Second Person, Second Sex:
Address and Apostrophe in the Poetry of Erin Mouré

by

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B.A., University of Victoria, 1991

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

In a language which has typically excluded the experience of women, the poetic use of the second person has relegated women to the role of passive objects. In order to create a place in language from which women writers are able to express their own experience, it is necessary to look at the void created when the second person is addressed (through apostrophe, in traditional poetic odes and elegies and contemporary love lyrics) and allow that void to be filled by the female voice. In this way, women writers--and readers--are able to appropriate the role of the second person, and thereby gain subjecthood. Through examining the poetry of Erin Mouré, a contemporary Canadian poet living in Montreal, this thesis examines the practical issues of creating this kind of female subjectivity.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to Stephen Scobie, Elizabeth Simpson, Rona Murray and (of course) Erin Mouré for their help and support. Also thanks to Jim, Miria, Sylvia, Jeremy and Robert--for all this and much more.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all those who matter:

You know who You are.

Introduction: Addressing the Absent Subject

If "who am I" is one of the more often-asked questions of the late twentieth century, then the question "who are you" might be considered similarly significant, as the flip side of a subject-object relationship. We are conditioned, in this era of individual egotism, to think of "I" as subject and "you" as object: a natural corollary. However, this thinking creates a perpetual system of inequality, whereby every dialogue becomes a conversation between the active subject and the passive object: an undesirable situation in an era which would seem to espouse the ideal of subject-subject dialogue, and its inevitable outcome of equality between all people. In order to overcome this dichotomy, it is necessary to question and change the way the second person, or "you," is addressed. We can do this through changing the way the second person is portrayed and perceived in (and through) poetry, and through assigning the desirable conditions of subjecthood and subjectivity to the second person.

Subjectivity can be defined as an individual's capability to perform actions as an individual. It assumes a point of view which belongs to the individual, rather than to another person who is

observing the individual. Creating a condition of subjecthood for the second person is particularly relevant to the question of gender equality. In a language and society which has frequently--some might say universally--posited men as subjects and women as objects, it is necessary to redress that imbalance by allowing women--writers and readers--to fill the role of subject.

This ideal becomes possible by examining the role of "you" in contemporary poetry, filling the role of the second person with a member of the so-called second sex, and allowing the "you" to respond--to the question "who are you," and to anything else she might desire. In this thesis, I intend to address these issues and possibilities through examining the poetry of Erin Mouré, a contemporary Canadian poet whose regular use of the word "you" in her poems conforms readily to these conditions.

But first, we must notice that between the first-person narrator and the third-person narrative, there exists a subjective vacuum. The unnamed position of second person has vast potential, based mainly on its condition of emptiness. If it is, by necessity, devoid of all identity, it is a free space, to be inhabited by objects, subjects, or anyone else. Because

it is largely excluded from critical discourse, it is unclaimed, unceded territory.

It is just this exclusion which gives the second person the potential to become a powerful entity. As Gabriele Schwab points out, "the excluded, as a secret, latent meaning, always has a potential place in our talk" (468). It is up to poets to claim the potential stashed within the second person's empty shell. Although contemporary lyric poetry posits "you" as the necessary object, certainly the very nature of apostrophe's emptiness allows it to be filled with a subject.

Women writers can use this condition to their advantage and endow the previously objectified "you" with a certain subjectivity by allowing "you" a voice. As Schwab states, "[women's] entire subjectivity bears the stamp of language" (464). For poets of both genders, the continued subjectivity of the addressee can be assured through the use of dialogue. The moment objects are allowed to speak, they begin to gain subjectivity. Maintaining and nurturing this dialogue, or implied dialogue, makes possible the second person's continuing subjectivity.

Jonathan Culler states that "when [poems] address natural objects they formally will that these

particular objects function as subjects" (*Pursuit* 140). One can take this statement one step further--if we agree that women, in much literature, have been endowed mainly with the role of object, then their place in literature can be addressed and changed by addressing women, too, as subjects. "The object is treated as a subject, an *I* which implies a certain type of *you* in its turn" (Culler, *Pursuit* 142). This use of the second-person, then, can potentially bring subjectivity to women's poetry. In turn, subjectivity in women's poetry brings female subjectivity into language.

Of course, we can also find the second person in the works of male poets, but it is important to consider the circumstances under which it is used. It generally seems to be fuelled by a long poetic tradition (of odes and elegies, in particular) rather than by what could be considered a need to create a place in language. While such writings certainly must exist, it is difficult to find traditional poetry written by men that includes reference to "you" in any but the most formal or perfunctory way. I will refer again to the male use of the second person, but before that is possible, we must address and understand the female poets' side of this issue.

Erin Mouré states that "male writers are at a disadvantage right now because they can take for granted a language that is already invented for them; it already belongs to them. The written history and literature of human beings has referred to 'he' and 'him'! Women writing feel the unease and strangeness in our language more readily because they are out of it . .[W]omen are beginning to write a new language, their own language, using the common word-signs of the old; women have to discover new correlatives of desire, or ways of expressing them" (Mouré, in O'Brien 31, quoted in Glickman 141). While apostrophe is a word-sign of the old language, women's use of it, or a variation of it, can be a new subversion of that language. It heralds a move towards a new language, one which better expresses women's experience of the world.

The need for a female-oriented language has been extensively addressed, both by feminist theorists like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, and by feminist poets like Nicole Brossard, Daphne Marlatt, and the subject of this thesis herself, Erin Mouré[1].

[1] We may assume that Mouré's exploration of women's role in language is largely informed by her close association with a number of Montreal lesbian and feminist poets, including Brossard and Gail Scott. These writers' ongoing discussion of poetry, language and lesbian theory has been well-documented in a number of books and articles, and Mouré's role within this milieu and its ongoing discussion can be seen as

Much of Mouré's work is driven by a need for, and exploration of, female-oriented language. Thanks to her way of looking at language, the subjective use of the second-person is evident in many of her poems. "The issue of language--of the failure of common speech and the need to discover a new way of speaking--has become . . . central to this poet's work" (Glickman 138). The subjective vacuum created by apostrophe is an example of just such a new way of speaking. "Poets such as Mouré . . .are finding in the chancy, the accidental, and the provisional, bases for a new feminist poetics" (York 133). I have chosen Mouré's work for this thesis because of her extensive questioning of language, and her successful attempts to change and incorporate her own version and vision of language into her work. "The new language struggles visibly, in her work, to escape from the confines of the old, even as it exists only through, and by means of, the old" (Glickman 140). A new poetic language bubbles through even such a misunderstood and antiquated trope as apostrophe.

This thesis will examine how Mouré's use of apostrophe and casual second-person address borders on dialogue, and will discuss the ways these

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likely inspiration for much of her own theorizing about language. However, an analysis of such theory and context in relation to Mouré's poetry is not within the focus of this thesis.

characteristics function in this particular poet's work. It will also examine the ways in which Mouré's questioning and re-thinking of language use contribute to female subjectivity within her own poetry.

Chapter 1: Addressing the Traditions

In order to understand the specific characteristics of apostrophe and second person address, we must look to the role each has played in traditional poetry, and consider it as stemming from such traditions. Because apostrophe necessitates and facilitates an awkward, unequal relationship between subject and object, it currently seems distasteful, an element of lyric poetry that must be tolerated, as long as it is not used too extensively. The character of "you" exists in a vacuum, neither an actual fictional character, nor an actual person, simultaneously created and denied existence. And yet it is there, in lyric poetry, in music and in popular culture. It exists in a vacuum which must be filled.

This vacuum would appear to be open for occupation by anyone, anytime, despite apostrophe's implied and necessary objectification of the second person. Even a self-controlled, self-proclaimed subject could move in and find a way in which "you" could become capable of answering back. Unfortunately, by its original nature, apostrophe disallows this possibility.

In its most classical form, apostrophe has been a mode of poetic address to one who is not there--whether they are dead, imaginary, or merely absent for the time

being. It stems from historic literature, an oral tradition which required the presence of listeners. "All the verse of antiquity was addressed to somebody, primarily because it was either sung or read and the traditions of song and recitation required that there be a recipient. Thus apostrophe is insignificant because conventional: an inherited element now devoid of significance" (Culler, *Pursuit* 136). While Culler's assertion may be true of traditional poetry, there is no way to deny the continued existence and significance of apostrophe as it appears in contemporary lyric poetry.

Apostrophe has been a major and necessary feature of traditional odes and elegies. However, the popularity of these verse styles seems to have diminished in the late twentieth century, an era which seems to enjoy the new or experimental more than the traditional. There is a general agreement that such poems seem, in their overblown addresses to the non-existent or non-human, to be self-consciously stilted and artificial, and certainly not in keeping with what many consider to be a rational, controlled, twentieth century mentality. Gone are the celebratory odes to the west wind and the elegies to brave and departed warriors. Gone, too, is the popular 19th

century familiar address, made directly to the reader. Jane Eyre's confession, "Reader, I married him" (Bronte 454), evokes none of the cosy confidentiality it may have implied a hundred years ago, but rather, might bring an amused, though slightly discomforted smile to the lips of the twentieth century reader. Such address now seems mainly restricted to parody, and contemporary readers are likely to associate it with such.

One can hardly disagree that over the centuries, there have been more male than female poets published. Perhaps that imbalance, to a certain degree, explains the prevalence of traditional odes and elegies written by men. Odes and elegies both use the second person form of address, and among traditional poems, are the main arena for such address. Although contemporary male poets do use the word "you" wherever appropriate, the strictly apostrophic usage mainlyn seems to crop up in the traditional forms.

