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**Maria-Mercè Marçal:  
an exploration of feminine  
poetics in the work of a late  
20th century catalan poet**

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Noelia Diaz Vicedo

CUADERNOS DE TRABAJOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN



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**Maria-Mercè Marçal: an exploration of  
feminine poetics in the work of a late  
20th century catalan poet**

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**MA Women's Studies in the Humanities  
University of York  
Centre for Women's Studies  
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*To my parents,  
Ramiro and Conchi*

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## Introduction

Hell and heaven are propped up.  
And the cradle and the grave, and the words  
and the body: natal country, exile. (1)

This dissertation examines the work of Catalan writer Maria-Mercè Marçal, through the study in depth of two of her poetical pieces from different books: ‘Solstice’ [‘Solstici’] and ‘I love you when...’ [‘T’estimo quan...’]. The former piece is included in the book *The Never Land* [*Terra de Mai*] (1982) and the latter in her last book *Thawing* [*Desglaç*] (1989). I will explore Marçal’s poetical voice as an intervention in a Catalan literary tradition in which religious and social discourses have reinforced the idea of the feminine woman as the guardian of the masculine Fatherland.

Images of Spain, reinforced by Catholic religion, have long been associated with patriarchal power. The dominant historiography of Spain upheld, until very recently, an idea of ‘greatness’ based on the golden era of ‘Los Reyes Católicos’. This tradition sought to convey a portrait of Spain, throughout history, as a strong and virile country. The ambition of those years, supposedly evident in the ‘discovery

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of America' and the power of the Spanish Empire over many nations in Europe, forged an image of Spain as a powerful man with a strong sense of control.

As we shall see below, this vision of the country was to form the basis of the ideology of the fascist regime that prevailed in Spain for almost half of the twentieth century, under the rule of Francisco Franco. An almost inevitable corollary was the disempowerment of women. Thus, almost forty years of permanent propaganda prevailed on the basis of a traditional Catholic society that situated women in the 'private sphere'.

The success of the policy of 'The Generalissimo' was supposed to be underpinned by the submissive woman who desired to serve her *patria*. Several arguments based on sexual difference were used to support and perpetuate this position. Thus, to control women's sexuality became a primary aim of the state:

Women were seen as both the source of all virtue and of all vice in society. On the one hand there was the ideal woman, dedicated to marriage and motherhood (*la perfecta casada*), faithfully fulfilling her domestic duties as the 'angel of the home' by not only cooking and cleaning but also by imparting religious values, love of nation and respect for (male) authority. At the same time, there were dangerous women who tried to step outside their 'natural' sphere

to meddle in public affairs for which they were mentally unfitted, or who undermined the family by offering sexual temptation to men.  
(2)

Born to this repressed and oppressed social and cultural environment, Maria-Mercè Marçal (1952-1998) appears as a unique poetical voice. I read her work in an attempt to dismantle the limitations inscribed upon women's bodies by an historical tradition construing them as precious objects to be manipulated by a patriarchal politics. However, Marçal's specific cultural location multiplies the axes of control and subjugation, and thus has further political implications. She was born in Ivars d'Urgell, in Lleida, which is one of the regions of Catalonia and thus one whose cultural identity and language were banned during the period of the dictatorship. Her position as a Catalan woman inevitably situates her work in the space of a double marginalisation: Castilian/Catalan and man/woman. This doubly marginalised perspective originated during Franco's regime, and still continues to be relevant in Catalan cultural and literary tradition. Typically, Spanish anthologies of women writers do not include Catalan authors. Only a small selection of Marçal's poems have been translated into other languages (Japanese, German, Hungarian, English, Galician, Portuguese and Castilian). There is still no extensive translation of her

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work, and Marçal remains an unknown poet even for most Castilian speakers. For this reason, one of the key challenges of this dissertation has been the translation of her works. I have provided my own translations except in certain cases, which are indicated. A small collection of her poetry has been translated into Castilian and included in an anthology edited by José Agustín Goytisolo, *Veintiún poetas catalanes para el siglo XXI*.

Hitherto, I have argued that the linguistic situation of this poet is structured by the problematic identification ‘woman-nation’ [dona-nació]; that she and her work are embedded within a double colonisation: cultural, as being Catalan versus the hegemonic Castilian; and social as being woman versus man. As Marçal writes, ‘Characterless maiden, colonised and without tongue. Both sides of the coin that bring together my past —our past’. (3)

Despite this situation, Marçal refuses to make this identification, and the debates surrounding it, the main focus of her work: although it is inextricable from her poetic universe, it does not conform to her main goal. She declared that ‘protest poems are not prominent in my work’. (4) Controversially, she considers more important than having a specific language, is having a woman’s body. She asserts

that ‘there are common experiences that cross the barriers of languages and that connect women’s experiences from different cultural contexts, even from different periods, whereas these experiences distinguish men and women who speak the same language’. (5)

My fascination for Marçal’s poems comes from her masterly ability to put into question the dominant discourses of Castilian patriarchy, and to rework them in such a way as to foreground women’s linguistic struggles towards self-representation. Her poetical corpus is concerned with the linguistic implications of the body: ‘it is much more significant [in my poems] to have a body, a situation, a woman’s story, or the other element, which continues to be very important, the linguistic. I can’t separate myself from these elements’. (6)

My interest in Marçal’s poetry increased last year (2002), when her complete works were published at the hands of her friend and scholar Lluïsa Julià, in *Maria-Mercè Marçal. Contraban de llum, antologia poètica* (Barcelona: Proa) as part of the collection of Catalan Classics [Clàssics Catalans]. I found this association between Marçal and the ‘classic’—or canonical— a highly controversial one, especially when considering the dismissive attitude adopted by most critics

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towards any suggestion of a lesbian presence or existence in her poems. As Julià has declared, Marçal's approach assumes that tradition and a confined understanding of the female body is still embedded in society, and that these conventions transfer to the field of poetry and criticism. Literary critics have focused their attention on Marçal's poetry as an attempt to claim her Catalan origins by introducing elements of the Catalan folk tradition, ignoring the challenge she poses to the impenetrable world of separate spheres:

So, from the beginning, I have been pigeonholed as a virtuoso in the language, in the revival of folk culture and in a particular imagery and a whole series of things; when you come out with something unexpected, like homosexual eroticism or a controversial perspective on maternity and, in short, heterodoxy —they did not go into that at all.... (7)

