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Somatization of Writing and Semiotization of the Body. A Study of Selected Texts by English-Canadian Feminist Writers

Language is a translation. It speaks through the body. Each time we translate what we are in the process of thinking, it necessarily passes through our bodies.
(Cixous,151-152)

Abstract

This study focuses on the analysis of selected texts by English Canadian feminist writers who are engaged in the conscious process of subverting / carnivalizing the coded discourse of patriarchal culture, which reinforces the heterocentrism, classism, racism and sexism of society. Betsy Warland, Daphne Marlatt, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Gail Scott, Erin Mouré and others challenge the traditional way of writing by deconstructing the linear alphabetical notation and writing a discourse translating the body into a script. Aware of recent development is the feminist discourse, the writers experiment with the translation of various senses of the body into writing. The body translated into writing somatizes the process, while the body itself is being semiotized, read as a linguistic sign or structure. The texts are read as an enactment of female desire, of female economy of language, the economy of plenitude, translated into the never-ending process of the eroticization of language. The rhetoric exploring the visual, the aural, the tactile and the olfactory experience of the body is examined here. The writers' penchant for linguistic play is not purely aesthetic. It helps us reflect on languages and the way they shape our thinking and acting in the world.

Résumé

L'étude analyse plusieurs textes d'auteures féministes anglophones au Canada engagées dans la subversion d'un discours patriarcal qui encode l'hétérocentrisme, le racisme, le sexisme et le statut quo social. Betsy Warland, Daphne Marlatt, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Gail Scott, Erin Mouré parmi d'autres défient l'écriture traditionnelle en déconstruisant la notation alphabétique linéaire pour créer une écriture qui inscrit le corps féminin. Suivant des développements récents du discours féministe, ces auteures transforment en écriture les différents sens du corps. La transformation du corps en écriture est un processus de somatisation, alors que le corps lui-même est transformé en signe et en structure sémiotiques. Les textes se lisent comme l'articulation du désir féminin et de l'économie linguistique féminine. Celle-ci est une économie de la plénitude qui se traduit sans cesse en un processus d'éroticisation du langage. Les textes explorent la rhétorique du visuel, de l'acoustique, du tactile et de l'expérience olfactive du corps. Le jeu linguistique chez ces auteures n'est pas seulement esthétique; il nous amène à réfléchir sur le langage et sur son influence sur notre façon de penser et d'agir dans le monde.

If hu(man) traces written in sand induce states of fear and anxiety, the imprint of the female body on writing in patriarchal cultures can be a reason for an even greater concern. Don't we remember the taboos around the female body as grotesque and

unruly? Don't we know that the pregnant, ageing and irregular body cannot be controlled? What about a female thinking, speaking, writing, gesturing and performing body, a body touching another body or a body traversed by female desire? How does one translate the body into the alphabetic notation system? What kind of traces does the female body leave on writing? How is the writing transformed in the process?

If we agree with H el ene Cixous that the material body of a writer definitely makes its mark on the body of language, then we have to admit that the alphabetic notation system creates a monstrous misrepresentation of both male and female bodies. The phonogrammic alphabetic system is not capable of translating the complex nature of the body because it has standardized and desensualized both writing and reading. Contemporary Western typography is based on a way of thinking that reduces letters to an endless horizontal line and hence it can only approximate a translation of rigid rational thought. If there is anything monstrous about writing it is the inability of the alphabetic system to translate the whole body presence, its visual, gestural, kinaesthetic and cognitive functions. In order to translate the body, writing must transgress the alphabetic notation and "carnivalize" it by means of codes deriving from other writing systems that still have traces of the gestural and kinaesthetic. The notation must be replaced by one that adequately translates not only "the dance of the intellect" (Perloff) but also the elegant "dance" of the body.

The complex issue of the translation of the body into writing has been one of the major concerns of an avant-garde group of contemporary English Canadian feminist writers. In their linguistic experiments Betsy Warland, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Daphne Marlatt, Gail Scott, Erin Mour e and others return to the old notation systems in which writing is "an intensely physical art, one that activates several senses at once" (Young, 5). They are interested in exploring the picto-ideo-phono-graphic notation typical of hieroglyphic or ideogrammic writing. Being aware that the phonetic standardized language produces a standardized highly reproducible discourse and that readers become "serialized language consumers" (Silliman 1987, 15), they discard the linear alphabetic logic in favour of picto-ideo-phono-graphic features of language. They question standardized orthography and standardized spelling, which take the sensuality out of language. Their texts examine strategies of hieroglyphic writing that are "at once plastic art and language, spatialized and nonlinear, functioning by agglutinations, joining together in one graphic code figurative, symbolic, abstract and phonetic elements" (Ulmer, 271).

