations of liberal humanist assumptions of coherent identity. Linda Hutcheon writes that postmodern questioning extends to "any totalizing or homogenizing system":

> Provisionality and heterogeneity contaminate any neat attempts at unifying coherence (formal or thematic). Historical and narrative continuity and closure are contested, but again, from within. . . . And, from the decentered perspective, the "marginal" . . . take on new significance in the light of the implied recognition that our culture is not really the homogeneous monolith . . . we might have assumed. (A Poetics of Postmodernism 11-12)

But Hutcheon also characterizes postmodernism as "politically ambivalen[t] . . . with an ironic sense of critical distance" (201). It is a distance that causes Sidonie Smith to suspect that, "while the breakdown of the universal subject undoes the authority of the father in one of his guises, it threatens another kind of subjection that would erase real women outside the 'text' . . . " (Subjectivity, Identity and the Body 59). The stories in Sojourner's Truth refuse postmodernism's critical distance. In doing so, I would argue, Maracle's text more effectively realizes theories of subjective and narrative hybridity. Its articulation of the particular elements of various subject positions offers a more developed sense of the complexity of constructions of identity. And it also reveals the practical considerations and consequences of these negotiations for both the individual, and for her communities. For example, the protagonist of "Who's Political Here" becomes increasingly aware of the varying demands of her hybrid context as a Native woman, mother, wife, and lover. Nevertheless, she must keep herself together in order to fulfil her primary responsibility to make a home for her children.

Smith writes that the contexts in which subjects situate themselves are informed by both the "'I' now and the 'I' then" ("Construing Truths in Lying Mouths" 150). Maracle's portrayal of the facets of her I includes components of her "'I' then." In "Maggie," she is at once eleven-year-old Maggie, Maggie's younger sister Stacy, and also, occasionally, grown-up Stacy. In "Yin Chin," Maracle experiences a flashback that situates her in the past and present. In "Dear Daddy," she is a fourteen-year-old girl reflecting on her abusive home life. "Who's Political Here" (as well as, I suspect, "Polka Partners, Uptown Indians and White Folks") returns to the 1970s to revisit some of the players first encountered in Bobbie Lee (Sounding Differences 355). Again, some of these stories are more identifiably autobiographical than others, but even those that are obviously autobiographical create and manipulate events and dialogue for the sake of the story. Of course, this technique is used in traditional autobiography as well, one example being narrators, situated in the present, who recount childhood experiences from adult perspectives.

The truths Maracle tells are the truths of her experience. They are not truths in the traditional sense of a "real" experience that corresponds directly to the experience portrayed in the text. And although Maracle's gendered, "raced," and "classed" body is at the core of her experience, her truths do not define those of other bodies similarly marked.[25] Smith suggests that the truth of an autobiographical text that rejects claims to "real" experience and universal truth may lie in its deconstruction of these concepts.

> What pertains to something called the "truthful" might be the deployment of subjectivity in and through the text, the self-conscious elaboration of the only "truth" that is the "truth" of the ficticity of

[25] Smith writes that the truths of one woman's experience are too often taken to represent "women's experience". "Certainly for the woman writing autobiography one of the critical words circulating in other people's mouths is 'woman,' for, if the sexed body is a most obvious 'fact' about the autobiographer, the gendered person inhabiting the 'I' is no such 'fact' at all. The identity of the gendered person inhabiting 'woman,' is one of those fictive 'truths' circulating through culture and its texts" (155).

> the "self" and "identity," of the very "I" that marks the page of autobiography. Or, what is "truthtelling" might circulate around the impossibility of any "truthtelling," the always deferred play of meaning, the undecidability of any coherent meaning and any unified subjectivity. (151)

In this sort of "truthtelling," Smith writes, an autobiographer may employ a strategy that she calls "'I'-lying," "the autobiographical gesture of calling to the surface of attention the fictivity of the 'I'" (160). I-liars break both autobiographical and fictional pacts by writing components of their own experience through an autobiographical I that, strictly speaking, may not be "them." "Thus lies disrupt the superficial placidity of an autobiographical contract that assumes identity between narrator and narratee as one basis of its truthtelling claims, that assumes the comfortable 'home,' the secure anchorage in location" (Smith 162).

Chicana writer Maria Lugones suggests that given the hostility that permeates the "homes" constructed for subaltern women by the dominant culture, it has become necessary for subaltern women to adopt the narrative technique of "'world'-travelling." This strategy stresses the " acquired flexibility" of the "outsider" to "[shift] from the mainstream construction of life to other constructions of life where she is more or less 'at home'" (390).

> A 'world' need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. . . A 'world' may be incomplete in that things in it may not be altogether constructed or some things may be constructed negatively (they are not what 'they' are in some other 'world'). Or the 'world' may be incomplete because it may have references to things that do not quite exist in it" (395).

In "travelling," Lugones says, "one can inhabit more than one of these 'worlds' at

the very same time" (396). In the context of Maracle's text, "world-travelling," like "'I'-lying," allows Maracle to construct the stories of her selves in other "worlds" while still affirming her position as a writer within an autobiographical "world." And in wresting lies from the purview of fiction and reapplying them to autobiography, she exposes the ways in which narratives, and identities, are constructed.

Maracle's autobiographical explorations of the selves that inform her subject position would certainly seem to engage her in games of "'I'-lying" and "'world'-travelling." I am not sure, however, that the "ficticity of the 'I'" is the *only* truth told in Sojourner's Truth. I return here to the idea of "social reality," the fact of the existence of oppressive societal structures that shape the experiences of the oppressed. Gunn Allen writes that many Native women live under the burden of this reality, and write what may be characterized as "war stories": "we write out of our experience as women at war, women who endure during wartime, women who spend each day aware that we live in a war zone" (21). Another "social reality" of Native women emerges in the assertion of many Native woman writers of the influence of "relations" -- of ties to family, community, lineage and history. "When we write," Maracle says, "I believe that what we are doing is reclaiming our house, our lineage house, our selves, because I think we already have a spirit of cooperation that just underlies eveything we do, and when you reclaim the self, there's no category" (Interview with Hartmut Lutz 176). She uses the word "siem" to illustrate this concept. Roughly translated as "all one," it has no English equivalent. "Siem" expresses a sense of connectedness, but one that "is personal and achieved through the hearing of all the voices, both in lineage, and through the people that you know" (176). Gunn Allen notes that "[s]eparation as loss . . . is a theme found all over Native America in both pre-contact and modern forms, and is particularly central to Native women's stories in both their told-to-people and told-to-the page modes"(8).

The truths of a sexist and racist reality and those of her Native communities' philosophy of connectedness are integral elements in Maracle's stories. This is so not only because of her responsibility as a writer to examine the important influences on her communities, but also because of her responsibility as an autobiographer to relate how these influences have shaped her experience. It is important to emphasize that Maracle, in her affirmation of the existence of social realities and their influence on the lives of Native women, does not necessarily delineate her experience as archetypal of the experience of all Native Canadian women.[26] Rather, she constructs experience in a way similar to Teresa de Lauretis's redefinition of it:

> For each person . . . subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and effect) to the events of the world. (159)

Maracle's stories represent her engagements in the social realities of her subject position, and demonstrate how the particulars of these engagements vary according to changing circumstances. The adolescent Maggie experiences her community differently than does the adult protagonist of "Who's Political Here?" Although Bertha and Lee (as written in "Eunice") are both adult working Native women, Bertha's experiences of life on cannery row vary drastically from Lee's interaction with her writing group. Maracle's I-lies articulate the diversity of experiences and the many selves that make up her subjective I; but they also suggest

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[26] Sneja Gunew points out that the return of "Woman as Truth" in the form of the subaltern Woman has been effected not in the writing of these women, but by critics of this writing (115).

the varying subjective realities of other Native women whose stories overlap with her own. In doing so, they explode the notion of a definitive Native woman's experience while still acknowledging common social realities. Maracle's I-lies affirm a range of experiences that have been manipulated or ignored within the arena of "official" knowledges. The truths of her experience may be positioned against "the old 'truth' as an alternative 'truth'" (Smith 156). As an alternative autobiography, Sojourner's Truth throws off the responsibilities set out by the autobiographical and fictional pacts and operates according to one of its own -- the responsibility of an autobiographer who, in order to tell her own story, must acknowledge all her "relations."

III

I now turn to the stories of Sojourner's Truth. I will look specifically at those that represent Maracle's selves over time and in several communities. Each deals with issues of oppression, community and separation as they affect Native women. Each also negotiates the act of writing. Some of Maracle's characters write stories on paper. All are in the process of writing, with their bodies, a living space within their communities -- a story of themselves that contributes to an interconnected book of stories. Through her characters' efforts, Maracle reveals the difficulty of this process for Native people, and especially for Native women, who have not been allowed the benefit of a clean slate. They must write over the indelible stories written of them by mainstream culture. And sometimes, these inscriptions prevent their own stories from being completed.