Whenever Marçal has been read by critics as a poet of love (8) it has been said that her poetry is 'personal' without any engagement with the lesbian erotic of the poems. As Julià lamented, 'with few exceptions, they [literary critics] have ignored the later evolution [of her work], they have pretended not to hear the description of her feminine sexuality, explicitly lesbian since the publication of the third volume of poetry'. (9) Marçal's poetry comes from the particular voice of a woman, from a particular lesbian body, from the

impulses of sexuality whose stimulus I seriously doubted could be defined as ‘classic’ or ‘universal’. Anna Montero, in her article ‘Maria-Mercè Marçal, L’Escriptora del Mes’ [‘Maria-Mercè Marçal, The Writer of the Month’] claimed that ‘in its themes, Maria Mercè Marçal’s poetry explores domains which are either exclusively feminine (maternity) or, which as universal (love, solitude), are traversed by a voice which expresses the feminine experience, and which, through the personal, becomes collective.’ (10)

The lack of critical consensus over Marçal’s value as a poet was evident in the poor reception of the book *The Never Land* [*Terra de Mai*], which failed either to get widely known or to receive positive critical reviews, as the poet herself lamented: ‘This last book has been specially unfortunate in many respects and, particularly, in its distribution.’ (11) In this book, Marçal describes the *jouissance* of lesbian love, while at the same time foregrounding her personal solitude and sense of literary exile. However, Anna Montero’s suggestion that Marçal nevertheless depicts a universal theme of love fails to do justice to the political implications of lesbian sexuality. ‘Love’ does not refer to the romantic conception of a universal feeling. It is limited and labelled and cannot be extricated from social relationships or from the dichotomised categorisation of hetero/homo. In the context of Marçal’s

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oeuvre, it raises a plethora of questions about the politics of homosexual identity: questions which were no less urgent for coinciding with the residues of fascism.

In her later work, then, Marçal was concerned with the vicissitudes and anxieties involved in inscribing this particular female sexuality within the constraints of her language and culture. Thus, her poetical corpus consists of a constant exploration of ‘her land’ [la seva terra] —her land as a woman, and as Catalan— a land where this love could find its place. The process begins with the ‘new ground’ through the sestinas of *The Never Land* [*Terra de Mai*] and culminates in *Thawing* [*Desglaç*] with an ‘emergent landscape’ [paisatge emergent]. In her own words ‘*The Never Land* [*Terra de Mai*], as its name suggests, represents an instantaneous — and false— attainment of the *utopia*. Every limit disappears, every bridle falls, everything is an undulation of open salt.’ (12) The progression of her poetical corpus evolves from this exploration of the lesbian body to a meditation on its social and political implications within the system of the phallogocentric apparatus. This second stage is explored in the forth chapter, where I intend to present, through the study in depth of the poem ‘I Love you when...’ [‘T’estimo quan...’], how Marçal, in her last published book *Thawing* [*Desglaç*], develops the thematic of lesbianism within

the binary opposition of presence/absence. In this poem, Marçal goes back to the origins of Western culture in order to change the symbolic structure from its foundations. She establishes an interesting simile between the Greek myth of Athena's birth, the guardian of patriarchy —and the woman poet. According to this myth, Athena was born from Zeus's head, which had previously swallowed Metis, assimilating her power. This 'original matricide' (in Luce Irigaray's words) (13) is presented as the origins of the Western culture, perfectly illustrating how the father absorbed the power of the mother. Marçal's project is to revisit the origins of the subject's inscription in the symbolic, and to change it from within. The poem 'I love you when...' ['T'estimo quan...'] represents this flashback journey and, through the development of particular images of violence and innocence in a dreamlike setting, refutes, on the one hand, the origins of Athena, the guardian of patriarchy and on the other hand, accomplishes the poet's quest to cross the boundaries of reality. 'The woman writer and in particular the woman poet —motherless, in the literary sphere, as I have pointed out— is never completely that model guardian of the paternal order that Athena can symbolise' (14)

## **Chapter 1: Historical Context**

Maria-Mercè Marçal began her career triumphantly at the end of a long period of cultural and gendered oppression in Spain, winning the Carles Riba prize in 1976 with her first book of poetry *The Hiding Place of Moons* [*Cau de llunes*]. The famous motto that opens this book springs directly from almost forty years of a fascist regime:

I am grateful to fate for three gifts: to have been  
born a woman, from the working class and  
an oppressed nation.

And the turbid azure of being three times a rebel. (15)

The motto conveys what Marçal describes as: ‘Three initial data —being a woman, from the working class, of an oppressed nation— not chosen at first, but, through an almost ironical gratitude, become conscious and accepted: a hurt root that becomes a tree, but in a triple rebellion.’ (16) This hurt found its origins in 1936 when the Civil War began and Spain witnessed the disappearance of the relative freedom of republican times. In 1939, the war ended. Traditionalism in all senses, and the political parties representing ‘tradition’, won the day. The emergence of Franco as dictator gave rise

to a new social politics, supported by National Catholicism and a policy of unifying Spain with one language and one culture. This effectively meant the prohibition of Catalan, Basque and Galician as official languages of the state; henceforth they became confined largely to the private and familiar sphere. Catholicism was defined as the basis of the regime's policies, and

A truly Spanish character and social order was postulated that was Catholic by definition. Its fundamentals were the family, a fixed social hierarchy and orthodox notions of morality that accorded with church teachings —particularly in matters of marriage, gender relations and sexuality. (17)

For the Catholic church, the supposed sexual differences between man and woman had a 'divine' origin. These differences were necessary to complete the harmony of the family. In men, the intellectual qualities supposedly prevailed: men were intelligent and had the faculty of knowledge. Women, by the grace of God, possessed the spirit of sacrifice and were the model of humility. With the Catholic Church in the ascendancy, and Catholicism in effect the only permitted religion, religious ideals and practices came to dominate both school and higher education. My mother remembers education under Franco thus:

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I remember that when I was at primary school, Mrs. Pilar forced us all to stand up and pray every morning before starting the morning lessons: I remember it perfectly, it was one time the Lord's prayer and one time the Ave María. On Saturdays we had to go to school [...] and when the lesson finished, two girls in rotation had to say the rosary. (18)

These practices were bolstered by a new propaganda extolling the greatness of Spain. There was a strong emphasis on teaching patriotic Spanish values based on the glorious greatness of the past and the sense of empire, as well as a stress on the cultural and racial characteristics of Spaniards, and corresponding antipathy towards the Anglo-Saxon world, Britain and the United States of America.