This feminist experimental writing is intertextually connected with the Qu eb ecois feminist avant-garde (Nicole Brossard, Louky Bersianik, France Th eoret, Louise Cotnoir and Louise Dupr e) and with the feminist branch of the American Language Poets (Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, Rachel Du Plessis, Rae Armantrout, Kathleen Fraser, Beverly Dahlen and Rosemarie Waldrop). One can also find similarities between this group of writers and the earlier avant-garde women writers who explored relationships between gender and language (Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes, H.D., Virginia Woolf and Marianne Moore). A language-oriented poetics has been, of course, explored by many male writers; it is enough to mention the predominantly male early twentieth century avant-garde movements (Futurism, Cubism, Surrealism) and the contemporary American Language Poets (Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, Bob Perelman, Ron Silliman and Barrett Watten). In Canada bp Nichol, bill bissett, Steve McCaffery, Christopher Dewdney and Christian Bok have inscribed themselves into the language-focused tradition. One thing is clear: contemporary writers, both male and female, appropriate writing techniques of the historical avant-garde and they translate

them into their own politics, aesthetics and ethics. The Canadian feminist writers not only feminize the historical avant-garde practices by experimenting with "body writing" but they also use them for their specific Canadian, place and space-oriented, social and cultural critique and for exploration of issues essential to current critical and feminist discourses. They feminize the historical avant-garde practices by experimenting with "body writing", which seeks to valorize women's desire and sexuality.

In their texts the writers achieve what Freeman in her discussion of Cixous refers to as "textualization of anatomy and corporealization of textuality" (Freeman, 62) or, in other words, the semiotization of the body and the somatization of writing. Freeman points out that in Cixous the body is not "prior to writing" but "already in operation *within* it". The relations between writing and the body are "homologous", "[b]ody and text are co-constitutive" and the "corporeal relations are at the same time linguistic (and vice versa)" (Freeman, 63). The English Canadian feminist writers are interested in both the American and French feminist discourse; their texts, similar to Cixous's textual practice, not only "demonstrate and *en/corp/orate*" (Freeman, 63) their critical awareness but they are also engaged in a dialogue with various trends in contemporary feminist thought. The writers do not accept the traditional literary discourse, as they do not agree to the status quo and hence to the invisibility of women. They opt for a dialogue with the patriarchal tradition, which they achieve through multiple acts of transgression at various levels of their texts. To use Scott's words: "women are skilled at stepping into spaces (forms) created by the patriarchal superego and cleverly subverting them" (Scott 1989, 110).

The act of translation of the body into writing involves, then, two processes simultaneously: the somatization of writing and the semiotization of the body. The body translated into writing somatizes the process, while the body itself is being semiotized, read as a linguistic sign or structure. In such an approach "what takes place between a woman's body and her words is not representation but a fluctuating process of intersemiotic translation" (Banting, 230). The body is no longer reduced to its biology (the essentialist stance), but is approached as a material, conceptual and linguistic unit. The essentialist reading of the female body is certainly monologic when not used strategically. The non-essentialist approach to the body entails the exploration of the process of metaphorization or re-metaphorization in the manner of Irigaray or Cixous. Both of them suggest such new metaphors for the female body as the "threshold", "espacement" (space) (the image of two lips), "an interval", a "process", "becoming", a "mediation", "love", the "mucous or mucosity", the "between", the "angel", "air", "singing", "dancing" (Whitford 159, 164). The new metaphors imply a change in sexual hierarchies and a focus on "nonphallic sexuality" (Gallop, 99). The crucial point in the new "poetics of the body" is the fact that it is not "an expression of the body but a poiesis, a creation of the body" (Gallop, 94), not a representation of the body but its intersemiotic translation. The conceptualization of the body no longer obeys the dictates of masculine discourse; the body is no longer conceived as a trope of similitude, but is metaphorized and hence semiotized.