Apostrophe in classical odes is typically characterized by the second person address to non-human entities, which are often intangible spirits, objects or cities, such as John Keats' Grecian Urn, or A.M. Klein's Montreal. This kind of poem endows the addressed entity with a mystical subjectivity, a kind of implied humanity. However, it is precisely this

implication which robs the addressed entity of its subjecthood--it is neither able, nor expected, to respond. In Klein's "Montreal," the city is addressed as follows: "O city metropole, isle riverain!/ Your ancient pavages and sainted routs/ Traverse my spirit's conjured avenues!" It would be preposterous to expect the actual island of Montreal to respond to Klein's adorations. It is also safe to assume the Montreal he addresses, a mythologized, idealized entity, exists nowhere but in his own mind. While his version of the city is recognizable as an image of such, it doesn't exist in a physical reality, and couldn't answer back if it did. For the sake of the poem, readers are expected to believe in its poetic, fictional existence.

The elegy, however, is addressed--often in the second person--to an actual human being who is not present to hear the poet's verse. A contemporary Canadian example of this usage is Robert Kroetsch's "Elegy for Wong Toy." Instead of endowing the absent addressee with a particular identity, Kroetsch aligns the dead man, whom he calls "Charlie," with the other--literal--objects of the man's life: "You were your own enduring winter./ You were your abacus, your Chinaman's/ eyes. You were the long reach up/ to the top of that bright showcase." No longer around to

defend himself, Charlie becomes equal with the elements of his life, mute and dusty in the poet's memory. Another example is Phyllis Webb's poem, "Rilke." The speaker in this poem addresses the dead poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, in the second person: "Rilke, I speak your name I throw it away/ with your angels, your angels, your statues/ and virgins." The speaker also commands the already absent Rilke to "[g]o away with your women to Russia or take them/ to France, and take them or don't the poet is/ in you, the spirit, they love that." By implying Rilke's presence, Webb asks readers to believe in the fiction that he stands before her as she addresses him. The speaker addresses a known person who is absent, with the assumption that the poem will be read by other people, who are not likely to be the addressee. Entombed in his collected works, Rilke himself is unable to answer back.

It doesn't matter whether an elegy is addressed to a dead poet or to a passed-away politician: the result is the same. Writers of elegies are able to tell the addressee anything they please, and the addressee can say nothing in return. The elegy not only addresses the absent one as an object, unable to respond, but its very nature also removes all possibility of the addressee's subjectification: it does not require, or

necessitate, a response. Indeed, it demonstrates the object, quality or person's assumed inability to respond: a fundamental characteristic of apostrophe.

Such a diminished second person can clearly be seen in F.R. Scott's "Overture." The second person is merely a conduit for music and the poet's own ponderings on the imminence of war: "under a cone of light,/ You precisely play the Mozart sonata. The bright/ Clear notes fly like sparks through the air . . . Your hands dart in the light, your fingers flow." The pianist, be it she or he, is less present in the poem than the strains of Mozart, less present even than the poetic speaker, who demands "But how shall I hear old music? This is an hour/ Of new beginnings" before declaring the tune being played as irrelevant as the person playing it. The final stanza points out that "this perfection which is less yourself/ Than Mozart, seems a trinket on a shelf." Not only is "yourself" not perfect, it is diminished, and placed on a shelf--a pedestal, of sorts, trapped out of harm's way.

Such pedestal-placing seems to be a major characteristic of love poems, even at the end of the twentieth century. As in centuries past, the contemporary love poem, or lyric, is typically addressed to an anonymous second person, or "you."

Contemporary popular culture also uses the second-person address in an effort to reach out to its consumers: the *new* "you," one might say. For example, in the collected lyrics of three record albums by the popular rap music band N.W.A., the word "you" appeared 351 times (Howe, Strauss 187). In this way, the use of the second person invites consumers of popular culture to see themselves as active participants in that culture. "You" are drawn into the popular song, television advertisement or magazine article, necessitating your co-operative involvement in its message. "You" are both an integral part of the culture, and the passive recipient of its message.

This casual second-person use of apostrophe, however, is not the same kind of apostrophe as seen in the ode or the elegy, or even in 19th century reader-addressing fiction. The old and new forms of apostrophe are both modes of address, but the contemporary form differs significantly, in that it has evolved to suit twentieth century sensibility and language use. Firstly, and possibly most significantly, it is anonymous. Secondly, it invites participation, a major step away from traditional uses of apostrophe. Thirdly, it thereby creates a deliberate state of confusion for the reader, by simultaneously defining

and blurring the boundaries between subject and object. Through these characteristics, we are able to question the identity of the second person, and posit the female reader--the so-called second sex--as that second person.

While odes and elegies project a clear idea of the addressee's identity (often indicating it in the title or in the text of the poem), contemporary poetic apostrophe refers to "you" whenever it needs to, and thereby creates a kind of confusion for its readers. The reader is placed within the poem, and addressed in a sometimes embarrassingly personal manner. But because the "you" of contemporary lyric poetry does not generally make reference to an actual identifiable person or thing, it presents a void, which must be filled, probably by the object of the poetic speaker's attentions or affections. Readers, however, are unlikely to know the actual identity of the beloved, which places them in a confusing and somewhat awkward situation: they are aligned through necessity with the poet's beloved, and in effect take on that individual's (or thing's) role or identity. The poet has become a subject, and the reader a fictional character: the object and recipient of the poet's affections or addresses.

The willing reader of this casual, second-person form of apostrophe will accept the existence of the addressee. Whether someone is actually physically present in that role, however, is beside the point. The trope of apostrophe, by its very nature, means that the addressee is *not* actually there: apostrophe necessitates absence, or at least absence of voice on the part of the addressee. In using apostrophe, even in the casual second-person form, poets must necessarily assume the object of their address is in fact absent--or, for the purpose of writing the poem, speechless or non-existent in the poet's immediate vicinity--whether or not this assumption is consciously made.

If "you," the addressee, is necessarily absent or non-existent, then her capability for returning the address is sharply curtailed. There is no possibility of dialogue, or even repartee. If the "you" is rendered incapable of response, there is no hope for the "you"'s potential subjectivity. From this, one might conclude, the subject-object relationship is a necessary condition of contemporary lyric poetry, and especially of love poetry. But that very relationship is a potentially controversial area, which implies

inequality while ostensibly espousing romantic feelings.

It is this very characteristic of apostrophe that has, in recent years, caused a major critical avoidance of its most classical form. Contemporary poets and critics shun the traditional use of apostrophe, and thereby avoid the notion that they might, in fact, be addressing nothing more sentient than the walls around them. For example, in an essay entitled "Reading Lyric," Jonathan Culler states, "apostrophes are embarrassing, and criticism of the lyric has systematically avoided both the topic of apostrophe and actual apostrophes -- translating apostrophes into description" (99). However, as Culler points out, "the fact that it is systematically repressed or excluded by critics suggests that is represents that which critical discourse cannot comfortably assimilate. Indeed, one might be justified in taking apostrophe as the figure of all that is most radical, embarrassing, pretentious, and mystificatory in the lyric, even seeking to identify apostrophe with the lyric itself" (*Pursuit* 137).

While contemporary poets and critics might shy away from using and discussing apostrophe in its most classical forms, the second-person form of address is

as prevalent as ever. It is difficult to find a contemporary love poem, written by a man or a woman, that does not at least make passing reference to someone who is referred to in the poem only as "you." Take, for example, "The Reason I Write," by Leonard Cohen:

> The reason I write
> is to make something
> as beautiful as you are
> When I'm with you
> I want to be the kind of hero
> I wanted to be
> when I was seven years old
> a perfect man
> who kills

In this poem, Cohen refers to a "you," ostensibly a loved one whom he considers to be beautiful. This loved one is not given a chance to respond, and is not described in the poem, except as being "beautiful." The poem, especially if we can agree to place it in a biographical context, tells vastly more about the speaker than about the beloved.

But this use of the second person draws readers into the poem, and in the long run makes the poetic experience far more inclusive. Once beyond the initial embarrassment of inadvertently becoming part of the poem, the reader--taking the role of the beloved--is able to slip onto the metaphorical pedestal, align his or her own identity with the anonymous character of

"you," and revel in--but, alas, still not question aloud--the poet's adoration.

This use of the second person extends, even through Cohen himself, into the medium of popular culture. As previously mentioned, current musical lyrics, the epitome of contemporary love poetry, use the second-person mode of address even more frequently than they use electronically synthesized violins. A pop singer who addresses "you" can facilitate the illusion that "you" are the singer's beloved one. Cohen's lyrics illustrate this perfectly: "I'm aching for you, baby, I can't pretend I'm not. I need to see you naked, in your body, and your thought" (Cohen, "Ain't No Cure for Love," 1988). Who is this beloved? "You" can mean anyone, even "you," the listener. "You" participate in the lyric by your mere objectified existence, and "you"--at least according to the continuing popularity of the genre--love it. On the flip side of the record, of course, listeners can imagine that they, themselves, are the pop singer, subjects addressing the tune to their own beloved objects. But either way, the words still necessitate a recipient.

The second person, by generally being devoid of name or description, except perhaps for the most vague details, can act as a slot into which listeners, or

readers, can fit themselves, in a role that assures they are already overwhelmingly desired. The character of "you" necessitates this role-filling, and requires "you" to fit "yourself" into its objective position, settle down, and listen to the music quietly, without talking back. Taught by society to believe that the condition of being desired is desirable to them, these (female) readers and listeners happily comply with the lyrics' invitation, and fill the void of "you" in order to feel as though they, themselves, could be beloved.