This situation reinforced social, gender divisions and hierarchies that were indoctrinated in schools. 'Educated in separate disciplines and settings, the destinies of men and women would converge in marriage and progeny and in their service to the Church and the nation'. (19) Boys were separated from girls and had different curricula with gendered emphases. Girls studied home economics and the demands of motherhood. My mother remembers that 'in the afternoon lessons, we were devoted to the household chores, where we were taught to hand-embroider in order to sew up our trousseau or our relative's for when they get

married’. (20) Boys studied maths, science and the humanities. In higher education, female academics were expelled from the universities. ‘Although single women were allowed to remain as school teachers, in suitable areas of course, all female academics were ejected from the universities’. (21)

Didactic texts which celebrated the virtues of the Virgin Mary were compulsory for girls at school. The most important task was to protect young girls from sin, or in other words, from sexuality. ‘They were under threat: sexual excitement could destroy the body and it could damage the nervous system, it could lead to insanity’. (22)

It was not only education that suffered the consequences of the Catholic reforms. In cultural and social life, the church had its own ‘guardians of morality’, in the priests and their representatives whose job was censorship and the supervision of public morality. Cultural life and leisure were also tightly controlled, as was the access to information. To this end, journalists, writers, and artists were often either executed or forced into exile. Festivals and celebrations were suppressed, excepting religious events. Secular music, popular dance, modern art and certain fashions such as short skirts or trousers for women were considered immoral. Women could be arrested on the beach for wearing a bikini. Priests

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cut scenes in films with any hints of adultery, prostitution or pre-marital sex. They even painted on the film if a girl was wearing a short skirt. All this was achieved via Franco's press and propaganda office, (23) and to further its aims, the state sponsored novelists and writers who conformed to nationalist ideals.

Within this atmosphere of coercion, 'El Generalissimo' considered that the success of his regime depended on the development of social policies oriented towards the control of women's bodies:

Women were politicized through the notion of a common female destiny based on their reproductive capacities. Female sexuality, work and education were regulated in accordance with this social function, while motherhood was idealized and considered as a duty to the Fatherland. (24)

The state placed special attention on having power over women because they were seen not only as the back bone of family values but also as responsible for the sins of the flesh by virtue of being a 'sexual temptation' to men. In order to further its purposes, the Falange (25) created the Women's Section, which arbitrated the education of women, and whose work was to provide them with the necessary skills and virtues to accomplish their political destiny: motherhood. The thinking behind these efforts to control women was

very simple: women had to educate children with religious values, with love for the nation and respect for the figure of authority in the family (male authority). The catholic family was considered as a microstructure and model of society: ‘the family was perceived on an authoritarian model, commanded by a patriarch just as Franco commanded the ‘family’ that was Spain’. (26) Hence, divorce and civil marriage were invalidated, creating a chaotic situation were couples who were divorced during the Republic were forced back together under threat of legal reprisals. Male authority in the family was reinforced by the reintroduction of the 1889 Civil Code by which men had the legal status to represent the family in public activities, leaving wives and children to the private sphere.

Heads of household also had authority over sexual relations, which of course were only supposed to occur within the confines of marriage. A stark legal double standard was reintroduced, whereby men were allowed to physically punish women for any adulterous or pre-marital liaisons, but they were not held liable for their own. (27)

At the beginning of the sixties, accelerating economic development provided people with economic expectations that inevitably weakened the political monopoly of the state. ‘Changing government policies leading to economic

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development ended the extreme cultural isolation of the country and wider concessions in cultural policies'. (28) By the end of the sixties, the political force of the National-Catholicism was beginning to decline, and by the beginning of the seventies there was an upsurge of political activism aimed at recovering democracy and cultural freedom.

The death of 'El Generalissimo' in November 1975 precipitated the transitional period toward the new political system, democracy. The social and political instability of the time was exacerbated in Catalan speaking regions, where there was a political amnesty and the restoration of the home rule promulgated in 1932. In 1977, the first democratic elections took place, and the constitution of 1978 established the 'autonomous communities', which were regions divided according to 'historical criteria'.

The increasing dynamic of self-affirmation of regional identities promoted by autonomic administrations helps explain some of the disputes which have arisen sporadically between different regions, and also the constant necessity for regional elites to justify their own power positions by demanding equality of treatment with the 'historical nationalities'. (29)

The new political system put an end to the Women's Section and its attempt to work towards 'the ideal woman'. (30) Under the first years of democracy, with the election of a

socialist government, new questions concerning social class, labour and woman (and gender relations) were pursued by Catalan feminist intellectuals of the time such as Maria-Mercè Marçal, Montserrat Roig, Mari Àngels Anglada, and Marta Pesarrodonà. They were dedicated to the recovering of women's voices that had been silenced in history and tradition through political and social oppression. Intellectuals and scholars from the left repudiated the Catholic-Falangist based organisation of the Women's Section and its manner of educating women.

The post-dictatorial period was characterised by literature, especially women's literature, as a period of effervescence. There was a generation of woman writers who were concerned with their political engagement with the new emerging society and with political and social interests. According to Isidor Cònsul 'this was the aesthetics of a literature in keeping with the yearnings of a generation socially and politically committed to the historic destiny of the country'. (31)

The situation of Catalan writers during the post-regime period was little different from the experience of other hitherto repressed linguistic cultures such as Galician and Basque. Young generations of writers, the so-called

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‘generation of the seventies’, experimented with avant-garde forms, thinking that aesthetic and linguistic revolution was the way to liberation, rather than social criticism, differing in this point from older generations. Addressing this topic in the context of poetry, Miquel Martí i Pol suggests that the years of transition after such a long period of repression ‘freed the poets from a more or less assumed militancy that in some cases perhaps had inhibited poetic expression, at the same time that it allowed them to enjoy the indescribable sensation of feeling their hands unbound’. (32) Marçal’s engagement with the cultural revival of the Catalan language can be seen through her untiring work to promote Catalan literature. Her work as a teacher of Catalan language and literature, and her intellectual activities as a literary critic, confirm her as one of the first essayists on feminist theory in Spain. Her most important contribution was to promote Catalan poetry by establishing a publishing house: *Llibres del Mall*, together with the poets Ramon Pinyol (who was to be her husband) and Xavier Bru de Sala. In addition she published two anthologies about women’s writing that show her commitment to creating a women’s literary genealogy. The first was *Cartografies del Desig* [*Cartographies of Desire*] in 1998, which is a collection of lectures that took place in 1997 in the Elizalde house in Barcelona. The second was the critical

anthology *Paisatge emergent: Trenta poetes catalanes del segle XX* [*Emergent Landscape: Thirty Catalan Women Poets of the Twentieth Century*]. This anthology was completed after her death in 1999 by Neus Aguado, Montserrat Abelló and Lluïsa Julià, members of the *Comité d'Esriptores* (Women writer's committee), literary critics and friends of Maria-Mercè. In collaboration with Monika Zgustova, Marçal translated into Catalan writers such as Colette, Yourcenar, Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetàieva.