"Bertha" is the story of a cannery worker who, like the others on cannery row, drinks to numb the pain of a dreary existence. The first section of the narrative sets the tone of the place: squalid, grey, permeated with gloom and perpetually raining. "It was not the sort of place in which any of the workers felt inspired to add a touch of their personal self" (17). Indeed, there seems to be no sign of life other

than the inevitable senseless violence that "takes place on a pay night"(16). There is a sense of profound apathy, a complete lack of agency. Even the tides that regularly invade the shorefront dwellings are met with silent resignation. "[t]he women who used to complain violently to the company that their cooking was made impossible by such intrusions have long since stopped" (18). Bertha, "trapped," "emiserated," and "resigned," realizes that"[s]he is no different from anyone else" in this world (19). All are simply workers, a commodity stripped of individual agency and identity.

This dismal place is contrasted with Bertha's memories of girlhood in a Native community in which "[e]ach girl was born in the comfort of knowing how she would grow, bear children and age with dignity to become a respected matriarch." In the village, women are the writers of the communal narrative, but for the women of Bertha's community, this writing is cut short by the pressures of colonization. Bertha "mark[s] the moment when her memories chang[e]" by the arrival of a priest to the village.

> Stories, empowering ceremonies, became pagan rituals, pagan rituals full of horrific shame . . . The old women lost their counsel seats at the fires of their men. . . Little houses . . . separated each sister from the other, harbouring loneliness and isolation . . . Noone connected the stripping of woman-power and its transfer to the priest as the basis for the sudden uselessness all the people felt. Disempowered, the old ladies ceased to tell stories and lived out their lives without taking the children to the hills again. (20-21)

This transfer of power severs the narrative continuum of the village and signifies a "futureless existence" that "dr[ives] youth to the arms of whiskey traders," and, eventually, to cannery row and its promise of easy money and material goods. The disintegration of the community is completed after the young people unwittingly give

blankets infected with disease to the people still living there. Traditional culture is progressively forgotten to the point where "[s]hort stays in the queen's hotel became the basis for a new run of stories, empty of old meaning" (21).

Maracle connects the community's loss of identity to "the stripping of woman-power" accomplished by the combined forces of religion and capitalism (21). This same process halts Bertha's own narrative of identity. "The efforts of the village women to nurture her as keeper of her clan, mother of all youth, had gone to naught. . . . Motherhood, the re-creation of ancient stories that would instruct the young in the laws of her people and encourage good citizenship from even the babies, had eluded her" (19-20). Stripped of her rightful position within the community and bereft of responsibility, Bertha's self-respect bleeds away. She marks her resignation to her circumstances by giving up the name her village bestowed upon her "as a woman" (19). Although she longs to speak this name, to draw strength from it, she cannot. "In her new state of shame, she could not whisper [it], even to herself. . . ." (19). Bertha realizes that the woman to whom this name was given, a woman who had a responsibility to her community as a teacher and healer, no longer exists.

Bertha's aborted role as community historian, the "keeper of her clan," would have centered around language. Colonization ends Bertha's education and robs her of the tools that would have equipped her for the writing of her own life and that of her culture and community. Fully educated in neither the language of her people nor that of the colonizer, she becomes what Maracle calls a "crippled two-tongue" (IAW 85),[27] locked in "the silence of not knowing how it all came to pass" ("Bertha" 22).

But Bertha makes one final attempt to pick up the threads of her story, to

[27] Maracle attributes this phrase to her grandmother (I Am Woman 85).

assume the responsibility of "the intellectual she should have been" (22). Lured into a drinking binge with a young girl who also works at the cannery, she sees the girl's youth sink away under the burden of the cannery row lifestyle. Bertha tries, and fails, to find any means of connecting with the girl, "stuggl[ing] with how it came to be that this girl from her village was so foreign to her" (23). Having left the village as a child, the girl "was not nurtured by the village grandmothers" (24). She envisions no future for herself, and prefers to dull the present with alcohol. The only context the women share is wine and the oppressive atmosphere of cannery row. Bertha feels a responsibility to impart to the girl some sense of community, but "[t]he brutal realization that she, Bertha, once destined to have been this young woman's teacher, had nothing to give but stories -- dim, only half-remembered and barely understood -- brought her up short" (24). Although Bertha senses that her memories of childhood may bring some comfort to the girl, "she could not find the words in the English she inherited" (24). Bertha is paralysed between two worlds, words spoken in her Native language are "foreign" to the girl, and inspire only fear and sadness (24).

It is as if Bertha's story, full and promising in its introduction, halts with her migration to cannery row. From that point on, she does not write, instead, her life is written by the hand of the colonizer, and becomes a stereotype of drink, laziness, and violence. The force of the colonial hand has inscribed its words onto Bertha with such force that she is unable to write over them. Her story ends abruptly. Only the cannery foreman realizes that Bertha has not shown up for work, and he notes her absence in the context of "the disruption of operational smoothness" (25). In the cannery "community," individuals are expendable. Bertha's sudden death suggests suicide. Lacking a context in which to act, and trapped in the paralysing silence of isolation, it may be, as it was for Rusty, that this final articulation of defeat is only expressive act left under her control. Maracle's use of

the third person signifies the erasure of Bertha's I But by telling Bertha's story, Maracle brings it out of isolation, ressurrecting Bertha's storytelling role and drawing her back into the community and lineage of women as the grandmother figure and teacher she was never allowed to become

As a grandmother figure, Bertha disrupts the idealized conception of the Native matriarch spiritualized in liberal mainstream culture In her study of the influence of the "landscape of the grandmother" on contemporary Native women's writing, Jennifer Kelly suggests that such interruptions "[counter] the risk of mythologizing the past in [the] process of recovery" (120) With "Bertha," Maracle writes the reality over the myth in order that the reality not be ignored The story teaches that a responsible exploration of identity must include the tragic as well as noble components of one's own history and that of one's community Bertha's truth also demands that Canadian society recognize the lasting horror of a colonization that was more rape than seduction [28]

As told in Bobbie Lee, Maracle grew up as a "wharf rat" in a community of dwellings much like Bertha's She lived with alcoholism and violence, problems that plagued her through to young adulthood She also describes feelings of alienation and hopelessness, and says at one point that "I never put any real effort into anything, particularly any emotional effort I just floated along more or less with whatever was happening" (Bobbie Lee 167) And for a time, Maracle had written the wisdom of her grandmother out of her life "because I didn't want to remember that I knew that from top to bottom this society needs an entire house cleaning and we possess the cleaning gear" (200) It is not difficult to see "Bertha" as the spectre of a future Maracle was able to avoid through reestablishing her communal ties and assuming her responsibility to help "clean house "

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28 For a lengthly discussion of the images of rape and seduction as applied within and to colonialist rhetoric, see Jane Miller's Seductions Studies in Reading and Culture (London Virago, 1990)

The zombie-like atmosphere of cannery row is a tactic of defense against the enormity of the trauma of separation and oppression that demands the sacrifice of the self. But as Maracle demonstrates in "Maggie," resistance poses an equal risk to the self. Maggie is a young girl with aspirations of being a writer. In her diary, she is able to define herself on her own terms, apart from the incursions of white society, school, and even family. And it is in writing, as well, that she can express what a young girl is not supposed to think about: the attractive prospect of "kicking ass" in white society (44), "her knowledge of truck driving and tits" (45), how an unnamed "he" in her mother's life is "loud and mean" (46). In fact, it is through her diary that she emerges in the first person. Although the story is set after Maggie's death, and is narrated by her younger sister, Stacy, Stacy interrupts her own narrative with passages read from Maggie's diary. Maggie's voice is set off and presented in italics, signifying the split of Maracle's subject position into the I's of her past and present.

Maggie is angry at the injustice she is encouraged to accept from white teachers who are "fools" and classmates who are "little brutes" (49). Like a young Bobbie Lee who decided in elementary school that "all whites were . . . creepy, cruel racists that I wanted nothing more to do with" (37), Maggie "viewed white people as some sort of blight sent over by some wicked demon to plague us" (50). Maggie is paralysed between her anger against the system and love for her family, caught between childhood and adulthood. Maggie's burgeoning anger and resentment against a racist society are compounded by her responsibilites as an older sister, responsibilities that are doubled by her father's absence and her mother's long working hours. She becomes an adult before she is allowed to be a child (55).