This mute response to the commands of the singer or poet implies a forced objectivity arising from this more contemporary use of apostrophe. In the past, we could agree, it was acceptable, even expected, for a poet (usually a man) to address another person (perhaps a woman) in a love poem. The (male) writer took the role of the subject, capable of desiring the (female) recipient, and neither eliciting nor needing a response. This practice could be considered the normal order of a society which viewed men as subjects and women as objects. However, this inequality--which many would say is still evident--also seems to be undergoing some questioning in contemporary society, by individuals who advocate subjectivity for both genders.

Contemporary Canadian society is one which, if not in practice, at least in theory seems to expounds the necessity of equality among all people. Therefore, the unequal relationship between subject and object, especially as delineated in classical uses of the apostrophe, feels outdated and uncomfortable. This country's poets and critics alike would probably prefer not to bear witness to such a blatant and embarrassing mode of address, perhaps (or particularly) because it draws attention to a possible failure to initiate equality in our real lives.

No wonder Culler states that critics feel uncomfortable. Not only does the contemporary casual use of apostrophe imply and enforce a condition of inequality, but, through the ode and the elegy, apostrophe represents an archaic, quirky mode of address that is better left to rot than be revived anywhere but in the most sentimental of love lyrics. "Proximity and distance are, it seems, equally good excuses for denying significance: to the Romantics apostrophe was natural and insignificant; to us it is wholly artificial and insignificant. It can always be ignored, though for changing reasons" (Culler, *Pursuit* 137). It is for this simple reason, for example, that it is embarrassing: "This embarrassment is linked to

the obviousness that apostrophe is a figure, an empty O, for which one can scarcely make cognitive or transcendental claims of the sort that are routinely made for metaphor: It is embarrassing for the high callings of lyric to depend on, or even be linked closely with, this sort of figure" (Culler 99).

I would argue that it is embarrassing *not* to address the void created by the empty apostrophe. The void presents a clear space in language, and a place from which to create female subjectivity.

Chapter 2: Speaking With the Second Sex

Before embarking further on this discussion of apostrophe and the second-person, it is necessary to refer briefly to Mouré's collected works. In order to understand the rationale for using her works as impetus and backdrop for this discussion, we must recognize her significant position as a contemporary Canadian poet. Her first seven books of poetry are as follows:

Empire, York Street (1979)
The Whisky Vigil (1981)
Wanted Alive (1983)
Domestic Fuel (1985)
Furious (1988)
WSW (West South West) (1989)
Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love (1992).

She has also published numerous poems in literary journals and a volume of selected poems (1994).

From the beginning of her poetic career, Mouré's work has addressed the nature of language, and sought to question and change the inherent structures of language. According to Susan Glickman, "in her first book, *Empire, York Street*, she explores the ways people are marginalized and deprived of speech by the world in which they live. It is the divorce of language and political reality that disturbs her most of all. In 'coda for innocent persons,' for example, she declares that

> power is not in your hands, is

> a word. it sings above your head, each day
> differently, as if you wanted
> to name it, the Cherished (85)." (Glickman 139)

Subsequent books carry on this effort to bring the power of language to the marginalized. "*Domestic Fuel* tries to deconstruct language and rebuild it to allow the individual to speak her particular truth and still be understood" (Glickman 141). This statement is crucial to Mouré's work, since the empowering effects of language mean nothing if the language itself cannot be understood by those who write or speak it, or by those written or spoken to.

Mouré's earlier works provide a solid basis for understanding her use of apostrophe and second person, and most of the examples in this discussion will come from her works up to and including *Furious*. Reference is made to her later books mainly to demonstrate Mouré's development of a poetic consciousness that has understood and embraced the existence of the second person. The use of language in her later works (particularly in *Sheepish Beauty, Civilian Love*) transcends the issue of apostrophe altogether, and enters into that realm where all subjects are equal and often indistinguishable from each other.

Overall, Mouré's work is particularly suited as a vehicle for the discussion of contemporary use of

apostrophe and the second person. By questioning the structures of language, she has developed a means of using language in a way which creates equality between reader, writer, and characters in her poems.

Whether or not the use of apostrophe and dialogue in Mouré's poetry is a method of creating equality --and therefore subjecthood--for its readers (and writer), is a question which rests largely on the voice implied by the use of these tropes. Not all poems with apostrophic elements immediately create subjectivity for those to whom they are addressed. There are, however, many poems which do. We can determine a poem's potential for creating subjectivity by examining the way in which it contributes to a creation of dialogue.

When assessing a poem's subjectivity-creating potential, one must first carefully analyse the poem's speaker or narrator, and the forms of address used by that entity. Attention must also be paid to the implied meanings of the poem. Most importantly, the reader must analyse the actual or implied dialogue held therein, while recognizing the subtleties of this analysis. As Schwab points out, "dialogicity emerges chiefly where there is no dialogue in the literal sense" (454).

If the poem indicates, particularly in an apostrophic manner (such as addressing a non-human or

non-living entity), that the addressee is unlikely to respond, then there can be no subjective voice evidenced by the addressee. However, if the poem invites or implies dialogue, it creates the potential for response, and therefore a subject-subject communication. This is the basic form of subjectivity created in poetry. It is implied, though not necessarily obvious. If the poem blurs the boundaries between speaker and addressee, it takes the created subjectivity one step further. When the characters within a poem can be mistaken for each other, they can therefore be seen as equals. In this case, the communication between the two characters is rendered still more equitable, as the reader is left to assume or suppose that the subject and (perceived) object are one and the same. In this way, subject-subject communication is created within a poem, and the reader is left with the implication that each character in the poem is a subject in his or her own right, existing simultaneously as speaker and addressee, giver and recipient.

Once the second-person has been invited to speak, she or he is free to speak with her or his own subjective voice. This freedom allows for an expanded understanding of the poetic process in language. Once a

shift has occurred in a poem, from first person to second person, readers can understand the experience of the second person as well as they can understand the experience of the first person--and posit themselves as either, taking on a subjective role regardless of their gender or their habitual form of self-address.

In analysing poems for potential second-person subjectivity, one must keep in mind the most important feature of this shift: it can only happen when the first person turns away from a one-sided address, and *invites* the second-person to respond. "Apostrophe does indeed represent something which discourse cannot comfortably assimilate: not voice as such, however, but what I shall call the passing of voice, its want or lack, even its sudden removal" (Kneale 142). While Kneale laments the departure of the voice, it must also be realised that in this way, the voice shifts from one speaker to another. This shifting away from direct address to invited response reflects another "passing of voice" capacity of apostrophe.

In Mouré's poem, "Rose" (*Furious* 37), this shift and invitation is quite evident. The poem begins with a typical apostrophic address, "In the house between parentheses, the howl./ O lady of the blessed flowers." This invocation is typical of an elegiac or apostrophic

style, calling on the (presumably absent) lady of the blessed flowers. In the first stanza, this lady is not expected to answer. Rather, she is simply invoked, or evoked, by the lines describing her: "our lady of suicide, our lady of the top floor, lady leaning/ over the rooftop." The woman addressed is placed in a precarious position, situated on the edge of a roof, presumably about to plunge to her death. This poem could almost be interpreted as an elegy for one who is not yet dead. However, the poetic voice shifts in the second stanza, and the narrator speaks in the first person. In this way, the lady on the roof is included in the discourse of the poem: "Our displacement is huge and wild" indicates a certain inclusion, tying the lady of the blessed flowers to the narrator by the use of the word "our." The words of the second stanza literally evoke inclusion, as in the lines "I too have combed my hair . . . I too have worn my famous airplane on my shoulders, its/ two wheels spinning./ I too am female am not truthful am not am not." The narrator's saying "I too" implies a kind of co-existence with the lady on the rooftop, the addressed object of the first stanza. The speaker, as a woman, has experienced existence as an object. She claims kinship with the invoked, with the addressed. However, this kinship

allows for a shift to take place, as it also implies an equality. Because the speaker, a subject in her own right, claims affiliation with the lady of the first stanza, and declares boldly that "I too am female," she announces her equality with the object, and opens the possibility of a dialogue or a potential exchange between the two.

This equality, or this shift towards dialogue that evokes equality, is clearly evident in the final stanza. The speaker asks the questions, "Do you remember./ When I am telling you do you ever remember./ Do you remember your hair & the light rose blouse you wore/ when we were walking over the railway, & I kissed you/ & the cars honked, & we were two women without stopping . . ." There is a shift in poetic tone here, an address to another woman (who may or may not be the woman of the first stanza), with the implication that she will respond and answer the speaker in the poem, as one subject to another. This assumption goes without question in the poem, just as the questions go without interrogative punctuation. The ellipses at the end of the poem especially indicate this invitation to response, the open-ended statement calling forth the memory of "you," the object of the speaker's

affections, who can quite easily be seen as an additional subject in the poem.

This shift in address also implies a move toward dialogue. In a conversation between subject and object, the boundaries between the two diminish, and allow the object a chance to express its own, or perhaps, *her* own subjective experience. By introducing dialogue into poetry, a conversation opens, one which implies a certain equality between speakers. "The key lies in the relation of the poet to the speaker of the poem, in the degree of objective, or, on the other side, subjective stance which the poet has employed. Any poem that portrays or represents a speech act would be to that extent dialogical" (Richter 15). In other words, should a poem include an address (or even a phrase that may be taken as a rhetorical comment or question), there is dialogue implied. When the second-person is addressed and invited to respond, particularly due to a question, the shifting of poetic voice brings that implied dialogue, whether the response is made immediately or not.