Given the dominant understanding of Spanish femininity and the political implications of the fascist Spain as I have identified it, Marçal's work is inevitably poised as a challenge and an innovation. Her treatment of bodies, and in particular her focus on woman-identified womanhood, place her in a pioneering role:

From the beginning her writing implies a new position in Catalan poetry, she emerges as a revolt and describes an investigation: a revolt from the moment that she explicitly assumes a woman's identity beyond any cliché; investigation, because her writing becomes an incessant research into feminine identity, and gradually into her lesbianism. (33)

Hence, my study will deal with Marçal's celebration of women's bodies and their sexuality as an attempt to dismantle the cultural apparatus of subordination. I will

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argue that the body in Marçal is the place from which the woman, and in particular the woman-identified-woman, can 'speak'. Marçal writes the female body to create, through its speech, the agent to produce knowledge and reconstruct a feminine space.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

And the immediacy with which the body, the id, *jouissance*, are supposedly experienced promises a clarity of perception and a vitality that can bring down mountains of phallogentric delusion. Finally, to the extent that the female body is seen as a direct source of female writing, a powerful alternative discourse seems possible: to write from the body is to recreate the world. (34)

The critical concept of *difference* depends on the structuralist understanding that meaning is achieved through the system of binary oppositions. Thus, the dichotomy man/woman implies that the meaning of each term is available precisely through its structural relationship with the other. Hence, the meaning of ‘woman’ is achieved only through its difference from the meaning of ‘man’. The apparent simplicity of this understanding was not enough for Derrida, who went beyond this confined structure of oppositions. For Derrida, the signification of terms is based on the ‘free play of the signifier’ (35) whereby the presence of one signifier plays with the absence of others.

Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of

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absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. (36)

As Toril Moi has summarised, ‘the interplay between presence and absence that produces meaning is posited as one of *deferral*: meaning is never truly present, but is only constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to other, absent signifiers.’ (37)

The equation of writing with the ‘free play of signifiers’ implies that the very act of writing can provide a new source of knowledge. Taking this understanding to illuminate my reading of Marçal’s work, I will suggest that Marçal’s poetry continuously navigates between the presence and absence of the body in the text. I suggest, furthermore, that the desideratum to submit the lesbian body to the language can be understood as a process of recovering her place within dominant discourse:

I think that it is very important, that the body is everything, that in the end we are nothing else but this. So, if you are in the text, your body is there in a way, and when it isn’t, this absence is another way of being [there, in the text]. (38)

This quotation discloses one of the most important problems of this research: the methodological difficulty of translation. In this instance the problem is with the

untranslatability into English of ‘ser-hi’, which conditions the conceptualisation of the body as inscribed in the text. In Maria-Mercè Marçal absence [la mancança] is a way of ‘being [there]’. Hence it is difficult to articulate in English Marçal’s conception of the body, which in Catalan is already implied here in the pronoun *hi*. This pronoun has no literal translation into English; it is merely a functional emphatic linguistic pronoun of location (which is the reason why the word should be indicated between square brackets). Thus, what she emphasises here is not only the fact of being—and absence—but also the significance of locating the body in the text. In English, the verb ‘to be’ connotes individual existence, conceptualisation tending immediately to abstract levels. But the *ser* emphasised by the *hi* pronoun in Catalan, and certain other romance languages (the equivalent in French would be ‘*une mode d’y être*’) connotes a physical meaning in the sense of the location of the text and hence, of the text in society.

To return to the structuralist understanding of meaning, presence/absence are determined in relation to each other, as by opposites. That is, if presence is determined by absence, then absence is obviously determined by presence. To some extent, the absence of the body in(side) the text becomes a point of reference to its presence. To mark the linking point

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between semantics and the theory of the body, I might refer to Ricoeur's interpretation of 'The Self-Reference of Discourse', where he proposes that the inner structure of the sentence refers back to its speaker through grammatical procedures. (39) However, more important for Marçal than considering the 'self' as an identity impossible to separate from the political body, is the fact of having a female body. For Marçal this is a consistent point of departure: one elided by Catalan cultural reflexes:

In our culture, the difference is clearly established. Consider how the fact of having a male or a female body changes one's perspective, that it is a point of departure. And it seems that our culture turns its back on the body, because it is limited, it is the limit, it is mortal, and we are very oriented towards what is transcendent, towards the idea of eternity.... (40)

Here I am reminded of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray and their reworkings of the Derridean concept of *difference*. From my readings of French Feminist thought, I have taken inspiration from the notion of *l'écriture féminine* as a way of thinking about some aspects of Marçal's work:

Stop learning in school that women are created to listen, to believe, to make no discoveries. Dare to speak her piece about giving, the possibility of giving, that doesn't take away, but *gives*. Speak of her pleasure and God knows, she has something to say about that. (41)

I take women's writing not to be a closed, subjugated element in a binary opposition —placing it in structuralist terms— but as an open heterogeneous perspective. On the one hand, I have used Cixous's version of *jouissance* in terms of a new attempt to create a non-dichotomised society. Toril Moi has claimed that

Cixous's vision of feminine/female writing as a way of re-establishing a spontaneous relationship to the physical *jouissance* of the female body may be read positively, as a utopian vision of female creativity in a truly non-oppressive and non-sexist society. (42)

Irigaray, in turn, has deployed the trope of fluidity to address the specificity of feminine writing. Toril Moi describes it thus: 'always fluid without forgetting the characteristics of fluids which are so difficult to idealise: this friction between two infinitely neighbouring forces that creates their dynamics. Her "style" resists and explodes all firmly established forms, figures, ideas, concepts'. (43) The idea of fluidity as a metaphor resistant to the solidity of forms and concepts can be applied to many aspects of Marçal's work, notably her invocation of a liquid dimension, implying an open, sexual atmosphere. Though some theorists, notably Toril Moi, have objected to this alignment of the act of writing —considered as an intellectual task— with the sexual interchange of fluids and touch, this conjunction

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is typical of the imagery of lesbian eroticism in Marçal's poems. This erotic iconography implies the re-affirmation of the body through the elaboration of new poetic images. She takes responsibility for articulating this body in the womb of the new identity. As Mary Eagleton suggests: 'because female desire, what women want, is so repressed or so misrepresented in a phallogentric society, its expression becomes a vital location for deconstructing that control'. (44) Hence, Marçal, like Cixous and Irigaray, uses the language of the body not as a form of biological determinism, but as a tool of subversion from within. (45)

Basically you asked to yourself, what is a woman's language? Taking it to the limits we might say that it is a language that women produce, but this language exists, it is given to us, it is the one that's there. And I have to ask to myself to what extent is it useful for me to help me to de-codify my experience, what I live. Everything is found in the language. (46)

Marçal's engagement with linguistic parameters took me to Julia Kristeva's study of the development of the speaking subject and the process she follows to be inscribed in the symbolic order. Toril Moi suggests that Kristeva's 'theory of the constitution of the subject and the signifying process is mostly concerned with developments in the pre-Oedipal phase where sexual difference does not exist'. (47) Marçal,

in the last period of her work, carried out deep investigative work that is reminiscent of Kristeva's understanding of the linguistic subject and his interaction with the symbolic system. Kristeva grounds this relationship between language and the subject in the separation of the baby from the body of the mother: 'this eternally premature baby, prematurely separated from the world of the mother and the world of things, remedies the situation by using an invincible weapon: linguistic symbolisation'. (48) In analysing Marçal's attempt to recover the lesbian body, I have drawn on Kristeva's concept of the *chora*, a site intrinsically related to the mother, and the site whence, I would argue, the poet undertakes the poems of her last phase.