As Maggie is consumed by her rebellion against the school system, she becomes increasingly isolated from her family (46). She begins to neglect her duties in the home and, as Stacy says, threatens the family's survival (52). Maggie's

withdrawal leaves her, literally and figuratively, out in the cold. Her battle of wills with her school principal results in detentions that expose her to long walks home in sub-zero temperatures. At home, while her mother and siblings laugh over family stories, Maggie is "outside chopping wood and splitting kindling or drawing oil, and she never hear[s] mama's stories" (46). Maggie feels "alone," "[t]he personal bride of cold" cut through with a "dread no one seems to share" (48).

Like Bertha, Maggie finally succumbs to the cold of isolation. Her writing hand is stayed by the paralysis of isolation; she freezes to death during a walk home alone following another detention. Her last words are written, in her diary, to her sister: "tell them, tell them, I just couldn't fight the cold anymore" (54). And Maggie, like Bertha, may be seen to represent a fate Maracle herself was vulnerable to, but managed to avoid. Maggie's death signifies the death of the focused, yet impotent anger of Maracle's childhood: a point at which she turns from being self-destructively "*en*raged" to being productively "*out*raged" ("an infinite number of pathways to the centre of the circle" 167). It signals the point at which Maracle's anger finds a direction.

Maggie's anger against her father, her heated run-ins with the school system and her contempt for white culture parallel Maracle's own. But Stacy's adult reminiscences also begin to invoke Maracle's subject position. Stacy's political activism and position as both storyteller and story told may be seen to embody Maracle's agency, as well as her position within the autobiographical context of the collection. As Stacy matures, she becomes more aware of the larger social significance of her experiences. But more importantly, she takes on the responsibility to look critically at these experiences. Stacy's narrative reveals the enormous pressure placed on young Native women who live under the compound burdens of racist institutions, poverty, constant work and rearing children. Like Maggie, Maracle was faced with adult responsibilities at a very young age. But at the

same time, as Stacy indicates, Native women are infantilized by a racist and sexist society that trivializes the experiences of women, and, especially, of Native women.

> Even the ladies from our own community called themselves girls -- little girls, growing girls, old girls, but all girls nonetheless. It took twenty-four years, amid much brouhaha and some pies in the faces of a few politicians who names I dis-remember, for me to say *women* and not girls, but it happened. It was kind of hard for me. I was among the first young females to gain adult status, and it took me a long time to figure out what being an adult entailed. Maggie must have known. (45)

Similarly, in I Am Woman, Maracle writes that "[b]efore 1961, we were . . . 'children in the eyes of the law'" (17), and that it wasn't until 1982 that she began to assert her own womanhood (16).

Adulthood for Stacy, as for Maracle, brings the knowledge that understanding the present necessitates placing it in the context of the past. For this reason, responsibility to one's community involves keeping stories of the past alive. Maggie's recognition of oppression, her impassioned writing, her refusal to accept the way things are, remain alive in Maracle's work, as in Stacy's. As Stacy says, "Maggie shaped me" (45). Through "Maggie," Maracle recovers and validates the experience of her childhood anger and acknowledges her debt to that self. At the same time, she reveals the difficult truth of Native girls robbed of their childhood by oppressive circumstances.

The varying responsibilities entailed by the hybrid positions of Native women are the focus of "Who's Political Here?" This is one of two stories I will consider that conform most clearly to the autobiographical contract in their use of an I

named "Lee" and, in this first instance, the names of her daughters.[29] In this story, Maracle positions Lee as a young mother having to negotiate responsibilities dictated by a sexist community -- responsibilities antithetical to those Lee feels as a woman.

In her domestic position of wife, mother, and lover, Lee is subject to the sexist legacy of colonization described in "Bertha." She is defined within the boundaries of the home in a way that recalls Aritha Van Herk's multivalent characterization of what it is "to be familied" (163).

> Family as authoritative structure. Shared blood, a shared household (possession there, in the realm of hold), enforced conjunction. . . . Breadwinning, housekeeping, natural, biological, functional, common residence. . . . That family has become its own questioned legitimacy, it's own metanarrative. Relational, nurturant. And demanding. Emotional blackmail, the blood's mafia. Enforcement. A prescribed intimacy. (161)

Van Herk's familial landscape constructs a female figure that occupies a continually shifting space of multiple functions, but whose movement within this space is limited. Family becomes a "prism/prison" that "refracts all selves into fragments," yet "insists on its own dutiful schedule" (Van Herk 170). In contrast to the highly-valued women's work of Bertha's traditional community, mainstream culture insists that "within the family women do not work" (169).

The men in Lee's life relate to her only according to her prescribed roles, and so are upset when they feel the responsibilites of these roles are not being met. Lee's husband, whining, as we meet him, about not having any clean laundry, emerges as a third child rather than a partner. Indeed, she asks herself, "[s]ince when have you

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[29] To avoid confusion, and to maintain the idea of a split subject position, I will refer to the progatonist, only, as "Lee," apart from "Maracle," the writer.

known a man to really grow up, Lee" (29). Frankie, the "obnoxious womanizer" with whom she enjoys a hurried afternoon encounter, is plagued with guilt at what he feels is his trespass onto his male friend's property. He is stupefied at Lee's lack of concern -- her infringement of the moral taboo that governs woman's place. "Sex, love and morals have never formed a triumvirate in my mind" (31), she says, agitated only by Frankie's "great pretense at morality, his sneakiness and his belief that I belong to my husband" (30). Frankie's last attempt to position Lee within the proper order of things is to invoke her responsibility as a mother. Her children, he admonishes, are "wild" and "need a good licking" (34). Lee recognizes his call for order as simple indignance. "I was supposed to be upset and shocked about what we did and he could not handle that I felt no remorse, no guilt nor any sorrow" (36). Her husband's friends, who arrive to inform her that he has been jailed for "postering" downtown, are similarly amazed at her cavalier attitude. "My sentence is 'until death do us part', he's going to be there overnight" (32). She decides to keep this last thought to herself.

Lee becomes increasingly aware of her exclusion from her husband's political fraternity. Readers, privy to Lee's insights into "Canadian legalism" (36), are led to question this exclusion as well. Lee contrasts her situation with that of Patti, her husband's mistress, who possesses "some sort of secret inside of her that inspires men to respect her brain and not intrude on her person by reducing her to a servant." Patti is very much a part of the fraternity, she has removed herself from Lee's world of children and housework, and is, in fact, contemptuous of it. "She acts like me and the kids are dead except when she wants coffee" (37). Patti's "secret" is her contempt for women in domestic roles; it is on the basis of this contempt that she is awarded honorary male status. Susie O'Brien writes that contempt for women signals a willingness to play by the rules of male discourse. Because Lee refuses to accept these rules, she "is denied the 'position' they could confer on her" (O'Brien

93). But hungry for recognition of her identity outside domestic and sexual servitude, she envies Patti nonetheless.

The political implications of Lee's position become clear toward the story's end, as she is faced with the complexity of her situation. She is a mother, wife, and lover who feels no responsibility to those roles as traditionally constructed. Her political input is rejected by a group that professes political awareness. And even though she rejects the values of this group, she envies Patti's acceptance in it. "Suddenly I resent them not thinking I am clever. Somehow what I am feeling seems more important to me than Tom's incarceration, and I think they should see it that way too" (38). Resolution visits Lee in the form of a recourse to maternal lineage. Her connection to a community of mothers and children surfaces along with a vision of her dead grandmother. Suddenly, political paralysis, the feeling that her agency has been numbed by her domestic role, falls away. In a wonderful final passage, Maracle writes:

> I hang onto the picture of her face against the white wall . . . She was telling me that confusion is just like any storm -- it rages, but at the end is the beautiful clear light of day. Stop it, and you lock your confusion up and stay that way. . . . [T]he last thing I remember is seeing my girls and thinking, yes, they are wild. Wild, untamed, not conquerable, and I was going to go on making sure they stayed that way. (38-39)

As indicated by the story's title, Lee reclaims the political agency of her position. She recognizes her responsibility to herself, her daughters, her grandmothers, her community of women, to subvert a contradictory and exclusionary patriarchy. Her power is her ability to supply herself and her daughters with the tools to rewrite, in a strong hand, the official script of their lives. And in rewriting this script, Maracle addresses her obligation to both grandmothers and grandchildren (IAW 8-9), she

confronts the colonial narrative that erases Bertha, and she ushers into adulthood Maggie's unqualified resistance.

In "Eunice," Maracle moves from the writing of her selves to the position of her writing self within a multiracial community of women writers. The story centers around a meeting of this community.[30] While the meeting embodies the concept of *métissage,* it also demonstrates reasons why it is a difficult ideal to attain. A space of inclusion, it offers the women a rare opportunity to discuss their work -- to meet at the points at which their lives converge. It is also a space of awareness. Maracle writes that the organizer "had taken great pains to identify each woman and characterize them . . . Her descriptions were intended to help me understand the participants in a way that would guide how I treated them" (56). There are inevitable tensions and blunders, but they are "not unbearable" (60) and are instructive. As a working space, Maracle writes, such meetings are still somewhat anomalous. Because of domestic and creative isolation, "women are still islands" (57) involved in the first tentative musings toward community.