This shift towards implied dialogue can be seen in Mouré's poem "Like the Rain" (*Domestic Fuel* 55). While the response of the addressee is not explicitly outlined in the poem, the questions asked by the

speaker imply an answer is necessary, and likely to come--indeed, the final stanza of the poem can itself be seen as a kind of response to the questions posed in the middle stanzas. The first stanza, which does not question, can be seen as a counterpoint to the final, answering stanza. It sets the tone of the poem, and can possibly be interpreted as the addressee's comments, before the questions start to fly. Certainly it corresponds with the final stanza in terms of images: in the first line of the poem, the reader learns "Sometimes everything smells like the rain," which connects with the first line of the last stanza: "Some days the rain is cleaning the whole city." These statements surround the questioning that occurs in the middle three stanzas, and give a kind of implied response.

The questioning of the middle stanzas is the clearest indicator of implied dialogue in this poem. In the second stanza, the speaker says "Try taking a nose dive into reality, come up/ gasping & tell me what it is, what/ makes you lunge/ in & thru my kisses," inviting, or perhaps demanding, a response. The poem itself is dedicated to "G.S.," whom one may assume to be the addressee. The addressee may be the voice behind the statements in the first and last stanzas, or she

may not be, but either way, there are two voices evident in the poem--the questioning voice and the stating voice, involved in a dialogue within the poem. The questioner says, "Hey when I get up so fast in the morning,/ do you think it's hard?/ Are any of these things hard?// Are kisses hard?" These questions imply an intimacy between the two voices, and that intimacy suggests equality between the two. If we infer that the dedication (to "G.S.") means Gail Scott, with whom Mouré's is closely associated, we see that the poem illustrates a relationship between two women, equal because it excludes the power imbalance often found in male/female relationships.

The poem's final stanza can be seen as a response from the stating voice to the questioning voice: "water eventually wears away stone, they say,/ if it persists." The persistence of the fluid questions eventually wears away the resistance of the stating voice, and of any inequality between the two speakers in the poem. The implied dialogue has created subjectivity for both voices, both characters, both women. The communication has become a dialogue of subjects.

The benefits of allowing this questioning address are clear. By making the shift towards dialogue, poets

are able both to endow subjecthood and to invite response and conversation, thereby endowing the all-too-often static word with living breath. As Schwab states, "the word is not a thing, but the ever-moving, ever-changing medium of dialogical intercourse. A single consciousness, a single voice, is never sufficient. The life of the word consists in passing from mouth to mouth, from context to context, from collective to collective, from generation to generation" (Schwab 453).

Language exists because people talk to one another. It is generally agreed that words have meaning only because we say they mean something, and that meaning is understood by others, and passed on. Without dialogue, there can be no development in language. Therefore, dialogue, and the subject-subject communication it requires, is necessary for the continuation of language and meaning. Therefore, it would seem logical that we are able to use dialogue to shape the meaning of language. We can see this modified, changing language appear at its most critical, most emerging stage in contemporary lyric poetry. If poets use language to define and create their own versions of reality, they must necessarily be the ones to define and create the terms and language of

that reality as well. It would seem they create a new language from the contexts and words of the old, and use it to describe a changing reality as they see it change. This "new language struggles visibly, in [Mouré's] work, to escape from the confines of the old, even as it exists only through, and by means of, the old" (Glickman 140). While there is really no escape from words, the necessary basics of the English language, an escape from the signified meanings of the language, and from the implied and signified meanings of individual words, is still possible. If we change the meaning of words by changing their contexts, we can also create new readings of words by changing their functions in syntax and form. We thereby create a new language by redefining the old.

"Since dialogism is a function of discourse rather than of overall form, it can certainly appear in the prosified poetry of the twentieth century," (Richter 18).[1] It is not the usual practice for contemporary poets to outline entire dialogues within the contexts

[1] The term "dialogical" stems largely from Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin's literary analysis. While Bakhtin did not focus his discussion on poetry, his analysis is easily applied to the genre. He stated that "any truly creative voice can only be the *second* voice in the discourse. Only the second voice--*pure relationship*--can be completely objectless" (M.M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of the Text," in *Speech-Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1986), p.110.

of their poems, as dialogue does not necessarily play an obvious role in much contemporary lyric poetry. It is, however, implicit in every poem in which there is an address to the second-person, "you," and in the implied invitation for the "you"'s response.

The creation of an even more intense, more obvious subject-subject communication is evident in Mouré's poem "Rolling Motion" (*Furious* 35), in which the distinction between speaker and addressee is deliberately blurred. Mouré has created a system of language-centred equality in this erotic poem, which is enhanced by the lack of the familiar subject/ verb/ object syntax. By disorienting the reader and blurring the distinctions between the two characters, the language in this poem gives a sense of pure subject-ness.

In "Rolling Motion," a sense of melding between two characters is implied by repetitious verbs and continual movement. As the poem says, "rolling/ over every upward motion/ rolling open over your/ Face in my neck again over/ turning risen though billows/ my mouth open enter/ dwelling upward face/ in your soft leg open." It is difficult at times to determine where one body stops and the other begins, or if there may even

be more than just two bodies participating in the action of the poem.

In "Rolling Motion," Mouré "successfully abandon[s] subject-object dualism and develop[s] the lovers' reciprocity" (JW in Williamson 79). By blurring the boundaries between the two characters, the poem creates not only a flowing mood of reciprocity, but also a smooth subject-subject communication. While the addressee, the "you" does not respond in words, there is clear evidence of her participation in the poem. To endow readers with the power to respond is to endow them with subject-ness, or the agency to act in their own right and to speak for themselves. And if they are able to speak (and act) for themselves, they will be able to express their own voice and experience, whether in speech or in poetry.

Unfortunately, in much of our understanding of apostrophe, we neglect to note its potential as a breeding ground for subjectivity. "The current problem with apostrophe stems from associating it with voice rather than with a movement of voice" (Kneale 142). By thinking of apostrophe as the static address to an object, as it does indeed exist in odes and elegies, we assign it that particular, traditional poetic condition or voice, and disallow any response to its

exhortations. However, if we think of it as a movement, a shifting of address, it becomes an invitation to dialogue, and pulls us deeper into a discussion of dialogicity.

We could agree that contemporary use of apostrophe is characterised by the speaker's turning to the "you" and inviting a response. This invited dialogue stands in contrast to the apostrophic direct address to "you," or the no-response-required address found in objectifying love songs. Instead of telling "you" that "you" are desired, this shifting movement of voice allows room for input, and invites interjection almost as though it were a question: "what do you think about being desired?" "You" are asked to respond as a subject, and are invited to participate in language from that position. An individual can thereby exist at once as a subject and an object.

In Mouré's poem "It Happens Only" (*Whiskey Vigil* 11), we can see this self-assignation of subjectivity, particularly with regard to the use of the second-person. Mouré writes: "you watching her, idolizing,/ staying later just to see her/ moving across the room, drinking more coffee./ & you drinking more & more wine/ . . . Only the slatted ribs of light remain/ &, I admit, the woman./ She's you; she left the

party a long time ago, she says./ Drugged & full of coffee. Sick of your/ love for her." Mouré uses the second person to illustrate and address the duality of subject-object within a single character, a woman who has likely frequently experienced the dual nature of her existence as both subject and object. By using the second-person, Mouré is able to illustrate that very duality in this poem. A further discussion of this duality will be found in Chapter Three.

By changing language, or at least the way they (and, eventually, we) use language, poets are able to change at least a small slice of reality. Although the language itself is not noticeably changed (we still see the same words used in pretty much the same ways), the ways in which women are addressed, and able to speak, in the language are. This move towards a more extensive subjectivity for women can be seen as a shift in the entire voice of the language itself. "It is notable that the greatest . . . departure from ordinary language, goes in two directions: either toward extreme stylization and formalization, and thus a rigorous bounding and structuring of linguistic material, or else toward a breakup of syntax and semantics and likewise a fragmentation and subversion of normal acts of imparting meaning -- hence a destructuring" (Schwab

468). Mouré's poetry is a fine example of this destructuring, particularly because of Mouré's apparent desire to rethink and recreate the current usage of language. So, in summary, we are able to see a revitalized usage of language by removing poetic language from the constrictive realm of subject-object discourse. This removal allows women to express their own subjective experience through poetic discourse, be it reciprocally apostrophic or purely dialogical.

By creating a new poetic dialogue and discourse, the entire condition of language is enhanced, and thereby the condition of poetry in general is expanded to include female poetic voices. The writer is able to become several speakers at once, to identify him- or herself with several subjects and objects at once. The poet is presented with a range of options of address, where previously there was only one. Women poets become able to express their own experience in a language which previously excluded them by disallowing their subjectivity. Language has suddenly made room for more poetic voices, and suddenly a previously excluded realm of experience is opened, with the ability to bring new vitality into poetic discourse.

Chapter 3: Women in Language: Filling the Void

In order to make further inquiry into the question of creating women's subjectivity through language, one must examine the characteristics of women's position in the language in the first place. As has been previously noted, women's experience is inadequately represented by the word-signs which make up the English language, and to attempt to change this condition is to attempt to change the very nature of the language itself. If much of women's reality remains unspoken, unexpressed, or inexpressible through language, then (if only in the interest of equality), the language must be addressed and changed. This is the project of numerous feminist writers and poets, and Mouré is unquestionably among them. "The issue of language--of the failure of common speech and the need to discover a new way of speaking--has become . . . central to this poet's work" (Glickman 138).