Both Irigaray and Cixous have argued that if women de-codified language through the inscription of female sex in the text, this sexed-text would not only enable the body to speak but also it would contribute to the process of recovering women's tradition. To observe and to live through 'women's eyes' inevitably implies the perception of reality from another point of view. The investigation of literary precedents becomes an exploration of the body itself, in the sense of placing feelings, anxieties and, in short, women's experiences in history:

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And yet, in its claim that women must write the body, that only the eruption of female *jouissance* can revolutionize discourse and challenge the Law of the Father, *écriture féminine* seems —however metaphorically— to be reaching not so much for essentialism (as it is often accused of doing) as for the conditions of representability. (49)

In what follows I will suggest that Marçal's Catalan version of 'écriture féminine' is part of a revisioning, too, of Catalan women's literary genealogy.

## Chapter 3: In the Solstice of our bodies

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement. (50)

In this chapter, I will offer a close reading of the poem ‘Solstice’ (51) [‘Solstici’], one of the fifteen sestinas included in Maria-Mercè Marçal’s book *Terra de Mai*, which translates as *The Never Land* (1982). Written in 1981, *The Never Land*, and particularly ‘Solstice’ are situated within the instability of the post-Franco regime. The transition to democracy was a complex process. Although the first elections took place in 1977 and the Constitution was enacted in 1978, the democratic environment in Spain was not attained until at least 1982. As we have seen, the transitional period marked a turning point in Catalonia’s attempts to reach political ‘autonomy’ as a region with significant historical and cultural differences from Castile.

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Amidst these historical circumstances a book appeared in the Catalan literary tradition which challenged prescriptive understandings of sexuality and foregrounded lesbian eroticism as an intervention in the new debates. Thus, *The Never Land* not only marks a turning point in Catalan literary tradition by introducing lesbian aesthetics as a literary thematic for the first time, but also opens a new poetical stage in Marçal's work: 'Marçal tackles a dimension that has usually been imprisoned and conceptualised as non-existent'. (52).

I will argue in this chapter that the formal rigour and the high level of complexity of the sestina helps to harness an imagery that in Marçal's words is 'foolish and without bridle' ['desbridada i folla']. I will argue, further, that the narration of lesbian sexuality in 'Solstice' is articulated through an erotic iconography which, pooled with natural imagery, implies that lesbian sexuality is 'natural'. However, this lesbian eroticism is situated within the specificity of a Catalan geography, thereby celebrating the re-creation of this 'new landscape' of sexuality within the cultural context of Catalonia.

As we have seen, twentieth-century Spanish women's bodies were 'objectified' through the combination of Catholic

religious faith and the efforts of the fascist government, whose policies were based on the heteronormative binary man/woman, both placing ‘woman’ in the domestic world. Victoria Lorée Enders in her study of the political identities of women in Spain, argues:

Because the Falange embraced traditional Catholicism, the *Sección Femenina* (54) necessarily endorsed the Church assessment of women’s nature and place. In this canon, woman was to complement her husband; her sacred duty was to be a mother. The rhetoric of Pilar Primo de Rivera (55) reiterated that woman was by nature submissive; that she realized herself most fully through self-abnegation. Never was woman to compete with man, or to attempt to replace him; she was to act in a well-defined and restricted world appropriate to her “natural” qualities. On both counts, Catholic and Falangist, the world of woman in the Falangist New State would be the domestic world. (56)

The sexual iconography of ‘Solstice’ together with its transfiguration of geographical places —by the use of extended metaphors of place and position— enable lover’s bodies in ‘Solstice’ to achieve the dislocation of the Catalan woman’s body from the traditional connotations of childbearing and sexual passivity.

Framed in a sestina, ‘Solstice’ depicts the encounter of two women who discover the nature of their bodies through the narration of an erotic experience between them. The use

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of intimate language underlines Marçal's desire to inscribe the lesbian body in the text. Indeed, the whole tenor of the poem is at odds with traditional Spanish notions of female sexuality. As I have indicated in my introduction, the history of female sexuality in Spain cannot be disentangled from the Catholic view of reproduction and the family. Women's sexuality was subjected first, to the image of the Virgin Mary, whose cult encouraged the inhibition of sexual desire, and second, to a whole range of sacred images; 'the regime sought to revive sixteenth-century devotions to saintly female figures—such as Santa Teresa de Jesús or the Virgen del Pilar—and hoped to repopularise Renaissance treatises on the character and proper education of women'. (57) Such texts included *La Instrucción de la mujer cristiana* (1523) written by Juan Luís Vives and *La Perfecta Casada* (1583) written by Fray Luís de León. The main goals in educating women were to instill honesty, chastity and virginity before marriage. Female sexuality was only permitted within marriage for the purpose of reproduction. Furthermore, woman's duty, as a good wife, was to be submissive to her husband's sexual desire. Catholic womanhood remained the norm until the end of the regime, keeping Spanish women's bodies and minds imprisoned in the iron ring of their motherly soul. (58)

‘Solstice’, by contrast, is about love and lesbian eroticism, and it can be read as bearing on the homosexual paradigm at the time, and in particular the homophobic atmosphere and persecutions prevalent under Franco —the most notorious example of which was the death of the poet Federico García Lorca in 1936. (59) Intolerance towards homosexuality—for both men and women— together with the image of the woman in the domestic world, left no room for acceptance of ways of love other than heterosexuality. The linguistic structure of ‘Solstice’ delineates a tension between the established practices and the inclination to explore new prospects. Just as Marçal is the first Catalan poet who explored lesbian love by using the severe rubric of the *sestina*, so she is the first openly to challenge the oppression of homosexuals in Post-Franco society. The responsibility of pioneering in this field seems to have been far from easy.

Given that I have situated the poetess, and particularly the poem, within the conflicts of the post-dictatorial era—a period of flux and uncertainty—it is striking to find a woman poet undertaking an extremely classical composition with a meticulous pattern that seems, at first glance, to resist the idea of change and refuse unpredictability. The political changes of 1976 opened a new dimension of possibilities based on the arrival of democracy. With the period of

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linguistic and cultural repression of the Catalan speaking countries (60) at an end, there was a tremendous explosion of voices condemning repression. Their demands included ‘political amnesty, democratic freedoms and the restoration of the home rule statute of 1932’. (61) Besides, all kinds of media —cinema, painting, and newspapers— were brought to bear on cultural and social experiments. In the Catalonia and Valencia regions literature, and particularly poets, were socially and politically committed to the historiography of the Catalan language and the revival of the culture. Marçal’s use of the classical sestina is thus conspicuously situated within a post-fascist political unsteadiness that endowed post-dictatorial writers with a revolutionary spirit based on the revival of the non-Castilian cultures. This period of uncertainty was marked by the aesthetics of rebellion: ‘younger, more activist and aggressive poets of the post-Franco era were challenging norms, boundaries and conventions’. (62)

In accord with this particular setting, Marçal, together with Foix and Brossa, challenged the aesthetic demands of the time —which expressed political vindication in the experimental forms of the calligram and the visual poem— by recapturing classical forms that were deemed not appropriate for the historical demands of the time.