Eunice herself is an extreme example. She is agoraphobic, trapped by fear in her own home. Even though she is white, she is a strong point of identification for Maracle, who recounts her own bouts with the disability (60). "We were both somewhat comfortable in our feminine invisibility, only Eunice stayed there, while I merely desired to" (57). But a gap in this identification arises because of Maracle's "dense assumption" that Eunice's dull view of an ugly schoolyard "isn't the stuff of great poetry" (59). An insensitive query why "women don't write about political meetings" prompts Maracle to note a certain hierarchy inherent to what is considered politically relevant writing. The factors that have induced Eunice's disability are political; the life of a woman cloistered within the home is political;

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30 It is possible that this meeting is based on Maracle's work with writers Sky Lee, Daphne Marlatt, and Betsy Warland. This collective organized a conference entitled Telling It: Women and Languages Across Cultures, and, in 1990, published a volume of essays from the conference under the same title.

"running about readying my four kids for my departure, giving last minute instructions about their care to my husband and finally robbing my change bank of loonies so that I can buy gas on the way -- that's political" (62)

Isolation within the home, comfortable and controllable, is at once a trap and a privilege. "Few people possess the courage to sit in solitude with their private selves, unravel all the junk they collect by living, and then march out into the world unencumbered." But Eunice finds that solitude cannot sustain her: "She wanted to be with other feminists" (64). For Maracle, being alone is a luxury rendered virtually impossible by her family responsibilities. The complex relationship that exists even between Eunice's agoraphobia and Maracle's desire for time to herself shows that the creation of a truly inclusive writing atmosphere demands far more than a simple collective agreement to empathy and good-heartedness. To be truly inclusive, such a space must respect different experiences and truths that exist even within those circumstances that seem to correspond. As Maracle writes, "[a]gendas, concealed and open, tend to obscure the politics of our lives" (62). Advocates of *métissage* must confront those concealed, even unconscious agendas that privilege certain writing positions, topics, and methodologies.

"Sojourner's Truth" is one of the least autobiographical stories in this collection, an account of a (presumably white) man's legacy, from his own perspective, after his death. It invokes Maracle's experience in its context of domestic violence against Native women, and in her responsibility to address this violence. But as a further deconstruction of perspectives of truth and experience, the story also confronts an element of the writing process integral to the construction of this collection -- the problematic nature of the writing I, the linchpin of Maracle's alternative autobiographical project.

"Sojourner's Truth" offers an interesting spin on the possibility of objectivity. Initially, the story appears to suggest that such a position is possible

reduces the pain the spirit needs to experience if it is to alter the actions of the body" (127). Finally, having come to terms with the responsibility of his situated, self-aware positioning, the protagonist is able to acknowledge the pain of the one(s) that he, and his white culture, has/have oppressed. In doing so, he affirms "our sacred right to resist abuse" and facilitates his wife's rebellion -- the self-defense killing of a new and also abusive husband (131).

"Sojourner's Truth" implies the ficticity of the objective I and detached Truth, for if transcendence is not possible even in death, it certainly is not possible within the "box" of the bodied self. Further, Maracle reveals the short-sightedness of assumed objectivity in a way that recalls Sally Haslanger's assertion of its collaboration in oppression (115). And finally, Maracle demonstrates the power of the situated self to assist in resistance on many levels, as her protagonist discovers, both oppression and resistance have ripple effects. It is a lesson that represents one of the truths of Sojourner's Truth as an autobiographical project. Responsibility for one's actions demands a situated positioning; it demands a recognition of the consequences of those actions within one's immediate community and those of one's relations, and it demands acknowledgment of the link between individuals and communities, and how elements of both contribute to the formation of the self, the multifaceted I.

# 4 "The strongest shape in nature" Living Lives and Writing Bridges in Ravensong

I fly and weave in and out of shadows There are pinpricks of lights in my eye and they annoy me I look down and I see that I have wings They flutter only at the tips They carry me about not by my power, not my power It is the power of this room

J B Joe, "Cement Woman," All My Relations, 167

## I

Thus far, I have examined Maracle's work in light of her construction of a responsible relational writing subject, and of how this subject reevaluates traditional ways of understanding identity To consider Maracle's responsible, relational and writing "selves" within their intersecting frameworks denotes the complexity of her subject position The writing in I Am Woman and Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories reveals that it is from this complexity, the outright refusal of the subject to be definitively theorized or essentialized, that the agency of the self emerges These works identify the friction of subject positions as the source that powers the process of self-construction

But while Maracle's writing problematizes identity, it also emphasizes the necessity of retaining a sense of how the multiple facets of the subject function together in the agency of the I For example, the subject declared by I Am Woman is comprised of the hybrid voices between its covers Similarly, the truth of the autobiographical I of Sojourner's Truth *is* the multiple truths represented by its stories In these works, the writing of a relational self is accomplished through the self's acknowledgment of the relations, or communities, that influence its construction, and of its responsibilities to those communities This process demands that the social realities of these communities, and hence of the subject, be recognized In short, agency does not arise full-blown from the inevitable *existence*

of multiple subjectivities, but from the friction that accompanies the acknowledgment, and, more importantly, the *setting-to-work* of multiplicitous perspectives. As Judith Butler writes, agency and responsible positioning require that the subject not be assumed in advance as a unified totality or, conversely, as simply a static sign for whom the only truth is that no truths exist.

> We may be tempted to think that to assume the subject in advance is necessary in order to safeguard the *agency* of the subject. But to claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined, on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency. For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, if not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked, resisted. ("Contingent Foundations" 12-13)

Butler stresses that "[t]o take the construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject" (15). Maracle's evaluation of the constitutive elements of her subject position provides the tools with which she narrativizes her I. The narrative process entails both an engagement with and a resistance to these elements, and is constantly under revision as new experiences are generated.

In I Am Woman and Sojourner's Truth, Maracle writes her self within an autobiographical framework that deconstructs the relations informing this self. Ravensong, her second novel, reconstructs the subject by coalescing multiple subjectivities in the person of a more overtly fictional protagonist, Stacey. Stacey represents theories of the relational self and the agency this self enjoys. Through her story, Maracle explores how issues of identity, responsibility, truth, and experience

are negotiated in the writing of lives, and the writing of texts.[31] In this novel, Maracle continues to deal with themes of connectedness and the physical and psychic peril that lies in wait for an individual separated from her communities. In doing so, she constructs a subject that derives its "authorizing power," the power to write itself, from the "replay" and "resignifi[cation]" of its cultural constituents (Butler 9). Maracle locates this power, this agency, in the subject's awareness of her *significance* within her communities:

> [W]ithout the person, or any individual, being convinced that they have spiritual significance in the world, they can't be individual. They can be individuated. . . . Our culture strives for personal significance and recognizes it, allows us to be personally heroic, where the other culture individuates, and separates, and isolates, so that individuals feel frail and vulnerable, rather than powerful and significant. ("A Conversation with Lee Maracle," Kelly 75)

Such awareness recognizes the importance of context and exposes the frailty of a position of assumed objectivity. But it also skirts another form of disabling separation: the loss of agency accompanying a fragmentation of the subject by theories that neglect to reconnect the pieces. Ravensong demonstrates that agency is realized in the creative act, be it Maracle's creation of a text, or Stacey's self-writing. Both are involved in a process of constructing a "significant" narrative that celebrates the agency enabled by a politics of positioning, and that acknowledges the responsibility of the writer/agent to examine critically those influences that constitute her position.