In Mouré's work, several characteristics point to a creation of female subjectivity through the use of language. Assuming there is a void in language where women's experience remains largely unwritten, we can see Mouré's poems as texts which are moving toward that void, and occupying the space, which expands even as it

is filled. We can also see emerging indications of a woman-centred language, which is immediately put to use to discuss the experience of filling that void. This new use of language, its context and contents, necessarily results in what we might call a woman-centred poetics. It becomes necessary to find a plausible location for the female poet in the English language. Currently, she is located in language as an observer--welcome and invited, but nonetheless, an observer. From this position, essentially outside the rules, she is able to join in with an abandon that drastically changes the nature of the game. Once she does that, she is no longer the observed, passive woman she was in traditional lyric love poems. She has also ceased to be the passive observer, who merely comments on the action as it passes her by. Instead, she fills the void with her own experience, and even calls it her own--or at least begins to do so. As Mouré herself comments in her essay "Watching the Watchwords," there still remains a strong need for women writers to move away from

> a poetry of the observer, by which I mean the poetic voice observing and commenting on an external world. I'm more interested in the movement of the linkages or threads than in the observed/observer, polarized at each "end". If you conceal these threads between us, setting up and isolating the poetic voice as "observer", I believe the resonances are diminished. Certain destructions become possible (Mouré *WtW* 3).

By changing the way we look at the structure of poetry, however, we end up with another destruction--that is, of the conventional syntax, which by its nature imposes a certain set of limitations on context and meaning. Through challenging the position of the observer and the observed, and by creating sentence structures in which there is another syntax besides the subject verbing the object, women writers allow for a rethinking of conventional patterns--and conventional attitudes. As Mouré puts it, "[w]hat I am trying to do in my work these days is two things: 1) break down the logical connections /structure of "meaning" (referentiality), and 2) break down the noun/verb opposition wherein the present so-called 'power' of the language resides, both of these while still using the surface of ordinary speaking as a reflex for emotional power . . ." (*Furious* 93). This challenge to language extends to--and is particularly evident in--Mouré's poetic use of the second person.

The use of the second person indicates a separation from the conventional syntax of language--and yet it implies an inclusion which cannot be achieved through the use of third, or even first person narrative. The use of the pronoun "I" claims territory solely for the writer/narrator, whereas the

use of third person pronouns, "he" or "she," generates a specific response in the reader, which must, in the context of this society, necessarily be coloured by associations of gender. "You," however, implicates the reader in the text, whether it refers (as a pronoun) to a specific character or not. It is, ultimately, neutral because it has no specific gender, and inclusive for the same reason. In English, "you" has no gender, status, or quantity. It can be used to refer to a crowd or to oneself. It refers to the unspoken reader, and is the spoken word of address to anyone at all. Mouré's poems make frequent use of these characteristics, and the following discussion of several of her poems will outline this point.

Since it is necessary to identify the void in language before it can be filled, we must identify--or create--poems addressing the void (and addressing the reader--a sort of call-to-arms). This is precisely what Mouré does in "Lunge," a poem from one of her earlier books, *Domestic Fuel* (13). In this poem, she points a poetic finger at the collective second person, the "you" who must be addressed and animated in order for this void in language to be populated with subjects in their own right. Conversely, the "you" of the poem can also be read as self-address. The indeterminate nature

of the second-person allows the poet herself to be included in the collective second-person, and also allows her to write a personally relevant poem with inclusive implications. Either way, though, the poem indicates a certain frustration and anger with the existing social order, and calls for a solution, an appropriately modern and somewhat impossible "fast cure."

Although the addressee in the poem is unnamed and ungendered, it is possible to infer an identity for the addressee. Lines such as "All of a sudden you find out there isn't enough time./ . . . You find out you shouldn't have washed the dishes./ Over & over, so many dishes, the wet cloth, the spill/ across the counter, window, bird out there/ or not, the clean house" imply, in the first and second stanzas, an identity which is intrinsically linked with domestic life, an identity which has little reality outside of that experience and yet has no means of expressing that experience. Instead, the addressee's reality is expressed through negatives, negated through inaction. "You shouldn't have craved the arms of women./ You shouldn't have slept with men./ You shouldn't have dreamed Philosophy, or/ the heart monitor screen in your apartment bedroom . . . It's all shit. Merde. This, & hey, & you others."

The images here are of desperation, a regret not as much for something lost as for something never had in the first place. The words "craved" and "dreamed" indicate a desire for something not yet found, and desperately, fruitlessly chased after in the next stanza. "Time for the medicine. You fast cure. You fuck-up mad dog. You you. You lunge over the table. In mid-lunge. . . . Lunge for the dog's stale portion of sleep, your legs straight off the chair, your hair stuck out, the clatter of the chair falling backward, zone five, zone six, the sound/ of/ Your arms make /Amicus, object, referrent/ Points of or- der."

The final section of the poem builds a frenzied picture of a desperate character, either the poet herself or the collective "you," an embodiment of the second-person lunging over the meaningless confines of a pointless, disordered life. Only at the end of the poem can we feel a sense of calming, achieved partly through sparse lines and wide spaces after the dense prose spacing of the previous stanza. The problem of an unnamed desire is outlined in the first few stanzas of this poem, and the desperate, lunging attempts to achieve that desire are expressed in the poem's latter half. The final three lines draw the poem to a calming close. Just as the addressee's "arms make/ . . . Points

of or- der," a point of order is made at the end of the poem, and the collective "you" is drawn from the chaos by the enclosing arms and voice of the speaker. The phrase also calls to mind the conventional "point of order," which insists on a structured response to a specific situation or question. Through this reference to parliamentary procedure, Mouré allows the reader to see the potential for the collective "you," and the possibility of its entrenchment as a subject in every part of language. By splitting the word, she highlights the word "or," thereby allowing an alternative order--as in, either/or. This creates room for the acceptance of a new use of language.

The "void" has been identified as the meaningless repetition of domestic chores, as the uncelebrated, suppressed details of women's lives. "There's a fierce anger . . . at a patriarchal system that the poet regards as not only marginalizing women but also silencing them" (Carey 27). The result is a call for points of order, for poetic points of reference, and expression, for the speaker and addressee alike.

These points of reference are further emphasized and explored in "Speaking of Which," from Mouré's next book, *Furious* (38-39). This poem speaks of identifying signs, indicators of identity within the void. "The

silver paper from the bottles, torn & rolled up, are/ our diamonds, or/ thrown up into the scarce air: stars./ By these stars you know us, don't you." The narrator calls out of the void of space, through fabricated stars, and addresses the second person, who is meant to identify the narrator and her companions, and to identify with them. These characters are women, determined to define their own reality despite the constraints and inadequacies of the signs, or words, with which they have to work: "these official stars."

By encompassing "I" and "you," the first and second person, "we" allows a certain solidarity between speaker and second person, a sort of unified subject-ness. In this case, the narrator tries to describe the reality of the women in the poem: "we move our elbows on & off the crowded table, we are women with/ *this & this* dream, we have eaten in *these* places, we slept with/ men or boys at the age of, too young,/ wanting to see what it was, that body,/ then finally,/ not caring for it,/ not dreaming of it either except as a sign." They have experienced a conventional reality, of eating and dreaming and sleeping with men, and are beginning to cast aside (or at the very least, challenge and question) that reality in favour of another approach. There is a subtle anger in this poem,

a smouldering sense of injustice which bursts out in the seventh and eighth stanzas: "The small clear globes of oxygen, our lungs & the rivulet/ of anger they touch & keep warm,/ its long passage of heat & fury under the skin, to all extremity,/ because this fury is our hardest core, because this bar is full of women's/ talk & whispers, by these signs you shall know us." The "you" addressed becomes a part of an inclusive "us," and by the quietly bubbling anger that these women hold within themselves, they shall be identified as subjects, as individuals in their own right who occupy the void and inscribe their own experiences, their own realities, in the pre-existing language. They will challenge the language, and re-create it: "the bright oxygen, the air inside us who stared/ then walked away, from the word *cock*, & *ravishment*/ To name what our own tongues will call *something*,/ our arms close to each other, so close, the ashtray full up/ with diamonds, our diamonds, our first born stars." These final two stanzas speak a denial of the existing word order, a rejection of not only the meanings but the signs of the old language. The language of "official stars" might be prescribed by the existing order, but these women will walk away from it, in order "to name what our own tongues will call something," or to create new words

which more accurately speak to their experience. As critic Rebecca Raglan puts it, "whether such lines challenge the 'power relationships' inherent in the structure of language is dubious, but they do suggest interesting possibilities in terms of the relationship between the poet and her audience . . . this is poetry about the way language is used" (97-98). This is indeed poetry about the way language is used, but the above statement remains unconvinced by the argument that Mouré has, through this poem, made a very clear challenge to the 'power relationship' inherent in language. It is difficult to imagine that a mere poem would have the power to change a language spoken daily by millions who will never read the poem itself. However, by creating a poem that rejects, through its text, actual words of this language, "*cock*" and "*ravishment*," Mouré has opened the door for herself and other women poets to reject or question more and more of the existing language. By using the second-person "you" as an addressee, she invites conspiracy, invites the reader into the void where the re-defining of meaning begins. By using "our" to refer to the women in the poem, she creates a sense of inclusion amongst those who exist within the void, and invites "you" to join "us," "our arms close to each other," speaking

with new words, "our first born stars," created by and for women to address their own experience at last, free from the entrenched "official" stars of male-dominated language.

Even so, the actual place in language (or indeed, the actual language), in which women's experience is fully addressed and expressed, remains an ideal. Some of Mouré's poetry seeks to speak from that place, but there is still a gap between the ideal, and the reality from which women must work. As Mouré says, "Women writing feel the unease and strangeness in our language more readily because they are out of it . . .[W]omen are beginning to write a new language, their own language, using the common word-signs of the old; women have to discover new correlatives of desire, or ways of expressing them" (Rubicon 31, quoted in Glickman 141).