The sestina (63) is a poetical composition with a high level of complexity and an elaborate structure that finds its origins in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the Provençal troubadours. Troubadouresque poetry was created to be sung by the jongleur. (64) It was written in what it has been named *koiné*, Provençal and Occitan language, which is considered as a supradialectical expression and precursor of the Catalan language. The troubadour was both a poet and a musician; medieval manuscripts still contain the musical notes for the poems. ‘This necessity of composing with music required a good training and a high specialisation, which stopped the dilettantes. Also, the sternness of the poetical technique did not allow the troubadour to improvise.’ (65) The perfection of these lyrics gave rise to the possibility of creating books on the theory of poetry to improve the art, didactic treatises for the purpose of perfection in the verse, grammar and style of such compositions. As a result, two divergent versions on these poetics were elaborated, one defined as simple expression, the ‘trobar lèu’ and the other one defined as the ‘trobar ric’ or cultivated expression. The author of the latter poetics was the acclaimed writer Arnaut Daniel, who is now claimed as the creator of the sestina. The structure of Troubadouresque poetry followed a precise scheme, which started with a number of stanzas

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with a rigorous rhyme, followed by a closing stanza, which comprised a general consideration addressed to the audience about the theme of the poem.

This period of time, considered the beginnings of the Catalan literature, was very important in Mediterranean culture, especially in the Catalan poetical tradition. The troubadoresque device is evident in the works of the writers who most influenced Marçal's poetics, Joan Brossa and J.V. Foix. The exigencies of this poetical technique suggest that 'Solstice' is the result of an intense and planned intellectual exercise, hence, it suggests its non-spontaneity. As the poet asserts: 'only one time I have planned a book, *The Never Land (Terra de Mai)*. Perhaps it happened because I was living a very obsessive moment about a certain theme'. (66)

The compression of 'Solstice' and the fixed literary rules of the sestina suggest the containment of an effervescent lesbian identity from within the post-dictatorial Catalan historical and social setting. Lluïsa Julià labels Marçal's work 'as the first explicitly lesbian voice of the Catalan poetic tradition'. (67) As a result, 'Solstice' can be read as at once a Catalan attempt to palliate the isolation of the woman's body and a strategy to dismantle homosexual bias, blending canonical tradition with her aims of exploring the female

body to recover not only women's experiences but also women's tradition.

The strain produced by combining these classical elements with subversive subjectivities raises questions about the role and definition of lesbian poetry. First, what do we expect from the lesbian poetic genre? And second, is it safe or useful to affirm that 'Solstice' can be included as part of the lesbian poetical corpus? Academic debates concerning female identity and the meaning of same-sex desire have unleashed a tension between the exploration of women's bodies as the actual fount of experiencing the world, as 'French feminist' scholars have suggested, and the political implications of the lesbian body, as Anglo-American feminism would argue.

Hence, Liz Yorke sees the question of lesbian expression in political terms, claiming that the fact that lesbian poetry has a political motivation means it must displace the inherited male models and myths. (68) In contrast, Marçal's works are originally placed on 'a given line' ['un vers donat'] that she manipulates in order to achieve her own purposes. Furthermore, the use of the sestina, with its traditional implications, creates a tension between the classical and inherited formal parameters and the shaping of individual desire. Does this mean that 'Solstice' cannot be considered

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as a lesbian poem, according to Yorke's formulation? Anglo-American theories of lesbian poetry have tended to claim that a lesbian poet must propose new strategies and literary devices to approach the lesbian body. She must bring forward discursive strategies to transform existing codes and rules. Marçal, however, argues that she had no choice but to imitate the inherited pattern of the masculine form, which were for her the only established tradition: the canon, and the formal compositions it inscribed. It is with this in mind that the political perspective in Marçal's poetic opus needs to be explored: the particular situation of dictatorship left no space for any precedent in lesbian poetry. There were no representations of lesbian bodies in Spanish texts, and the alternative was to offer a vision that either excluded or challenged Spanish woman's roles: dutiful daughter, faithful wife, obedient nun, or sacrificing mother.

'Solstice' confronts the social and political institutions that have cloistered Catalan women's bodies through the dynamics of an erotic lesbian context. Adrienne Rich states that 'the autonomy and equality of women threaten family, religion, and state. The institutions by which women have traditionally been controlled — patriarchal motherhood, economic exploitation, the nuclear family, compulsory heterosexuality— are being strengthened by legislation,

religious fiat, media imagery, and efforts at censorship'. (69) Marçal's depiction in 'Solstice' of two women enjoying their bodies and pervaded with an intense *jouissance*, suggests that these bodies are in some way out with this patriarchal scheme. Marçal's poetic voice thus disrupts the political status of women, not by vindicating rights or formulating political charges against government institutions, but by placing women's bodies as a starting point. Through her attempt to inscribe the lesbian body into an erotic context the poet, inevitably, dismantles the normativity of heterosexuality and conceives lesbian love as a tangible possibility.

Both in terms of form and content, signifier and signified, the sestina's combining and re-combining of line endings, like the joyful ringing of church bells, enacts the dynamic between discipline and *jouissance*. The ending words of each line: flesh (*molsa*), open (*oberta*), sexes (*genitalia*), bridle (*brida*), alive (*viva*) and mouths (*boques*) (70) are repeated in rigorous order in every stanza in the sestina (the scheme is as follows: 123456, 615243, 364125, 532614, 451362, 246531 and the three-line closing stanza, which rhymes 246). This combining and re-combining recalls the rhythm of church bells, whose permutations create what is called change-ringing. The art of bell ringing has much in common with the art of the sestina. The rhymes, like the bells, ring in a

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precise relationship to each other that provides numerous but finite possibilities of change: ‘the rhythm should not vary from row to row. The rhythm provides the steady framework within which the complex changes are heard’. (71).

In a manner analogous to bell-ringing, ‘Solstice’ as a poem moves between two points: the mouth and the (female) genitals. The whole piece seems to work on the basis of this duality. Within the parameters of the poem’s narrative, the reader is led from the ‘mouth up’ position through a circle down and back into the initial position again, as she says (lines 18 and 19) ‘in the middle of the face and the crotch, mouths./ Everything is an up and down of open salt.’ [al mig del rostre i a l’entrecreix, boques./ Tot és un daltbaix de sal oberta.]