The texts of the writers under discussion inscribe the theoretical discourse on the body. In fact, the texts and the body are used in a way that shows their mutual substitutability. If the terms are substitutable none of them can be privileged. The usual cause/effect relation between body and writing is deconstructed. Instead there is a dialogic relationship between body and writing, not a hierarchical one, as suggested in the line by Tostevin: "I am not a woman I am a poem / I am not a woman I am a woman / a space in space" (Tostevin 1985, n.p.).

When Gail Scott asks “What is the relationship between writing and the rhythms, pulsions, memories my Protestant body ... mediated by an English-language inscription in-the-feminine?” (Scott 1989, 16), she is not thinking of the essentialist biological body but about the Bakhtinian “chronobiological body” (Jaeger, 38). This concept clearly dissolves the biology/culture opposition as it posits the body as being in dialogue with the external, social context. In the words of Braidoti this is a body as “an inter-face, a threshold, a field of intersection of material and symbolic forces; it is a surface where multiple codes of power and knowledge are inscribed” (Braidoti, 219). The body, as theorized and inscribed in the texts of these women writers, is a body situated in a particular social, political and cultural situation, and a particular place and time: Canada in the 1980s and 1990s.

What follows is an analysis of selected texts engaged in the project of the intersemiotic translation of the body; they employ aural, visual and performance poetics, or to use Tostevin’s words, they incite the reader “to hear to see to smell to taste to touch” (Tostevin, 1985, n.p.).

Body translations 1-6: complex dialogues between the visual, aural, gestural, kinetic, olfactory and ideogrammatic qualities of language

Body translation no. 1

Betsy Warland: “induction” from *open is broken*

text the tissue one long
 sentence no period we are menses flow
 period: “sed- to go, exodus”
 are exodus
 “going around in circles”

(Warland 1984, 14)

The syntax translates the body as overflowing, excessive. The text inscribes a tension between the semantic and syntactic economies of language. It is evident that it calls attention to its own composition in the space of the page. The words, letters and punctuation marks are dispersed and animated on the page. The non-phonetic and gestural material is grafted into the phonetic notation. The orderly and predictable relations of sequential language are disrupted and subverted. The ideogrammatic principle is invoked. The act of reading becomes an ideogrammatic act of discovery. The visual text disrupts the apparent stability of the acoustic pattern. It shows the illusion of pure meaning.

Body translation no. 2

Betsy Warland: from *serpent (w)rite*; turn 4 and turn 5

we have all been fe(male)

“a feminine plural “ + “a masculine singular “

XX + Y

yet he remains ADAMant
using Garden Grammar he writes an opposite story
names the *clitoris*

()

O

XOXOXOXOXOXO

“fluid slanguage “

sss-lang
this is how we read

I/s movement

serpent movement

(Warland 1987, n.p.)

The whole text is constructed ideogramatically. Warland moves beyond repressive metaphoric constructions and uses an ideogrammatic method that operates on the principles of collage. Complex ideas are the result of association and juxtaposition. All sequential or causal principles of discourse are ignored. The layout and typography of the printed page are crucial. Space interrogates lexical and semantic meaning; it places syntactical principles in doubt.

What words can describe best such a practice of writing? Is it visual, aural, kinetic? It is evident that the text calls attention to its own composition in the space of the page. The words, letters and punctuation marks are dispersed and animated on the page. The non-phonetic and gestural material is grafted into the phonetic notation. The orderly and predictable relations of sequential language are disrupted and subverted. The visual text disrupts the apparent stability of the acoustic pattern. It shows the illusion of pure meaning. The eruptive capitalization in “ADAMant” and in “I/s movement” is an intentional wordplay. My eye is caught in the double movement. I must trace patterns of meaning back and forth. The tension between the visual structure and the oral medium is significant. How do I read “XOXOXOXOXO”? Is it a verbal construct or a silent visual image? The interaction of sound and silence generates intensities and subtleties of meaning and it foregrounds the materiality of language. The effect achieved is similar to that accomplished by the materials of visual art.

Body translation no. 3

Betsy Warland: from *open is broken*:

]
[
]
[
]
[
no words
]
listen

[
wind: of our
]
 being
 [
 “air “
]
 “aura “
 [
 “wing “/each
]
 a wing
 [
 riding
]
 our own wind

(Warland 1984, 51)

The text stimulates the curiosity of eye and ear. The topography of the page and the paratactic combination of the words suggest multiple possibilities for reading. Writing functions here as a spatio-temporal phenomenon and Warland exposes the senselessness of such standard practices of conventional writing as grammar and referentiality. The text embodies an ideographic principle: “a combination of two hieroglyphs corresponds to a concept, as in the ideogram “knife + heart = sorrow, or a mouth + a bird = ‘to sing’” (Eisenstein, 30). In Warland’s text the rule functions as follows: wind + air + wing = freedom, emancipation, linguistic exuberance/ independence. The chosen ideogrammatic principle fuses both the spatial and temporal event and thus avoids the deterministic conventions of succession and linearity. An interpretation turns into an optical act.