Stacey is situated at the juncture of several communities. With one foot on

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[31] In Borderlands/*La Frontera*: The New *Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldua eloquently expresses the inextricable bond between living and writing: "A lack of belief in my creative self is a lack of belief in my total self and vice versa -- I cannot separate my writing from any part of my life. It is all one. When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart -- a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body." (73)

either side of the river, she spends much of her time comparing the norms and mores of Native and white worlds. She is also on the cusp of adulthood, and must reconcile the differing responsibilities that accompany this right of passage in Native and white communities. This process is intensified by her preparation to leave her village to attend university in Vancouver, the first member of her community to do so. Ravensong is a story of leaving home -- the home of the past -- which is for Stacey that of childhood, her traditional village and a social system through which she interprets the world. Maracle describes the novel as chronicling the necessary, albeit painful, end of the "self-imposed segregation" of Native communities in the 1950s (Kelly 74). The text marks her coming-to-terms with the existence of a white readership, and is the result of her realization that "it was time Raven came out of the house" (Kelly 76). For white readers, and perhaps particularly for mainstream feminist readers, Ravensong may also act as a means to shove us from the nest of traditional modes of theory. Although feminist theory's problematization of individual and group identity has proven valuable in its quest to expose the value systems of these constructions, it too often stalls at the point of suggesting practical ways of achieving political solidarity and becomes itself a closed system, self-referential and exclusionary.[32]

Maracle's play with definitions of theory, evidence and argument reveals that "none of these words exists outside of its interconnectedness. Each is defined by the other" ("Oratory: Coming to Theory" 7). She writes that the "European" separation of theory from story requires "a different set of words ... to 'prove' an idea than to 'show' one" (7), and that this separation establishes a hierarchy that privileges

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[32]Jana Sequoya suggests that Western theoretical formulations of identity obscure those important to Native American readers and writers: "theoretical emphases on the expedient reinventions of culture in Western literary forms, for example, while functioning for standpoints grounded in colonizing perspectives, override American Indian conceptions of identity with the landscape and the ancestors, conceptions every bit as determining for the cultures of indigenous people as Euroamerican institutions are for the people they serve" (460-61).

theory [33] "By presenting theory in a language no one can grasp," she continues, "the speaker (or writer) retains authority over thought. By demanding that all thoughts (theory) be presented in this manner in order to be considered theory (thought), the presenter retains the power to make decisions on behalf of others" (9).

Susie O'Brien interprets Maracle's comments on theory as evidence of her "position in the anti-theory camp" (88). But to question the assumptions of theory does not necessarily indicate an anti-theoretical position. In fact, Maracle asserts in the very article that O'Brien uses to validate her hypothesis, that "[d]espite all academic criticism to the contrary, my book I Am Woman is a theoretical text" ("Oratory: Coming to Theory" 10). The title of this article suggests that Maracle calls for an alternative conception of theory, one that is less exclusionary, and that integrates it with "oratory," or story. O'Brien's critique suggests a culture-bound diagnosis of theory as a Western invention -- that it exists only in the form utilized in Western critical discourse. But as Barbara Christian wrote in 1987, "people of color have always theorized -- but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. . . [O]ur theorizing . . . is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs . . . since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" ("The Race for Theory" 73).

In Ravensong, storytelling allows Maracle to deconstruct individual and cultural identities while stressing the personal and political importance of solidarity. Stacey's self-writing project is an exploration of a number of possible affiliations. But the novel offers possibilities for solidarity extratextually as well as within the narrative, through story, Maracle is able to make complex concepts available to readers to whom Western theory is not relevant, or accessible. And

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[33] There are some feminist theorists who have undertaken to close this gap between theory and story. Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands/*La Frontera*: The New *Mestiza* and Aritha Van Herk's In Visible Ink: crypto-frictions are just two examples of such writing.

finally, Ravensong may help to initiate a solidarity among writers and readers willing to follow Raven's lead. Maracle names Raven as "the harbinger of social transformation [who] sings when the world is amiss, and some people hear that song" (Kelly 85). And as she writes in the preface to Sojourner's Truth, those who tune their ears to Raven's song, who become tricksters, are empowered as agents of change (13).

Ravensong's epilogue identifies the narrative as a reconstruction of the events that lead up to Stacey's departure. It sees Stacey, her sister Celia, Celia's son Jacob and family friend Rena resurrecting the past in an effort to understand the suicide of Celia's other son. Stacey's story becomes representative of a crucial historical point in the narrative of her village, and that of Native Canadian communities in general. Stacey remembers her leaving as a turning point in the life of the community. "The world floated in, covering us in paralysing silence and over the next decade the village fell apart. . . [I]t was as though the whole consciousness of the village changed at the same moment. . . Now we are caught in an epidemic of our own making and we have no idea how to fight it" (197).

In fact, Ravensong, along with Maracle's other writing, takes up the challenge presented in this expression of paralysis. As cultural critique, it throws off the blanket of silence and, like the figure of Raven, acts as an instigator of social transformation. Maracle identifies the trauma of transformation as a necessary step in "examining how we view the world and with what sorts of eyes we're looking at it" (Kelly 74). In undertaking this examination, "Ravensong tries real hard . . . to begin with the spiritual and end with it. . . And so that requires that we come out of our house, out of our village . . . and into the white communities" (74). Maracle's portrayal of traditional Native spirituality does not attempt to effect a return to origins, or to an unchanging essence. Such a quest is both impossible and undesireable, given that "[Native] culture is a culture that looks upon life as

constant spiritual growth " (Kelly 74) Rather, she reclaims traditional spirituality as a facilitator of change. In Ravensong, Maracle writes spirituality as a centering force for her Native subject, and as a force, this centre is less like the static and serene eye of the storm than it is the storm itself.[34]

For Stacey, this storm, intensified by the competing influence of white town, is what propels her struggle to construct her self. Her challenge is to write her own narrative overtop of those spun by her village, and by white town. She writes over existing narratives not to erase or obscure them, but to add to them. Maracle characterizes individual stories, layered upon each other, as the building blocks of a cultural narrative. "We need to know that a part of our culture is that each generation brings something new" (Kelly 75). In the addition of something new, we may recall Homi Bhabha's notion of supplementarity -- that "adding 'to' need not necessarily 'add up' but may disturb the calculation" (305). Stacey's act of self-writing, positioned within the intersection of her Native village and white town, interrupts the insular narratives of both communities. She feels, in her juxtaposition of the morality of her village with that of white town, that "she had brought their world into Momma's house" (106). And through her interaction with her white classmate, Steve, Stacey is able to sew "the seeds of shame" in a white community that had hitherto averted its eyes from the tragedies of the village.

Once again, I return to the metaphor of the bridge. In many ways, Maracle constructs Stacey as a bridge between Native and white communities, a

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[34] It is important to keep in mind how "spirituality" in a Native context differs from the Western sense of spirituality as organized around a deity that in many ways duplicates a secular humanist tradition that envisions 'man" as a detached and autonomous being with the capacity to transcend the corporeal world. '[I]n contrast," Sequoya writes, "traditional American Indian identities are not determined by the centrality of the ego. Instead, such identitites include the interactive participation of sacred beings embodied in geography, the plant and animal life of the region, its elemental characteristics, as well as the ancestors and kin whose histories constitute a part of the place. The goal-seeking drive of Native American systems of cultural organization, then, is different from that of European systems in its emphasis on preserving identification with ancestral events, customs, and values, and these are located as story and song, ritual, and memory in the members of living Indian communities, as well as in the territorial features of the homeplace" (461).

responsibility that Maracle's "obligation to [her] community as a woman" requires that she herself assume. The bridge is where Stacey does much of her thinking. From the top of its arc, she is able to see both communities, and look down upon the constantly changing river and the spectacle of its spawning salmon. In a sense, Stacey's self, her body and mind, become the bridge; her self-writing is aware of influences from both sides of the river, is powered by her spiritual connection to the life force of the river, and is symbolic of the generative act of the salmon.[35]

Watching the salmon inspires in her a sense of ritual, duty and lineage, and causes her to consider the integral role of creativity in the spiritual life of her people:

> This picture rooted Stacey to a sense of duty she could not explain, but she suspected that white folks lacked this sensibility. . . . Maybe some white people had no roots in the creative process, so could not imagine being that devoted to staying alive. If you have only yourself as a start and end point, life becomes a pretence at continuum. (61)

Stacey's creative duty (and, as Maracle writes, her own) is to write a narrative that is of significance to her community. She functions within the continuum as a builder of bridges between her village and the white world, between herself as an individual and the members of her community, between the narratives of the past, present and future. It is her sense of responsibility to maintain this continuum that informs her dream of becoming a teacher and motivates her to "collect the magic words of white town and bring them home . . . in a way that would revitalize her flagging community" (192). Stacey realizes, ultimately, the importance of a responsible

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[35] The bridge may also be seen as the location of the point of "hesitation" that Sequoya suggests is necessary for "agents of change [who] must undergo a period of transition prior to the inauguration of the new social order." She writes that "[w]hile hesitation marks a withdrawal that effectively places the subject outside of the system under consideration, it is a hiatus capable of fostering alternative standpoints in the contest of stories. That is, under conducive conditions, 'hesitation' may enable conceptual reorganization preceding a new engagement . . . (463). As I will go on to discuss, Stacey's initial response to her capacity as a bridge is to retreat into herself, a manoever that may signify a strategy of "hesitation."

positioning -- of context -- to this project. As Maracle says, "We're all making our way to the other world. We all need that bridge and we all need to build it and we need to build it from where we are. We need to stand solidly in our own culture . . ." (Kelly 85).