Desire is at the centre of Marçal’s aesthetics. Desire is articulated here in terms of flow between the ‘mouths’ and ‘sexes’ of two women. First, there is sexual desire; second, there is the desire to reconcile the lesbian body with nature. As Irigaray puts it: ‘Woman’s desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man’s; woman’s desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks’. (72) The ‘body’ is disclosed through the inter-relationship between

the metonyms ‘sex’ and ‘mouth’. Secrecy is the result of the metaphorical ‘bridle’ that women have been forced to wear. But in ‘Solstice’ the ‘bridle’ has disappeared. The narrator’s desire makes her speak, write her body, because her desire is the desire of ‘the other woman’.

Marçal’s fluid language, particularly her references to the ‘night-dew’, ‘sea’, ‘rain’, ‘liquors’ and ‘tide’, places the reader in a steamy and hence unequivocally sexual atmosphere. The imagery of the tongue playing with the almond, combined with the humid atmosphere, reinforce the erotic mood:

What a nip, with the brightness of a living almond!

What a talk with night-dew of an open gorge!

What a dance, little tongues without bridle!

[Quin mossec amb lluors d’ametlla viva !

Quina parla, amb relent de gorga oberta !

Quin ball, petites llengues sense brida!]

In addition, in her use of this natural imagery, Marçal harnesses a familiar lesbian trope to a specifically Catalan topos. The poet celebrates ‘sex’ in the space of nature. The natural imagery (‘flesh’, ‘almond’, ‘fruit’, ‘corals’, ‘salt’, ‘forests’, ‘sun’, ‘leaves’, ‘sap’, ‘patches’, etc.) explicitly aligns lesbian sexuality with nature. Such images of the natural landscape are frequent in poems with a lesbian thematic (as for example in the poems of Caroline Halliday, Judy Grahn,

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Suniti Namjoshi or Marilyn Hacker). This use of natural imagery is connected with the need to express this particular experience. Gabriele Griffin claims that this innovation is important to consider the changes in the understanding of women's sexuality. Thus, using this natural environment the poet aligns the body with nature; in Griffin's words: 'lesbian sexuality is natural because of its affinities with nature'. (73) Furthermore, Griffin, in her study of the representation of the lesbian body in poetry, claims that 'in a culture, in which the normality or otherwise of lesbian sexuality is perpetually under scrutiny, women's writing on lesbian sexuality can celebrate and affirm that sexuality by maintaining, through nature imagery, that lesbian sexuality is natural'. (74)

Through the simplicity of the language and the references to the idyllic earth, the poem is imbued with a sense of openness, fluidity and 'natural' freedom, 'We have the beach wide open' [De bat a bat tenim la platja oberta]. The fourth stanza presents the classical notion of 'carpe diem', offering an optimistic view of female sexuality and acceptance of lesbian possibility:

We are where the hour and the fate lose the bridle,  
where we ride on the spring living tide,  
without sails, sliding along the wake of the flesh,  
my sex and your mouth: sexes

in the middle of the face and the crotch, mouths.

Everything is an undulation of open salt.

[Som on l'hora i l'atzar perden la brida,  
on, a cavall de la marea viva,  
llisquen sense velam, pels solcs de molsa,  
el meu sexe i la teva boca: sexes  
al mig del rostre i a l'entrecuix, boques.  
Tot és un daltbaix de sal oberta.]

Marçal becomes the troubairitz of lesbian love, as opposed to the 'courtly love' of Catalan tradition (it is pertinent to note that the word 'love' was a feminine term in Provençal and old Catalan languages): 'In women's speech, as in their writing, that element which never stops resonating, which, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us—that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman'. (75) The poem explodes into an erotic imagery, as a sensual stream without constraints, without limitations, without rules. Yet sung by the highly disciplined jongleur, the poem places lesbian experience and love on the threshold of the public domain:

Let everything burn in a torrent of flesh  
and let our open sap ripen!  
Let the solstice of our sexes happen,  
let the heart convert to rain every bridle!

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Let the patches burst into a living tilth!  
Let the forests flourish in thousands of mouths!  
[Que cremi tot en un torrent de molsa  
i que ens mauri la nostra saba oberta!  
Que facin el solstici els nostres sexes,  
Que el cor transformi en pluja tota brida!  
Que esclatin els bancals en saó viva!  
Que els boscs floreixin en milers de boques !]

As we have seen, the erotic iconography of the poem becomes available through a fragmented body represented by ‘mouth’ and ‘sex’. However, this fragmentation is aimed not at dismantling dichotomies such as homo/hetero, private/public, but at involving the reader in an equivalent duality that puts the two female bodies at the centre of the sexual bonding. The first line of the poem ‘Your sex and mine are two mouths’ [El teu sexe i el meu són dues boques] introduces the metaphor which extends throughout the stanzas. Grammatically speaking, ‘mouths’ (les boques) is a feminine-plural word in the Catalan language. As a discursive act giving shape to the conception of lesbian practice, the poem seems to mitigate the silence produced by the sealed mouth, which ‘remembers to bridle’:

We are where the hour and the fate lose the bridle,  
where we ride on the spring living tide,

[Som on l'hora i l'atzar perden la brida,  
on, a cavall de la marea viva,]

The word 'mouths' as metonym has several connotations. 'Mouth' becomes the medium through which physical interaction —both the sexual and the speech act— is placed on the threshold between the private and the public frame. In turn 'sex' is a metonym for the body, and hence the representation of these women's community and collective memory; it is a reification of the recovery of women's experiences in history through feelings, perspectives, and sensations.

I am reminded here of Irigaray's conceptualization of female sexuality. She defines women's 'sex' as an organ 'formed of two lips in continuous contact' adding later that 'with herself, she is already two —but not divisible into one(s)— that caress each other'. (76) Going from the first line 'Your sex and mine are two mouths' [El teu sexe i el meu són dues boques.], to the second one 'love, are two mouths. And two sexes/ rattling us now to the place of mouths' [amor, són dues boques. I dos sexes/ ara ens bateguen al lloc de les boques], and subsequently in every stanza, there is a special movement between two points, between two lips. It is worth noting that the other key terms in the poem ('flesh', 'bridle', 'open' and 'alive') are singular, whereas 'mouths' and 'sexes'

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are given throughout as plural. Why does Marçal submit her readers to this confusion? As Irigaray notes suggestively, ‘her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is *plural*. Is this the way culture is seeking to characterize itself now? Is this the way texts write themselves/ are written now? Without quite knowing what censorship they are evading?’ (77) The poet’s use of this ‘mouths-sexes’ identification is suggestive of Irigaray’s formulation of plurality.