Body translation no. 4

Lola Lemire Tostevin: from “re”

writing as reading (the past?) would only be writing
 without breathing a word while writing as rereading
 doubles back to recall to hear again the resonance as
 re tears from the rest reenters the mouth with quick
 motions of tongue rolls liquid trills laps one
 syllable to the next

[and later]:

the urgency of writing with a vengeance revenge
 it’s only human you said an eye for an eye a word
 for a word writing that repels the peels of laughter
 rebels bell-mouths to bellow to howl in the hollow
 the holocryptic cipher that gives no clue to the reader
 with the missing key the second name of *ré* riding on *do*’s back close to the
 heels of *mi* up and to the diatonic scale of C to see the tune to which the
texts is set to hear the beat the beating hollow
 that allows the verb “to write” to reverberate

(Tostevin 1985, n.p., underlining E.S.)

The syllable “re” has both linguistic and musical connotations and it is used for the exploration of simultaneous operation of the codes of music and codes of language in a written text. Tostevin is fond of Kristeva’s word “transposition”, which applies to the “feminine economy of language. Trans: a moving through on to the other side. To transpose: to write or perform a musical performance in a different key” (Tostevin 1986, 391). The word signifies, then, an operation of language as both verbal and nonverbal, as both writing and musicating, and as interweaving of the linguistic, graphic and musical codes/rules: the technique used here could be called syllable leading or syllable play, which functions as a crucial element in discovering new words and in furthering the text. In addition to syllable leading, Tostevin uses nearly all the other devices of musicating, alliteration, vowel leading, consonant play, internal rhyme and repetition. References to hearing and seeing sounds are repeated (“to hear the resonance”, to “see the tune to which the text is set”). The text shifts between visual and oral/aural codes. The punctuation is replaced by a “pregnant pause as conceptual space” (Tostevin 1987) and the recurrence of the technique can be considered an instance of musicating of structure. Phonetic echoes build metonymic associations not only between English words but also between French and English ones, e.g. “*cuisante de remords qui mordent*” leads to “her lingual position from/ dormant to mordant”, or “the might of mote” to “*le mot* that place”(Tostevin 1985, n.p.). The sound associations are more stressed than the traditional syntactic or semantic associations, but Tostevin also foregrounds the semantic value of sound. The words evoke recognizable images and concepts that augment the effect of sound. The act of reading becomes a sensual act as I can literally feel the words rolling on my tongue. The words touch, brush, knock against each other, causing in me a “peculiar dance of the speech organs” (Shklovsky quoted in Peter Steiner’s *Russian Formalism*, 151). The sensual, the kinetic and the gestural return in Tostevin’s writing, which in fact aims at evoking the original synaesthesia of language.

The text can be read as an enactment of female desire, of female economy of language, the economy of plenitude, translated into the never-ending process of the eroticization of language:

as the re of
 desire reverses into the erotic sequence of a sentence
 into the consequential climax of the writer over and over

(once more?)

(Tostevin, 1985, n.p.)

The text is not only an intersemiotic translation of body/female desire into writing but also the transposition of writing into music. Tostevin makes reference to the diatonic scale of music, but her use of language is not bound by the rigid rules of diatonic music, which always gravitates towards a source of stable meaning. She moves away from a rigid discourse or, in other words, from a purely diatonic framework and representationalism. She focuses more on the relationships between words, or “relationships between tones rather than an inherent quality in the tone itself” (Heble, 56).

Body translation no. 5: Smell

In *serpent (w)rite*, turn one and turn two, Betsy Warland translates the experience of being lost in terms of olfactory event:

we lose ourselves in each other
smell
aeiou
e
i
o
u
last lest list lost lust
lest
list
lost
lust
your smell in/lists me
is pleasing to satisfy ... a desire or inclination
inspiralling inclination
scent/sentence inspiralization

circling circling ringing out
aeiou
u lust las(s)
we are "lov/hers" of lost

this the lost manuscript

odors coming from the fluids of the body / excess, overflowing- marking where we have been

"wordsmells"
smell signals scent/ence

serpent language, "forked tongue" / bilingual wordsmells

(Warland 1987, n.p.)