II

Ravensong shows that creating a fully-developed sense of context from which to begin building bridges is a confusing and arduous task, one that is both psychically and physically demanding. The novel opens with an invocation of natural connectedness that places Raven at the center: "The sound of Raven spiralled out from its small beginning in larger and larger concentric circles, gaining volume as it passed each successive layer of green. The song echoed the rolling motion of earth's center, filtering itself through the last layer to reach outward to earth's shoreline above the deep" (9). It is in the midst of this activity that we meet Celia, who, throughout the course of the novel, becomes representative of the individual's ability to channel natural creative energy toward the production of visions that position her within a historical continuum.

Celia's visions of first European contact and its destructive consequences do not empower her, but exact an invasive physical pain that "silence[s] her" (10). Celia's pain echoes Raven's prophetic rendering of the inevitable and necessary pain of transformation:

> Change is serious business -- gut-wrenching, really. With humans it is important to approach it with great intensity. Great storms alter earth, mature life, rid the world of the old, ushering in the new. Humans call it catastrophe. Just birth, Raven crowed. . . . Still, Raven was convinced that this catastrophe she planned to execute would finally wake the people up, drive them to white town to fix the mess over there. (14)

The catastrophe planned by Raven is the epidemic that shatters the village. It causes the villagers, and primarily Stacey, to become conscious of the gulf that separates white and Native cultures, and of the threat this separation poses to the survival of both. Celia's continuing visions put this sickness into a historical perspective that emerges as an integral component of the transformative process. But as Maracle indicates, Celia's agency is hindered by her youth, she lacks the experience that would allow her to create a context for her visions (Kelly 86).

This wider context seems to be lacking in the village as a whole. Readers enter the narrative of the village at a time of transition: the funeral of Nora, an elder whose unconventional life had a profound effect on the community. Even so, Nora's funeral inspires only "relief and resignation," an atmosphere that contrasts sharply with the outpouring of emotion that had characterized past burial rituals (11). The village is caught in a kind a stasis, although Ella's words to the funeral gathering preach an ethic of connectedness that conjures infinite grandparents and grandchildren, it is an ethic that does not extend to the "others" who live beyond the perimeters of the community. From her bird's-eye view of history, Raven sees that the time has come for a reevaluation of context:

> She considered her plan to drive the people out of their houses. She knew they stayed confined to their villages for false reasons: segregation between the others and her own people had as much to do with how her own felt about the others, as it had to do with how the others felt about the villagers. Raven saw the future threatened by the parochial refusal of her own people to shape the future of their homeland. Somewhere in the fold between dark and light her people had given up, retreated to their houses in their raggedy villages and withdrawn into their imagined confinement. She had to drive them out, bring them across the bridge. (44)

Like Celia, the villagers' lack of experience of the others obscures the larger context in which change must occur, silencing and paralysing them in the face of it.

The villagers, comfortable in the home of their isolation, feel no need to look beyond it. But for Stacey, who possesses knowledge of the threats and possibilities inherent in interaction with the white community, the haven of cultural isolation is no longer an option. Stacey's experience puts her in a difficult position. Raven laments that while Celia has "the courage to look . . . Stacey, who knew the others, refused to see" (15). Indeed, when we meet Stacey, she seems, to use Maracle's term, "individuated," caught in a cultural paradox that promotes a different sort of isolation -- isolation within her self. A typical teenager, she is immersed in dreams of her own future, and is attracted to (somewhat selfishly) and, at the same time, repelled by, elements of both cultures. Unwilling, or perhaps unable, at this point, to risk the litmus test of full identification with either culture, she remains, as Raven observes, somewhat innocent. "She judged the world through a pair of glasses whose colours did not match reality. Stacey behaved as though she did not share the context of her clanswomen." (22). But nor does she share the context of her white classmates. As of yet, she is not positioned in either world, and hence is an agent in neither.

Maracle presents the complexity of Stacey's dilemma with great skill. Stacey's reflections on the divergent facets of her worlds portray a profound sense of paralysis. Although her two worlds continually butt heads, Stacey stops the process short of allowing a meaningful intersection to occur. An intersection would necessitate the assumption of a critical position, would call for action, but Stacey is not ready to act. It is as if, posed on the brink of beginning, as a adult, a new chapter of her life, Stacey experiences a debilitating writer's block; she fears where the responsibility of critical thinking will lead once it begins, that it will take her over, and that she will lose whatever small measure of control she has.

Maracle manages the delicate operation of exposing Stacey's mental processes in order that readers may begin to dissect the intricately-connected components of agency.[36] Through Stacey, it is revealed that while interpretations of the significance of events must be accompanied by a responsibility to act on these interpretations, the ability to act is predicated on situating oneself within a context from which to act. Initially, Stacey denies her context, distancing herself from both of the cultures that constitute it, while she resents her mother for cultivating "weeds," she nevertheless recognizes "the pathos of white folks discarding wild food growing" (32). Perhaps, she sees herself as a sort of weed -- something that grows, but is not planted. And weeds are also notorious for spreading their roots, appearing everywhere at once, their origins imperceptable.

Stacey is aware of contrasts between the social realities of her communities. Even things like her inadequate footwear (although perhaps insufficient clothing is only a small matter to those who do not have to deal with it) make a world of difference.

> She schlepped down the hall conscious of her feet, cursing her parents for having kids they could not afford. She cursed them for not going to school, she cursed them for continuing to live like her grandparents had, as though this world had not changed. . . . Her parents were caught in some strange time warp they refused to be freed of. . . . "No use thinking about it," the returning image of Nora told her. Nora's face whirled about the streaks of rain without acquiring any significance. (24-25)

As this passage shows, Stacey stops short of attaching any real significance to

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[36] And it is in trying here, outside the framework of story, to illuminate those components that I begin to understand Maracle's assertion that story "is the most persuasive and sensible way" to apply theoretical concepts of subjectivity ("Oratory: Coming to Theory" 7). Oratory is especially useful as a tool for the subaltern subject, the stories and the poetry of I Am Woman, she writes, "bring the reality home and allow the victims to devictimize their consciousness" (10).

cultural contrasts and, through the course of the novel, invokes Nora's refrain, "no use thinking about it," to rationalize her inactivity

It is the approaching spectre of sickness that begins to stimulate a recognition of the social significance of these contrasts. Within the historical perspective of other epidemics, Stacey sees "the meaning of death to the village". "[e]very single person served the community, each one becoming a wedge of the family circle around which good health and well-being revolved. A missing person became a missing piece of the circle which could not be replaced" (26). Still, she does not register the fact that her failure to situate herself within this communal circle renders her a "missing person," and that her absence has a ripple effect. Again we see how Stacey avoids the meaningful intersection of communities within her. At the moment of contact, she withdraws. Distracted by the observation that "[w]hite people didn't seem to live this way," her fear is replaced with "[a] sliver of pale apathy" (26). But earlier, when talking to Carol, she felt hard-pressed to concentrate, wanting to focus instead on the "significance of the epidemic" (25). Although her "sense of family" prepares her to assume responsibility for helping to fight the epidemic (27), she suppresses her nagging sense of responsibility for her school's collective humiliation of Polly, a classmate whose sexual liaison is revealed in public. Rationalizing that this incident has "[n]othing to do with me," Stacey "hurrie[s] to school without bothering to take a look at the world around her" (29).

Stacey's visits to the stifling and antiseptic home of Carol, her white classmate, help her to conceptualize her schizophrenia. "I am obsessed with living like these people but I can't stand them anymore" (37), she thinks, and later realizes that "[s]he wanted the things without their ways dangling from them" (65). The white world offers her the means to realize her dream of a university education and to help satisfy her burgeoning intellectual curiosity. Stacey learns, however, that for the women of this world, curiosity exacts a high price. Polly

commits suicide over the damage to her reputation. Her death marks a crucial point in the novel; the halting of Polly's life story is the point of departure for Stacey's own. Stacey's inablility to come to terms with the incongruity of suicide as an outcome of sexual passion prompts her to feel that "she must be missing some significant piece of information." From her position on the bridge, she fights to "deaden the script set off inside by Polly's passing" (40), cognizant of the fact that fighting the epidemic will consume all of her energy. What she cannot know is that the 'flu will provide the information she lacks -- the knowledge of context -- and thus act as the catalyst that sets in motion her writing of this script.

Stacey develops her sense of context for the most part within the community of women that band together to fight the epidemic. Celia sees the process of self-writing take shape in Stacey, who begins, as she battles the epidemic, to write her way out of her own helpless sickness. "[Celia] imagined Stacey's character unfolding under the light of the fight against the 'flu. Stacey's devotion to healing the fallen didn't seem to fit Celia's previous understanding of her" (62). From within the context of this community, cultural differences begin to take on a new significance. The ethic of choice the village women enjoy is juxtaposed with the morality of white town, where illusions of virtue hinge on a deception named "discretion" -- the ability not to be caught (64).