The poem "Cherish," from *Domestic Fuel* (78-79), gives a clear example of Mouré's earlier writing from within the void, and in its content demonstrates strong evidence for the need of new expressions of desire. It uses the inclusive "we" to express not only the connection between women, but the subject-ness which comes with that connection. The first lines raise that very question: "The expression of longing,/ in & among/ the collapse of social systems" speaks to a need for

something as constant as desire, even through the re-thinking of its expression and of the social contexts which make it a human event. The poem calls for a situation "where women are not forgetful any longer/ but tell their whole stories", situated in a place where women can be alone and not afraid--"the unknown way to cherish aloneness." This poem seeks to define a safe space for women's voices, or even to describe the void in language as that space. Once women begin to communicate with each other, the void will begin to fill in, and the longing, the desire for that space, will be (at least temporarily) satisfied. "Women/ in the ease of their voices' murmur,/ able to express but not dispel/ anything/ To talk without loneliness/ because it has been acknowledged & achieved/ in our own bodies/ Because here the cups are full of the noise/ of our laughter." These lines indicate a satisfaction, almost a quenching of the need for a safe language. The images of cups filled, perhaps to overflowing, with women's laughter is a joyous, celebratory description of women's poetic reality once the void in language has been filled. As the poem concludes, "no touch is the answer & we know it giddily/ & the longing for it/ purely/ makes us full." The desire is its own satisfaction, just as the search

for, and investigation into, a language with which to describe women's reality is a satisfying task in itself.

A deeper investigation into the syntax and nature of this re-defined language is evident in "Ocean Poem," from *Furious* (48). Despite the first-person narrator, Mouré's use of language in this poem indicates a resistance to traditional poetic forms, and particularly traditional love lyrics. As she has stated, "The same old tired forms of writing about love aren't good enough for me. I don't think that love between women or lesbian love should be written in the same tired way. Sometimes it comes across in the same buried clichés" (EM in Williamson 79). Instead of writing a traditionally objectifying, adoring poem, she has created a poetic text, supplemented by footnotes, to describe an experience of desire. Its language is elliptical and allusive, simultaneously clarified and clouded by the footnotes. "The tension involved in trying to speak one's own tongue through, and in spite of the inherited language, to discover one's own faith through, and in spite of, inherited values, is represented in Mouré's work by strategic incoherence. Transgressions of syntax and punctuation, repetition, fragmentation, obsessive amplification and parataxis,

the rejection of formal closure -- all these devices . . . are typical of her work in general" (Glickman 142).

Several of those elements are quite obvious in "Ocean Poem." The poem begins "I am the one who lies, slowly, closer/ to your arm./ I insinuate." The commas separating the words "lies, slowly, closer," and the line break between the first and second lines, allow for an elliptical reading of the poem--we can read that the narrator tells lies slowly, moving them slowly closer to the addressee. Or we can read that she lies down slowly, close to the addressee's arm. Either meaning has its own implications, yet neither contradicts the other. The economy here is one of words, not meaning--indeed, the meaning is doubled by Mouré's use of these transgressions.

Another device Mouré uses to amplify meaning in this poem is repetition. The fourth line, "The trip trip of the rain into wet earth &" is evocative of the dripping sound of the rain, but also implies a journey, the trip being that which the rain takes to travel to and through the wet earth, a fluid soaking and entering the body of the soil just as the flowing words of this Ocean Poem enter the body of the conventional language.

Repetition, and its power to emphasize meaning, seeps through again at the conclusion of the first stanza: "The word human being has stood for men/ until now./ Until now." The repetition of the phrase "until now" indicates a questioning of the existing order, and a desire to change that order. By repeating the phrase, Mouré adds emphasis not only to the sound of the words, but to their meaning. "Until now" implies an immediate cessation, a calling off of something that should perhaps not have been there in the first place, something which is rightfully questioned because it is about time it was. This meaning is further understood when one considers that these two lines reflect a question back at the two lines immediately preceding them: "I don't know if there is any difference between men & women[3]/ is just a lie.[4]" This statement's jump in syntax jolts the reader, and is indicative of a feminist assertion that women's writing is indeed different from men's, and needs a different context within which to be discussed, and a different language or system of language with which to be written. The lines are footnoted with the comments "[3]The poets who say this believe that the standard of poetic excellence is just excellent and not male./ [4]This should not be done in any poem, accusing someone of lying." The first

of these comments repeats the message of the line in the poem it refers to, thereby emphasizing the meaning of that line and underscoring the very necessity of its interpretation. By saying that excellent refers to just excellence and not maleness, despite the fact that, typically, that which is male is not usually differentiated while that which is female usually is, one implies that the norm is male, as is the condition of excellence. In other words, an excellent female poet would be excluded from this debate. The challenge to the statement comes not only with the poem's firm repetition of the phrase "until now," but also with the footnote that accompanies the line "is just a lie." While the footnote might at first seem to be an amusing comment, a didactic statement on the propriety of poetic accusations, we can also read it as a challenge to existing social orders, as a challenge to readers to accept the poem as truth, and, as a challenge to the preceding footnote. If one should not, in the text of a poem, accuse someone of lying, one should also not accuse someone of lying in a poem, despite the fact that the first line's doubled meaning implies that the narrator is "the one who lies." Through this doubling of meaning, both in the text of the poem and in the text of the footnotes accompanying it, Mouré creates a

poem in which the realm of meaning is expanded, and through which women's experience can, at least marginally, be expressed. The void in language is discovered and populated with words, and the reader is able to experience that word-space along with the writer.

"Ocean Poem" is told by a first-person narrator. To ensure inclusiveness between reader and writer, and to ensure a continuous creation of subjectivity for both, the direct address to the second person must be maintained and explored. In her book *WSW (West South West)*, Mouré continues this exploration, particularly in the poem "The Jewel." This long poem is concerned largely with populating the void in language with women's experience, but it is the last stanza's inclusion of an address to the second person which most beautifully captures the nature of this form of address.

In the last stanza of "The Jewel," the first person narrator makes the apostrophic shift towards the second person, addressing the reader specifically as "you." In this case, however, instead of addressing an absent addressee and not expecting her response, there seems to be a deliberate attempt here to make a connection between the reader and the poet. "I love

you. My readers, I will be able to kiss you. The dryness of my lips. I warn you. What we are given to understand. What we are given. Begs the question. One question. So I can kiss you. The words kiss & question unconnected until now." The prose format of this stanza draws the reader in with a continuous sense of meaning, and the repetition again brings a sense of importance and gravity to the words' meanings. There is also a subtle link between this poem and the earlier "Ocean Poem" through the words "until now"--the situation addressed in the earlier poem, that of a need for description of women's subjective experience, is spoken to in this later poem. The connection between the poet or narrator and readers is made not only by the direct address, but also by the inclusion--"What we are given" is a common understanding, a common ground of experience which unites readers and writers within a common language which addresses the reality of both. The poetic union of desire and challenge, demonstrated in the line "words kiss & question unconnected/ until now," indicates a challenging of a language that does not allow the expression of women's desire, and a movement towards a language that facilitates that expression. "Poetry is not the act of an author 'giving' messages to a passive reader; it is a

passionate embrace, wherein the reader joins his/her lips to the poet's, connecting and giving life to the text" (York 135). This connection is a process, which is never completely finished, just as the void can never be wholly filled. The end of "The Jewel," after the words "until now," is left unpunctuated, unresolved. This deliberate omission not only allows the word "now" to remain eternally in the present and eternally relevant, but also indicates just how important it is to leave space open for the questioning of language.

Chapter 4: The Nature of You: Identifying the Second Person

In order for it to apply to this thesis, we have assumed that Mouré's poetic use of apostrophe and dialogue stems from a desire to invoke its theoretical function, and thereby endow a position of subject-hood upon the second-person characters of the poem. It is a reasonable first response for the reader to assume that the "you" addressed does refer immediately to herself, the poem's reader. However, there are other identities which can also be assigned to the second person. As an apostrophic address, the "you" would necessarily refer to an individual or entity separate both from the reader and the poet. In this way, the subject of the poem shifts, from being an absent or intangible addressee, to a living, reading addressee. It is possible for this shift to take place a number of times in a single poem, as the reader interprets the words and draws meaning from lines which hold truths for her own self. Because the "you" is often left partially or wholly unidentified, it is open to individual interpretation. For this reason, I will discuss some of the significant interpretations of the identity of the second person. By defining some of the possible

identities of "you," readers become more able to interpret the meaning of a poem, based both on the intent of the author, and on their own responses to the work.

In addition to the apostrophic or direct address use of the second person, "you" can also be a self-referential address, creating in itself a method of distancing by which the poet can maintain a sense of separateness from the poem. By addressing herself in the second person, a poet can take an outsider's point of view while still examining her own life. While we generally assume that a poem, to some degree, is indeed a poet's self-address, this interpretation opens the door to the possibility of self-created subjectivity. Through self-definition comes subject-hood, but this self-definition is achieved through a distancing process: the use of the second-person.

As well as creating a potential subject-hood, this distancing questions and challenges the authority both of the poem's author, and of the subject about whom the poem is ostensibly written. In this way, the boundaries between subject and object, and between reader and writer, are transgressed, and at times, almost overcome. The poem becomes an arena for the interplay of poet and reader. The reader becomes a

participant in the poem, writing her own meaning into her reading of the poem and thereby complementing and augmenting the poet's own encoded meaning. In this way, the use of the second-person goes beyond and between the poem's internal and external boundaries.