What is the property of smell and touch that can be transposed into writing? What is the "rhetoric of scent"? (Benstock, 156). Smells are not easily containable; they escape boundaries, they defy any attempts at enclosing them in any fixed spaces and they are predominantly invisible. In writing, touch and smell become optical fields. The dispersion of words and letters on the page translates the spreading of scent in the open space: "eyes smell words sprayed in page" (Warland, 1987, turn one). They are experienced more as marks or gestures rather than elements of a semantic exchange. They entice each other phonetically with little concern for semantic value. Scent is transposed into an opto-phonetic domain; spiral configuration of words replaces syntax: "inspiring inclination/scent/sentence inspiralization" (Warland, 1987, turn one). Words spiral as do scents in a whirling movement of air. Both the horizontal and the vertical flow of the same letters and words suggest the ubiquitous, all- pervasive effect of the scent of the body on the structure of the text – its openness. Slashes and parentheses are not grammatical pointers here but spatial ideogrammic interventions that multiply meaning, that spread the scent of the words, that acquire polysemic properties. The text incites synaesthesia between eye, ear (vocal writing) and the sense of smell evoked thematically; and only a silent graphonic

reading can give justice to such language games as “u lust las(s) / we are lov/hers of lost” (Warland 1987, turn one).

The rhetoric of smell has no borders, words have no fixed meanings, new words preserve the odour of other words. If this is a space of difference in Warland's case it translates (intersemiotically) the female body as excessive and overflowing. It translates into a double-voiced language or “double-scented language” that does not hesitate to question the dominant language of society. The dominant writing with its rigid rules does not leave much space for a scent to permeate its structures. It is only writing that challenges such rigidities, that can approximate the transformance of smell into a written verbal event. And again it is the picto-ideo-phono/sono-graphic script with its multiple open spaces that is closer to the rhetoric of scent than any other notation.

Body translation no. 6: Touch

Touch is a gesture, a kinetic movement of the body. Can gestures be written on the page at all? How to translate them into a written text that privileges sight? “[I]t is through gesture that any *form* is constituted,” says Pauline Butling (237), and in the case of language writing “forms and gestures in writing” are chosen that “generate a perpetual openness”, a disruption of rigid structures and at the same time a creation of new possibilities. Such gestures of writing are formed by paragrammatic wordplay (play with letters) and puns (play with sounds and meaning) (Butling, 238-242) I will look at the paragrammatic wordplay as an instance of translation into writing of letters and words that through contact or touch with each other produce a series of spatio-phonic or a picto-ideo-phono-graphic intensifications. This is a translation of the verbal intimacy onto the page. The verbal touch can be auditory, graphic or ideographic, but it usually encompasses all of these aspects in one textual event. It is another instance of the somatization of writing, of the intersemiotic translation of body into a written text.

Warland's and Marlatt's “Reading and Writing Between the Lines” explores their gestures of writing through paragrammatic wordplay of both letters and words. The auditory, graphic and ideographic gestures are involved in their wordplays:

we do write to each other's u/s

u-feminism a strategy against u-thanasia
all our u/s essential

...thinking about the word *euphemism*
eu-, good + *pheme*, speech u-feminisms
all our yours (u/s) and all the others

(Warland and Marlatt 1988, 90, 89)

Also similarly in “Subject to Change”:

intimate/intimate. (p)art of each other. y-ours? generative
power of our intimacy – this too must have a life on the page

(Warland and Marlatt 1991, 16 & 17)

or in *Proper Deafinitions*:

I/s, un(i)dentified,
I absent in theor ze
li(v)es,
the m()ther within, wor(l)d

(Warland 1990a, 77)