The white ethic of female virtue is an invasive influence, however, and one Stacey cannot easily shake. Her identification with her Native female community is sorely tested with the revelation of her mother's relationship with her uncle, Ned. Following the death of her father, Jim, Stacey learns that Ned, Jim's twin, is her biological father. This relationship was sanctioned by Jim, and Stacey's Grampa Thomas, on the basis of Momma's desire for children and Jim's inability to father them. With this knowledge, Stacey suddenly finds her mother's renewal of her romance with Ned "disgusting" (104). "No wonder the priests think we are

immoral. We are." She sat rooted to her chair, wanting to be someplace else but unable to move. In her mind, the simplicity, the austerity and the bedraggled poverty of the village took on ugly tones. "Some stories aren't worth telling and this is one of them" (102). Suddenly, the rules governing her village's ancient system of gender protocol seem to her "absurd" and "pretentious" (103). And when Polly's presence appears in the midst of her confusion, she summarily "erase[s] her" (104).

It is in conference with Old Ella that Stacey manages to reestablish perspective and establish an important connection between the experiences of women in her white and Native communities. Through the risqué story of Snot Woman, Ella demonstrates the importance of "keep[ing] our minds and hearts in our own bedrooms" (105), and that the Native community's prerogative of choice gives Momma "permission to satisfy her passions at any time, in any way she [chooses]" (106). And this time, when Polly's image surfaces, Stacey does not push it away, but realizes that "Polly and Momma were the same woman -- good-hearted and passionate," and that "[i]n the white world her momma would have perished," just as Polly did (106). Through Polly's influence, Stacey is able to recognize a bond of experience shared with Momma, both are "disruptive," having resisted the self-ordained power of white school authorities (107). In allowing the spirit of Polly to guide her in the same way as do those of the village elders, Stacey builds an important bridge between communities within herself. And with this bridge arises the possibility of intersection, of supplementarity, and the first glimmers of cultural, and cross-cultural, solidarity.

This understanding is initiated in part by Stacey's visits to the home of Rena and German Judy, lesbian partners whose life choice is respected, albeit not wholeheartedly accepted, by the villagers. In talking with Judy, who is white, Stacey comes to realize that the support system provided within the village's female community does not exist in white town. "Until now," Maracle writes, "Stacey had

bagged white men and women in the same sack. White women started to look different." Understandably, this makes Stacey "a little uneasy" (81), given the disruptive influence of this knowledge on her preconceptions of cultural incompatibility. At this point, readers may recall instances where Stacey attempts to theorize this incompatibility. She remembers that "Polly's smile had invited her to some sort of relationship Stacey had never picked up on," and wonders if a lack of communication is to blame for her persistent feeling of separation from Carol's mother (73). And later, after discovering that Carol had betrayed her confidence to Steve, Stacey's hopeful suitor, Stacey realizes that the distance between Carol and herself has resulted from the fact that they know virtually nothing about each other's lives. "Is it prejudice," she asks herself, "or a gulf of difference too deep to cross?" (90).

Throughout Ravensong, Maracle portrays white town as a community "headed for some nameless disaster" (39), poised on the brink of implosion due to the individuatedness of its members. In white town, it's every man for himself, and Stacey's mother observes that it is "[n]o small wonder they don't like us if they don't like their own" (153). The individuation of white town's residents makes it difficult for the villagers to relate to them. But Maracle also demonstrates that the gulf of difference has been dug by both communities. At several points in the narrative, Stacey's mother expresses an extreme contempt for all whites. In her rage over Stacey's unchaperoned excursion with Rena and German Judy, Momma says of Judy, "[s]he's white and so she don't count" (123). For Stacey, having made the first tentative forays onto the bridge she has constructed between white and Native women, Momma's answer is not one she can accept (127).

Stacey has begun to consider the influence of different experiences, and how the variant truths generated by them impact the social realities of women across cultures. As at many points in the novel, readers are prompted to remember Stacey's

earlier musings on the nature of difference. Polly's initial humiliation first inspired her to consider the strange predicament of women within white culture.

> She wondered what magic medicine Polly hid inside her passionate self. A self that had inspired Herb to write the love note and risk being caught by giving it to her in class. Underneath this lay a question not fully formed which Stacey could not bring up far enough to ask: what powerlessness lay inside her magical self that killed Herb's loyalty when they were both caught? What drove [the principal] and her classmates to hold Polly alone to account for the actions of both her and Herb? (32)

Polly's helplessness in the face of her gender script contrasts sharply with the ethic of choice within Stacey's village -- one that allows her mother her sexual freedom, that tolerated Nora's presumed homosexuality and choice to "fish, hunt and space logs rather than remarry" (77), that accepts Rena and Judy's relationship, and that supports Stacey's own unprecedented choice to eschew domesticity in favor of an untraditional education outside of the village.

Cultural differences no longer simply clash and separate in Stacey's mind, for she has developed the perspective of the relational self, as a bridge between communities, she is the ground for the interpolation of influences, and, more importantly, is open to the significance of this interplay. The isolation wrought by patriarchal morality becomes for her more than an affliction of white women, for Stacey has become tuned to the signs of its influence on the village. She sees its signature in the actions of the abusive Old Snake, who returned from the white world with "crazy notions about his wife's place." Although the villagers think him crazy, "Stacey wonders how long they would continue to think this way" (149). She establishes a connection between the fate of Polly and Carol with that of her cousin Shelley, left by her husband to the misery of skid row, and the young woman who left

the village to follow an abusive husband, and was never heard from again. The dire consequences of an encroaching patriarchal system manifest themselves with a vengeance as Madeline, the Old Snake's wife, shoots him in an effort to halt years of systematic abuse.

Stacey's recognition of her changing world allows her to answer a question she had previously asked herself, but had been unable, or unwilling, to answer. When she is asked whether or not, in relation to white town, she thinks the villagers "live wrong," Stacey replies that "[m]aybe we are being driven from our insulated little lives into the other world because they need something we have" (142). This something is a sense of responsibility, of duty, for one's actions. Stacey's reply shows her recognition of the inevitability of change; and the reader discovers, along with Stacey, that the individual agency that inspires change arises from within "the context of her clanswomen." Stacey's visit with her cousin Stella, who has chosen a life narrative very different from her own, solidifies for Stacey the value of communal bonds:

> Stella was a mother and Stacey still innocent. Stacey was full of foreign knowledge and the philosophical understanding of their own, while Stella was a genius with the tools of womanly survival. They both seemed to be looking at each other from opposing ramparts between which stood an invisible arc of family history binding them together. . . . The arc, the strongest shape in nature, couched the little girl that they both held. . . . Stacey would shape her intellectual development. Stella would love her. Together they would create a child different from them both. It inspired fear and wonder at the same time. (140)

This passage draws together the power engendered by a grounding in community with Stacey's direction of this power beyond its communal origins. Ultimately, though,

individual agency, when exercised in a way that is responsible to its origins, enriches the community that fosters it.

Stacey's relational positioning is built on an awareness of context: her interaction within her Native community and her position as a bridge between cultures. Admittedly, my use of the term "context" could benefit from clarification. Maracle's novel presents context as a construct with shifting boundaries, yet with boundaries nonetheless. Boundaries of context are delineated by experience and the truths generated by it.[37] In an immediate and generative sense, Stacey's context is her Native village -- her place within its continuum of lineage and the evolving traditions and protocol governing its interaction. But as Raven teaches, the full realization of her position within this continuum necessitates the recognition of a larger context -- the experiential arena that includes white communities, for it is within this larger context that Stacey is able to make sense of the influences each culture has on the other, and thus operate in her role as a transformative agent.

In I Am Woman and Sojourner's Truth, Maracle functions within this larger context, the space where cultures intersect, to undertake a critique of the mutual influence of white and Native communities. But as she stresses throughout her work, writers of lives and texts must finally remain responsible to, and for, their primary cultural contexts. Responsibility to one's context, or community, recognizes the effect one's actions have on its members, responsibility for one's context recognizes its fundamental influence on any interpretations made from within it. As Stacey concludes: "Words are sacred, once spoken they cannot be retrieved. Sometimes they

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[37] Joan W. Scott offers a helpful way to think about "experience." She writes that the processes that constitute experience must be historicized in order for our understanding of "repressive mechanisms" to extend beyond the simple recognition of their existence to how those mechanisms operate. "It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces" (25-26).

fall out of the mouth in moments of thoughtlessness when the speaker focuses on images which don't include the one spoken to, and burn holes in the lives of the listener" (167). The relational self operates on the understanding that experience cannot be transcended, and that (despite some mainstream writers' protests to the contrary), efforts to do so are artificial exercises in assumed objectivity that ultimately succumb to the paralysis of individuation. As Stacey's struggles show, words spoken in isolation are words without power.