By opening the boundaries between poem, reader, and writer, the poem becomes an open field for further questioning of identity, and an arena for the creation of subjectivity. In particular, this open space creates an opportunity for dialogue, between reader and writer, writer and writer, or reader and reader. One could even, with certain reservations, speculate on the possibility of a dialogue between reader and poem. Regardless of the identity of the dialogue's participants, and regardless of the concrete details of the dialogue (who said what to whom), the necessary condition of this dialogue is one of equality. In creating subjectivity, conversation must feature communication between equal subjects. Without this equality, subjectivity is lost. By creating a language which is able to express that subject-subject communication, a poet is able to create subjectivity within her poem. With the hope, idealistic as it may be, that language used in poetry will eventually be adopted by the rest of the speakers of the language,

one can assume that the subjectivity created in poetry will extend throughout the language, and influence the eventual subjecthood of all its speakers.

An address to a reader, whether present or not, is the most apostrophic technique found in any of Mouré's poems. Particularly in her earlier books, *Empire York Street* and *Whisky Vigil*, she makes frequent use of dedications, which are the most blatant example of address to the second-person. Of course, we cannot immediately assume the addressee to be the individual to whom a particular poem is dedicated, but we must take into account that the poem has been published with that dedication intact, and that a reader could immediately assume the poetic speaker to be addressing the individual named. This is, after all, the nature of apostrophe--in which the reader is directly addressed, but can assume that the address is actually meant for someone else.

Mouré's poem "Visiting Airplane Avenue" (*WV* 13) is dedicated "for Aline." We can assume that most readers of this poem do not, and will not, know who Aline is, and therefore will either choose to ignore the dedication or to assume, throughout, that the "you" in the poem is a direct address to Aline herself. For the moment, let us refer to the second-person as Aline, and

assign that name to the "you" in this poem. The person Aline is absent from the context in which the poem takes place, as is evident in the lines, "Tonight I am far off in Vancouver with my wet shoes,/ my head bowed under the rain; what I do is/ I read your letter/ over & over in different parts of the room, as if/ that could make you speak louder." Although Aline is not physically with the speaker of the poem, she is definitely in the poem in her own right, through her letter, which the speaker "read[s] in different parts of the room."

In some poems, the only identifiable character is the addressed second person. In this poem, however, the first person speaker is also a distinctly identifiable character. This juxtaposition of the first person "I" with the second person "you" indicates a separateness of the poem's two characters, an address which almost approaches being a dialogue. The "you" is given the opportunity to speak, through her letter which the speaker reads "in different parts of the room." Aline is characterized, "telling me/ you waxed the stains where my whisky burned the finish/ from the wood." This, presumably, is information contained in the letter, which is in Aline's own words. In this way, "you" has a voice in this poem, and is a participant in

an ongoing equal dialogue between herself and the speaker. "[I]n the light/ the stains come back like shy sentences . . . I am still there with you/ talking, listening." The dialogue continues, and one can not be entirely certain whether these lines come from Aline's letter or from the speaker's mouth. In this way, the two characters become equals. Indeed, they almost become one and the same in the mind of the reader. This is a poem which captures very well the essence of apostrophic dialogue as a means of creating subjectivity for both speaker and addressee.

Another poem which creates a relationship between first and second person, while implying at the same time that the reader may in fact be the second person addressed, is "margins" (*EYS* 17). The poem speaks of a distancing between the speaker and herself, and also of a distancing between the first and second person. This separation is evident in the first few lines, "Nights when i am no longer/ available, even to myself. / You climb the long blur of stairs to my door and speak/ like a tourist of the day's work." There is a clear address to an unidentified "you," a second person who is also a second character in the poem. The first person, the speaker, claims to be "unavailable," to "you" or even to herself. This distancing creates a

feeling of disassociation, a disjointed tone to the poem which implies that the relationship between the two is not equal, or rather, not one of two subjects relating on an equal basis. The lines "when you reach to embrace, your hand/ gropes thru my breast, embeds/ within the wall . . . mouth wasted/ w/syllables, you thrust/ thru my body and enter/ rusted coils of mattress" outline the details of the relationship's inequality. In this case, we might assume the second person to be male. While "you" participates in supposedly amorous activity with the speaker of the poem, "you" is also met with invisibility, with the wall or the rusted mattress coils. This time, because the first person (the speaker) is not assigned an identity by the second person (the late night visitor), the speaker loses her identity, and her own subjectivity. She becomes invisible, absorbed into the relationship as so many women, socialized from childhood to cater to others' needs before their own, are absorbed into their partners' lives and identities.

It is not within the speaker, however, to accept this loss of identity. Seeming to recognize the power that comes from telling one's own experience, she begins to rebel, "writing words in the impossible/ margin between us." The first-person's act of writing

allows the reader to recognize that the first person experiences inequality solely within the relationship described in the context of the poem.

The actions taking place in the poem are nearly equally shared between the first and second person ("i am no longer/ available . . .you climb . . . i stand . . .you reach" *etc.*), taking turns throughout. While the first person narrates this poem, the second person is given actions and an identity, even a voice: "you . . . tell the floor/ how to win at electric tennis." This line does not come across as a command, but rather as an observation of the second person's action. This technique juxtaposes the first and second person, and uses them to contrast each other. It also indicates that the "I" and the "you" of the poem exist as equals, even though those same individuals are in the context of an unequal relationship. In the poem, the "I" has the opportunity of telling the experience of the poem, but the "you" is assigned a certain subject-ness by the "I"--that is, "you" is a character in his (or her) own right. The reader may or may not choose to identify with either the first or second person, or may assign an identity to either which stems from the reader's own understanding of the poem.

While readers of "Visiting Airplane Avenue" and "margins" may distance themselves from the poems' second-person characters by assuming "you" to be some unknown person named Aline, or an unnamed visitor, not all of Mouré's poems allow the reader that opportunity for distancing.

When a poem addresses "you" but does not have an obvious dedication, or a named identity for "you," the reader may make one of several assumptions. Perhaps, as in "margins," the addressee is someone the reader assumes to be someone else, because the poem's details (such as "the day's work making plywood") are too specific for the reader to understand on a personal level. If this is not the case, however, the reader may assume one of the following: either the poem is addressed to the reader herself, as an existent, though anonymous member of the same linguistic cosmos as the poem's speaker, or the poem is addressed to the poet herself as a means of creating a distance -- this time, between the writer herself and an aspect of her own life or self that she wishes to address.

A direct address to the reader can be seen as somewhat apostrophic, in that it addresses an unknown entity which may or may not exist (after all, a poet can only assume or perhaps hope that her poem will be

read!). But the use of the second-person as a form of poetic self-address can also be seen to be far more introspective. It is an internal address, made by the poet to the poet, or perhaps by or to an aspect of the poet's own psyche. By taking a step back from one's actions, or looking critically at the events affecting oneself and one's reaction to those events, one can see one's own fulfilment of the roles of subject and object, and can address this inequality even as it exists within one's own being. In taking on the object, or passive, role without question, we forget or remain unaware of the possibility of being an active subject. By questioning our own accustomed roles, we are able to create the possibility of an internal dialogue between the self as subject, and the self as accustomed object, and the conflict and resolution facilitated by this dialogue.

Because evidence is not often indicated by the poet, it requires a good deal of speculation to determine which poems are likely written as forms of self-address. However, we can make an educated guess in the case of some poems, basing our assumptions on the poem's tone and subject matter and the argument that a self-addressed poem would be an appropriate choice for

the poet to make in light of that particular tone and subject.

The use of a second-person self-address lends itself particularly well to Mouré's poem "Whisky" (*WV* 10). In this poem, the second person is characterized as a captive of "unsated desire," listening to the pull of whisky "urging you/ One drink, the one you can't have." The internal sensations experienced by the second-person are so vivid that the reader might easily assume the following to be words from a self-addressed poem: "Your head a stone dull & uncut./ Your same old gestures played to strangers like a film./ The old rope of/ fatigue tied through you." The physical sensations of the desire for alcohol are also evoked by the use of the second-person. In this way, the speaker can create a sense of separateness, and a sense that the speaker, despite the fact that the first person is *not* used in this poem, is in a state of double existence, sober and not-sober. Just as the whisky takes on an almost sensual persona ("Now is the time the old habit chooses, it wrings wet/ fingers across your skin,/ kissing your sore joints"), the character of "you" takes on a double persona, almost disembodied from itself, and disassociated from the speaker in a kind of split-personality enhanced by the effects of the

whisky. Indeed, this split is emphasized in the text of the poem, in which "one drink is relief, from fatigue,/ from the weight of one's self, the heaviness of spirit." By removing the boundaries between oneself and one's self, a poem can address the darker side, or indeed, just an other side, of the speaker's psyche.