Only a silent graphonic reading can account for the sensory overload in “u/s”, “u-feminism”, “(p)art”, “y-ours”; I experience a giddy synaesthesia between eye and ear; the tension between the phonetic and graphic elements intensifies the polysemic character of the words, and hence the ideogrammic content of the text. The concept of writing, as always collaborative (not only between actual persons, but also between the words themselves), is translated into the paragrammatic play of the singular “u” (you) that turns into plural “u/s” (us), and “y-ours” that is both yours and ours; (p)art becomes art and feminism turns into “u-feminism” (feminism inclusive of all women); The spatio-phonetic play demands an intense conceptualization from the reader and it produces diverse significations that are not available through conventional writing/reading strategies. The syntax is fragmented, the words are ruptured, but as Bruce Andrews argues, “[f]ragmentation doesn't banish the references embodied in individual words” (Andrews, 34) and “[m]eaning is not produced by the sign, but by the contexts we bring to the potentials of language” (Andrews, 33). All of the linguistic experiments, once contextualized, evoke serious theoretical and political issues. The word “m()ther”, for instance, implies the complex nature of discourse on mother and daughter relations (Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother-Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, the work of Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray); the absence of “i” in “theor ze” or the splitting of “I/s” and “u/s” evoke the contentious issue of subjectivity and its monologic/dialogic interpretations. Such texts challenge the traditional categories of authorship and readership, and they offer “the alternative sense of reader and writer as equal and simultaneous participants within a language product” (McCaffery, 62).

Many feminist language-centred texts have been accused of vulvocentric/vulvomorphologic based on anatomy. The Canadian feminist writers, however, in Irigaray's or Cixous' fashion, use the vulvomorphologic metaphoric paradigm for their own subversive purposes and for “deliberately strategic ends” (Freeman 66). The translation of the female body into writing gives the writers a chance to challenge the masculine conceptualizations and representations of the female body. When Warland, for instance, talks about a text as being “full of holes”, about another text as “mouth cunt ears urethra” or about women as “menses flow *period*” (1987, n.p.), she deliberately assumes male metaphors of women (the insistence on the connection of women with the body and its functions). Nevertheless, like Irigaray, she is performing a strategic metaphorization or “tactical mimesis” (Whitford, 72). She is transgressing, decolonizing and hence carnivalizing the dominant discourse; the act of appropriation of male metaphors of women is empowering on its own. Irigaray's term “*mimétisme*, usually translated mimeticism, comes from the domain of animal ethology and means ‘camouflage’ or ‘protective colouring’” (Whitford, 72). But this is not only a camouflage. It is also an appropriation of the masculine metaphors by women in a protest against their “(re)assimilation and destruction by the masculine economy” (Whitford, 72).

One may wonder about political ramifications of such linguistic experimentation. Language writers, however, believe that political structures are informed and supported by particular verbal structures which, when questioned and dismantled, open a space for social transformation. The very fact of repeatedly evoking a musical, visual and gestural language disrupts the conventional, standardized language of mass/popular culture. This is not writing that conforms to accepted norms but that pursues new forms and ideas. Such writing aims at killing a ready-made alphabetic discourse; it questions standardized ways of thinking and incites alternative ways of perception. Through the exploration of language the writers challenge the power structures of representation; their writing acts not only as a critique of society in general, but more particularly of the patriarchal structures inherent both in language and society.

It is also crucial to point out that the writers never differentiate between the body and the mind. When Warland talks about "writing a new kind of theory – fiction/theory", she emphasizes that in this kind of writing there is "[n]o mind and body split", that "the text embod[ies] the viewing" (Warland 1990b, 76). And when Marlatt comments on her use of the line she points out that for her it is "a moving step in the process of thought or, as Denise Levertov puts it, 'the process of thinking/feeling, feeling/ thinking'" (Marlatt 1982, 91). It is clear that the writers have a different conception of thought; they conceive of it as "not rational but erotic because it works by attraction" (Marlatt 1984, 45).

For readers interested in traditional poetic discourse, the picto-ideo-phono-graphic writing may appear problematic; for lovers of intellectual language games, however, and for those who are serious about a female voice in literature, this writing project focusing on the translation of the elegant and graceful dance of the thinking body is not only an important but also an exciting development in the contemporary Canadian literary discourse. The writers' penchant for linguistic play is not purely aesthetic. It helps us reflect on languages and the way they shape our thinking and acting in the world.

It also makes us aware that language has become a commodity that many of us blindly accept without thinking about the ideological consequences of its use. Erin Mouré's words aptly summarize the importance of the intense work on language in all discourses. As she points out

the way we remember, have remembered, structures memory, *is mediated by language*, by the conceptual frameworks buried in language: and if we are not careful, the structure of our works reinforces heterocentrism, classism, racism, as well as sexism. (Mouré, 67)

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