Finally, it is responsibility, to and for her communities, that powers Stacey's agency and allows her to hear Raven's song. As a member of the village, she must remain accountable to family and community law. When she breaks protocol by failing to ask her mother's permission to visit Rena and Judy (whose lesbian status, in Momma's eyes, writes for them a male script), she is threatened with ostracism. Maracle notes that this law is not absolute, that there is "a way to change it" (127). Stacey's crime is not visiting the women, it lies rather in her abdication of her responsibility as a community member by simply ignoring its law. Jana Sequoya makes the relevant point that "in order to receive the tribal knowledge encoded in the traditional stories, [members] must submit to the social terms of which the stories are a vital part" (460).

But Raven insists that Stacey's responsibility take on another form: a critical examination of her culture with an eye turned toward change. While she respects the community's traditional teachings and the choice of traditional roles made by her brother and cousin, there are some by-products of the village's isolation that she cannot accept. Stacey's growing awareness of the possibility of a cross-cultural solidarity among women, for example, challenges Momma's belief that whites "aren't human" (192), and her refusal to see the difference between lesbian scripts and male ones (127). Readers see the seeds of transformation growing in Stacey, who begins to question her own assumptions about whites. "Stacey offered tea. Carol

declined. Stacey bristled. White people were so incredibly rude. Stacey argued with herself. Carol couldn't possibly know her refusal was rude. Yes, she could. She could have found out before she came what the sense of courtesy was. How, research it? Stacey stifled a laugh" (129). She remembers Dominic's words concerning the destructiveness of stockpiled and directionless anger, and concedes that it is "unfair" to make "Carol stand in for the anger she harboured toward white people in general" (130).

Stacey's act of self-writing is evident in such revelations. Faced with the imminent dissolution of her traditional community, she must, as Sequoya writes, "reinvent viable conditions of being Indian" (458-59). But Stacey's reclamation of agency by no means supplies her with all the answers to her questions. Differences abound, and are compounded with the emergence of Madeline, who is welcomed into the village after the Old Snake recovers and is exiled. Madeline is from the prairies, and her odd ways throw a wrench into the machinery of what Stacey has theorized as Native identity. "When Madeline was around she doubted the . . . discipline that she had accepted as the best possible form of human expression. . . It was annoying to have your whole self challenged so innocently" (173). The more apparent differences become, the harder she must work. Forced even to question her motives for going to university, she remembers the rhetorical question posed by Dominic, Old Nora and Ella: "How else are we to learn how we are to live with them?" (154). Suddenly, Nora's constant refrain "no use thinking about it," takes on a new importance, for it may be newly translated as "no use thinking about it, *unless you are going to act*."

Stacey succeeds in writing her life as a bridge that connects her to her communities, that spans her village and white town, and that traverses the past and future. Ultimately, however, her agency springs from the place at which this construction began. Her final confrontation with Steve takes place on the bridge

between, yet it demonstrates that work to bridge cultural differences must be engaged in from both sides. Without mutual effort, effective solidarity has no context. When Steve sulks that he cannot manage to "care desperately" about the survival of Stacey's village from his side of town, she sends him back across the bridge, the gulf between them grows into an "ugly maw" before Stacey's eyes (186). It does not result merely from the fact of cultural and sexual difference, but more from their disparate reactions to this difference. Steve's perception of his context is static -- determined by cultural prejudices he does not question. Stacey sees that his "future was pre-cut from some cloth she did not want to wear" (188). Her own vision, although "confused," is nevertheless in process, "a cloth made of disparate threads from her past warped alongside the threads of white town, with unknown threads waiting to be shuttled overtop" (192). As a creation-in-process, she is open to countless possibilities. And like Raven, she is a harbinger of transformation.

Ravensong does not shy away from harsh realities. Its epilogue reveals that even after 25 years, Stacey is not allowed to put her education to use (198). Suicide and disconnectedness plague what is left of the village. But it is also a hopeful book. Throughout it, readers are afforded glimpses of real, if tentative, instances of solidarity. A particularly interesting one occurs between Stacey, Rena and German Judy as they ponder the rift between white and Native worlds:

> Somehow the ignorance of Stacey had power in it. It was inexplicable but there were so many assumptions in the white world that had no meaning here . . . The gulf between them ceased to be a threat. The absence of knowledge of the other world was so vast that Judy could not conceive of its size. All three women sat in a complete state of unknowing. In an odd sort of way they were all equal in their lack of knowledge. (112-13)

When picking one's way across an unfamiliar space, the gulf poses a threat only

when it is obscured, or denied. When one looks hard into the gulf, as Stacey does, it begins to take on the shape of a challenge. Ravensong suggests that in order to achieve an atmosphere of *métissage,* one must first acknowledge the gulf in understanding between cultures and take the difficult step of admitting one's ignorance. From this point, dialogue may begin from the ground up -- a very simple start on the road to the *mestiza* knowledge preached by Dominic. "[t]he world needs a combined wisdom, not just one knowledge or another, but all knowledge should be joined. Human oneness, that's our way" (67). At this point, Dominic's utopian goal seems very far away. However, there is comfort in the fact that, as Celia's young son knows, "the story [is] not over" (199).

## Conclusion

"We talk to keep our conversations from getting too dead."

Marie Annharte Baker, "One Way to Keep Track of Who is Talking," Being on the Moon, 78

In this study, I have tried to show how Lee Maracle's writing constructs a model of responsible relational positioning that offers exciting possibilities for writers working toward the realization of *métissage*. The challenge of such a positioning is to maintain an awareness of the self as a subject in process. The continual shift and evolution of communities necessitates a constant negotiation of changing roles and responsibilities within them. There is no end *to* this process -- no theoretical home to be built and then furnished with an array of comfortable knowledges. But there is an end *in* it. Named *métissage*, *la mestiza*, the bridge, it is an equitable atmosphere in which the multivalent manifestations of positioning can occur. The cornerstone of the solidarity offered within this space is the collective empowerment of individuals to assume their differing tasks toward this end.

Although each of the texts I have looked at is concerned with the process of positioning, consideration of writings representative of Maracle's body of work brings the magnitude of this process into perspective. Bobbie Lee and I Am Woman reveal that a critical awareness of context -- of personal, cultural and political history -- is crucial to beginning negotiations of one's place within one's communities. In the stories of Sojourner's Truth, Maracle dissects her context in order to demonstrate the complexity of her relational self. She shows how working to satisfy the responsibilities of this self connects her to her relations, and discovers this connection as the fundamental source of individual, and communal, agency. Ravensong sets the concepts of responsibility and relational postioning to work toward the creation of bridges between communities. Although it accomplishes this

under the auspices of fiction, it continues Maracle's focus on life writing, on the inextricable bond between the creation of lives and the creation of narratives. Maracle builds her narrative around Stacey's own efforts to write the story of herself, efforts which bring to the fore the intricate and often unsettling strategies involved in constructing a responsible relational subject position.

The connection between lives and texts made in Ravensong, as well as by Maracle's more autobiographical work, emphasizes the practical, as well as textual, applications of a politics of positioning. Such a politics serves, in Raven's words, "to drive the people out of their houses" (Ravensong 43), it stimulates a questioning of ideological homes. And once out of the house, agents are open to accept Maracle's challenge to become "architect[s] of great social transformation at whatever level [they] choose" (Preface, Sojourner's Truth 13).

By way of conclusion, I would like to offer some thoughts on my own position within this study. Exploring Maracle's writing has heightened my awareness of my own strategies of positioning. I approach Maracle's work from within our intersecting spaces as women, writers and feminists, however, as a white feminist working within an academic setting, I have had to acknowledge, and question, the degree to which cultural biases inform my operation within these spaces. For example, in challenging mainstream feminist missionary tendencies to try to "save" Native women from the obscurity of the margins by bringing them to the center, I am forced to question my own critical intentions.

I answer, in part, in saying that by situating my readings of Maracle's work within the parameters of contemporary feminist discourse, I hope to begin to address her call to responsibility. I interpret this call as a summons, first, to recognize the factors that influence the stories communities write for themselves, and second, to act in ways accountable to, and for, these contexts. Part of one's responsibility to one's communities is to undertake a critique of them. Hence, my effort to develop a

critical sense of the climate of current feminist theories of Native women's writing endeavors to establish a context for my own project and acknowledge my debt to this community, but, at the same time, questions its assumptions and methodologies. Close readings of Maracle's work try to remain responsible to her critical vision, my intent is not to position her as a "native informant," but to show how her articulations of her self-positioning contribute to theory. Ultimately, I realize that the call I answer is, at least, as much mine as it is Maracle's. But it is my hope that my project assists in the crucial process of reexamining stories of ourselves.

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