In "Whisky," the reader must make an educated guess that the poem is addressed to the poet (or the speaker) herself. In other poems, however, it is much more obvious whether the poem is indeed a self-address or not. In particular, the very title of "To Herself, on her Birthday" (*EYS* 79-80) indicates a self-addressed poem. While much of the poem is concerned with description, such as "The trees consume atoms of the air,/ fuse them into leaves./ Sky trickles across empty sidewalks," there is still sufficient address made to "you" to support the idea that this is a poem which endows subject-hood on the second person--perhaps, one might think, as a birthday gift. The tone of the poem is reflective, as a person might be on her birthday. She considers the events of her present, where "Alone in a bar, boots raking/ the worn carpet, other patrons loom/ twisted as ogres above your table," and her past, where "You grew once in the flat brown lands . . . If you began in some tropic, you could say/ you went

north, but now/ you can say only that you travelled west, &/ were stopped by a grey ocean./ The tides lap at the atoms of your heart." The static situation of the present is in juxtaposition to the growing and travelling of the past. Where the second-person's identity "grew once," developing its own subject-ness, it is now stifled: "Stop speaking; stop speaking: the right has been legislated into silence." Developing one's own identity is a freedom which is often only available to children, before they become subject to socially defined and prescribed roles and behaviour. On her birthday, the speaker looks back at the freedom with which she was able to create her own subjectness, referring to the character of her past as "you" more freely than she does to the character of her present. Indeed, it becomes obvious that she regrets that loss of individuality, and of self-defined subjecthood. "The atoms of your childhood dissolve/ into trees, how can you claim them now?/ Your history is born in that rain" are lines which indicate the loss of a subjectivity which the speaker seeks to reclaim, by telling herself, in the second person, to "Dance! The leaves will unfold/ into your outstretched palms; this magic/ is ineffable, is not an industry. There is no other climate./ Stop speaking & dance!" She is able to

reclaim the subjectness of her childhood by rebelling against the "legislated" silence--she may "stop speaking" in the language which silences her own voice, but she will persist in communicating, if only in another language--of "dance." As I have discussed, it is necessary to create a new language which examines and expresses women's experience. This poem speaks to that "ineffable" desire and necessity, by using the second person as a character in her own right.

By combining the possibility and potential of the first two interpretations of the use of the second-person, and by recognizing that the second-person may be either an apostrophized entity, the reader, the writer, or any combination of the above, we come to a third interpretation of the use of the second person. This final exploration, which invokes the use and creation of a subject-subject dialogue between the second person and any other character, opens the door for the most potential in terms of the creation of subjecthood. When a poem brings an internalized dialogue together with a real or implied apostrophic address, it creates an open field for questions and challenges to the status quo of language. Not only does it ask the question, "what do *you* think" of an audience whose voice may not yet have

been heard, but it also raises the fact that that question can indeed be asked--and by a woman writer. By asking the addressee the metaphoric question, "what do you think," the poet/speaker invites the addressee's subjective participation in the ongoing dialogue which forms the basis for the creation of subjectivity.

It is not entirely necessary for the addressee or the second-person to actually answer back within the context of the poem. If "you" is an invited participant in the poem, rather than an adored object (as in traditional lyric love poems), then "you" can be said to hold "your" own degree of subjecthood. Because the second person is addressed as an equal or as an extension of the first person speaker (especially if the first person speaker does not make the distinction between "I" and "you"), the second person is assigned a subjectivity of her own.

In Mouré's poem "Incantation" (*EYS* 15), the "you" of the poem does not respond directly to the speaker, yet is juxtaposed with another character, "he." While it can also be read as a self-addressing you, the deliberate juxtaposition allows the reader to see the second-person as the main, important subject of the poem, and to see the third person, "he," as an intruder, even as an embodiment of the terror which is

the topic of the poem. "It waits behind you now/ paring fingernails w/knife/ . . . This is the way/ it begins His mouth electric-/ open upon yours heart jarring." The third-person exists as a separate entity against which the second-person can act and react, a sounding-board for the newly subjective reality of the second-person.

The poem itself reads as a set of directions, indeed, as an incantation of the subject, the second-person who will react against the third person and triumph, finally being able to "forget terror." The second-person is instructed, when confronted with "the locked recess/ of his cheek" to "Touch it/ gentle w/your tongue/ Forget terror." This instruction requires a shaping of language, for which the second-person's tongue is a metaphor. By introducing her gentle tongue, or language, to the "locked recess" of the third-person's cheek, she is able to forget the terror both of the existence of the third person, and of the language within which he moves and exists. By challenging this language, she will find that "The questions/ he never asks he will ask/ when this is over". Perhaps the third person may even learn to ask the second person, "what do *you* think?"

The poem is, on the surface, about a violent sexual encounter between the third person and second person, that is, a man and (presumably) a woman. However, it also serves as a metaphor for the way language (and the presumed woman) has been dominated, and the reclaiming of both language and the body that is necessary for the creation of female subjectivity. Ultimately, the second person is able to regain her own power of expression. Despite the fact that "Long past the departure his smell/ will be on you urging/ into your skin & thru your torn/ thought," despite the lingering sense of male dominance, the second-person is instructed, or urged, to "Grasp the bright/ gift & lance his loin Open sighs/ to black air & exhaust them/ finally Touch the scars w// your finger/ Become terror." She will take control of the fear which has been created by male domination, and will derive her own power by becoming one with that fear. Although the fear still exists, it is now in her control. She will use the language with which she is dominated, and change it to make it her own. The juxtaposition of second and third person in this poem allows just that to happen.

In Mouré's poem "Never Too Much" (*WV* 9), we witness another dialogue/juxtaposition. This time, the

movement is between the speaker, who never uses the first-person but may or may not be referring to herself in the second-person, and an unnamed third-person, who is referred to only as "she" or "her." We can assume that in the first stanza, the speaker is addressing "you" as the subject of the poem, whether or not the "you" of the second person is indeed the speaker herself. The speaker refers derisively to the second person, with whom she shows apparent dissatisfaction. "Never too much room to/ move thru, fool./ Whisky stains on your arms, the dark/ shirt of your friend./ What will she say when she comes up the step, two footed/ to see you?" This could be an episode of talking to oneself, or it could be an internal voice, a conscience which chides its owner for past behaviour. The speaker is, presumably, the first person, but the subject of the poem is the second person, who is required to contemplate herself and her present situation. By using the second person, the speaker of the poem can distance herself from her actions, and, as in "Whisky," achieve a kind of subject-subject dialogue between herself and her second-person identity. The possibility of this dialogue is heightened by the juxtaposition of the third person, who acts as a kind of sounding board for the first and second. "What will

she say when she comes up the step, two-footed/ to see you?" is a question which might well be asked by a disapproving self. When confronted with a friend for whom there is "never too much room or enough/ time," she might well ask herself what made her friend come to this conclusion. Perhaps it is a direct result of the first/second person's own past behaviour, of "Whisky stains on your arms." We can also interpret the confrontation as a coming-together of different selves, all within the same individual. While the first and second person are likely one and the same, we can go further and speculate that the third person might also be another aspect of this same individual. The effect is that of looking in a mirror which reflects upon itself, multiplying the individuals by their own reflection. Indeed, the image of the mirror comes up in the poem, emphasizing this point: "You'd recognize her anywhere, now./ Even in mirrors. Never too much,/ she'd say,/ walking away without paying./ Just like you. The memory crowding her." There are enough characters in first, second, and third person points of views to crowd anyone out of this poem. Although the third person, seeking space, "walks, foolishly/ alone now," she returns to confront the first and second person, through mirror reflection or in person. The

result is a combination of all three points of view, which play off one another to create a complete individual, and a complete subject. Without the various points of view, and the address to the neglected second person, this completion is not possible. The second person must be invited in to participate in a poem, and allowed to respond as herself. In this way, a further exploration of the identity of the second person as a subject will be possible, not only in poetry, but in language. "You" will not only be permitted, but expected to voice "your" opinions, and we will know precisely who "you" think(s) "you" are.

Conclusion: Sharing Subjectivity

The project of creating a more inclusive, more explicit language is an ongoing challenge. It is unlikely that, in the foreseeable future, the works of Erin Mouré will be taken as the keys and texts for a new way of speaking and a new way of addressing the issue of equality within language. However, it is through such poetic works that language can, ultimately, be challenged and shaped. By stepping outside the boundaries of conventional syntax, and by challenging the usual role of the second person, it becomes possible to place within language the seeds of new ideas, which will grow and spread over time.

Because the unconventional use of certain parts of language startles or even challenges the reader, "poets such as Mouré . . .are finding in the chancy, the accidental, and the provisional, bases for a new feminist poetics" (York 133). By challenging previous assumptions about how women exist within and make use of language, feminist writers can extend that challenge to include previous assumptions about women in other realms of life.

The use of the second-person, "you," invites a shared dialogue and a shared subjectivity that seems to

be unavailable in many traditional lyric poems. Because the "you" is often passive, the mere object of the poet's affections, it is rarely able to express itself. Endowing "you" with a measure of subjectness, by turning to the "you" and asking her questions to which only she can supply the answers, allows "you" to participate in the poem and in language. If the second person refers to readers as a collective "you," then the poem endows its readers with a subjecthood, and invites them to participate, as subjects, in the meaning and interpretation of the poem. If the "you" is an address to the poet herself, it becomes a means of internal questioning, a way of endowing herself with the independence necessary to her own understanding of herself as a subject in her own right. If the "you" is an apostrophic address to a particular person, it endows subjectness by assigning an identity to that person. In this way, the absent or non-existent are invited to answer, and even, in the context of the poem, given the power to respond. These inclusions allow the reader to witness the actual and implied dialogue that occurs when the first and second (and even third) person characters in a poem are subjects, equal in their own right, within the context of the poem. This subject-subject dialogue informs the reader

that such exchanges not only exist, but are desirable. When this desire, shared as it is between first and second person, and between poet and reader, is expressed in a dynamic, attractive language, it becomes not only acceptable, but desirable in and of itself.

By allowing the equal exchange of dialogue and desire between individuals who are subjects in their own right, the poetic use of the second person creates and fills a space in language wherein women can claim their own subjectivity. What "you" think begins to matter, and what "you" respond becomes poetry. "You" become a subject, and speak your own experience for yourself. And people listen to "you."

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Title of Thesis:

Second Person, Second Sex: Address and Apostrophe in the Poetry of Erin Mouré

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April 28, 1995