A further element of the poem’s lesbian imagery is the dewdrop, which not only connotes the pearl (78) and the clitoris (both familiar from lesbian poetics) but also implies a progression from single drop to sea. The poet writes (line 4) ‘What a talk with night-dew of an open gorge!’ [Quina parla, amb rellent de gorga oberta !]. As the sexual bonding is conceived as a communicative act, the erotic stimulus becomes the threshold between the intimacy of two dewdrops and the openness of a sea of dews: ‘Sea castles in party, in the open night’ [Castells de mar en festa, a nit oberta]. The suggestion is not that lesbian desire would dismantle the historical circumstances oppressing women’s bodies; rather this is an attempt to put desire at the centre of an engagement with place: or as Deleuze states ‘concretely, if you define bodies and thoughts as capacities for affecting and being affected, many things change.’ (79)

Thus the erotic imagery of the poem suggests a dialectic between secrecy and disclosure. ‘Lesbian writing was —and to some degree still is— silenced because of its association with sexuality, a sexuality which is resistant to the normative forces of a heterosexist society. The word ‘lesbian’ conjures up women loving women, and not just platonically’. (80) The insistent references to the ‘sex’ of the two women suggests a testimony from within, from the realm of sex and from the essence of women, yet one which reaches out to a wider sphere:

Your sex and mine are two mouths.  
Don't you feel what a dew kiss on the flesh!  
What a nip, with the brightness of a living almond!  
What a talk with night-dew of an open gorge!  
What a dance, little tongues without bridle!  
What a secret of a narrow pass! Our sexes,  
[El teu sexe i el meu són dues boques.  
No sents quin bes de rou sobre la molsa!  
Quin mossec amb lluors d'ametlla viva!  
Quina parla, amb relent de gorga oberta!  
Quin ball, petites llengües sense brida!  
Quin secret de congost! Els nostres sexes,]

Through the images of the ‘mouth’ and the ‘bridle’, Marçal suggests that to write lesbian sexuality is not only to speak about desire, but also to desire to speak. Secrecy

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is the result of the ‘bridle’ (81) that horses —and nagging wives— were forced to wear. (82) But in ‘Solstice’ the ‘bridle’ has dis/appeared:

We are where the hour and the fate lose the bridle,  
where we ride on the spring living tide,  
without sails, sliding along the wake of the flesh,  
my sex and your mouth: sexes  
in the middle of the face and the crotch, mouths.  
Everything is an undulation of open salt.

[Som on l’hora i l’atzar perden la brida,  
on, a cavall de la marea viva,  
llisquen sense velam, pels solcs de molsa,  
el meu sexe i la teva boca: sexes  
al mig del rostre i a l’entrecoix, boques.  
Tot és un daltbaix de sal oberta].

The movement from silence to speech is reinforced in the final stanza:

And let the mouths make the flesh  
takes root, alive, like the open skin  
with no bridle at the mirror of our sexes!

[I que les boques facin que la molsa  
arrelí, viva, com la pell oberta  
sense brida al mirall del nostres sexes!]

Irigaray argues that ‘the rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary certainly puts woman in the position

of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) 'subject' to reflect himself, to copy himself'. (83) The reference here suggests that the poet is not invested by the masculine. It is clear where Marçal places the 'mirror': she places it 'at our sexes' and again the scheme of duality in the poem becomes available. Her 'sex' is reflected in the mirror, in the same way that both 'sexes' enact the reflection of their bodies to each other.

Griffin points out that 'the representation of lesbian sexuality does not exist outside of or independent from the culture and period in which it occurs, and the structures and codes to which writing on sex is subject at any given time are reflected/ expressed in texts on lesbian sexuality'. (84) I would argue, with Griffin, that the dialectic of secrecy and disclosure, silence and speech, within this poem relates not only to the poet's personal transition 'out' of the closet, and the rhetorical project of encouraging women 'out' of the constraints of heteronormativity, but also, metaphorically, to the cultural and geographical conditions of Catalonia at this time. Josep-Anton Fernández suggests that this transition is not only tangible in 'Solstice' but also in the whole book *The Never Land* (*Terra de Mai*, 1982), pointing out that it

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is a ‘collection of fifteen poems in which Marçal’s transition into lesbianism —her sexual experimentation— goes hand in hand with her spectacular linguistic and poetic experimentation’. (85)

What a talk with night-dew of an open gorge!  
What a dance, little tongues without bridle!  
What a secret of a narrow pass! Our sexes,  
[Quina parla, amb relent de gorga oberta !  
Quin ball, petites llengües sense brida!  
Quin secret de congost! Els nostres sexes]

Here, Marçal requires the reader to enter into the geography of the body for the purpose of situating her audience in the specific, personal and intimate dimension of this communicative process. The particularity of the gesture lies in the alignment of the geography of the body with the geographical landscape of Catalonia through the linkage of the words ‘congost’, and ‘gorga’. Their local specificity renders these terms difficult to translate. They denote aspects of a Catalan landscape specific to the Pyrenees Mountains. On the one hand, ‘The Congost’ (86) of Mont-rebei in Lleida was, historically, the only geographical pass from the Pyrenees to the plane of Lleida (87) (it is significant to note that the author was born in Ivars d’Urgell, in Lleida). This is a natural pass that was gradually formed by the river Noguera-

Ribagorçana dividing the mountain vertically. It is a place not widely known outside the region due to the geographical enclave of the pass. On the other hand, ‘gorge’ is another narrow pass in a cliff position with a narrow riverbed. Both terms, thus, denote mountain paths and connote secrecy and inaccessibility. Hence, the poem is resolutely situated in the toughness of the Pyrenees landscape, linking the difficulty of communication and intimacy between women with a particular Catalan geography. Just as, with its rigidly confined lexicon, ‘Solstice’ establishes the space of intimacy within the discipline of form, so the imagery of the ‘congost’ and ‘gorge’ of steep and perilous mountain passes demands that progress must be made cautiously, step by step. The connotations of the terms suggest that the path down which lesbian *jouissance* is to be attained is recondit, profound, intense and secret.

Yet ‘congost’ and ‘gorge’ can also be translated via Castilian as ‘throat’ (garganta). The ‘throat’ is the canal through which the voice can be produced into actual sounds, the medium through which thought materialises into words. Furthermore, Marçal plays with the image of the ‘gorge’ to allude to the vaginal cavity, which again situates her engagement with lesbian erotic in the specificity of the Catalan geography. Together, the connotations of these terms, combined with

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the poem's formal rigour of the sestina, locate the lesbian subjects of the poem as conspirators, smuggling pleasure across a harsh landscape.

My reading of 'Solstice' suggests that lesbian desire can change the parameters of spatiality. As Elspeth Probyn argues: 'the fact that a woman materialises another woman as her object of desire does go some way in rearticulating that space. The enactment of desire here can begin to skewer the lines of force that seek to constitute women as Woman, as object of the masculine gaze'. (88) Feminist academia, and most prominently lesbian studies, have developed a special interest in articulating sexuality as a possibility of changing spaces. Nicky Hallet develops this idea:

It is not only about how women touch each other, and so make spaces queer, it is also about the ways in which things can be affected by touch, become themselves subjectified, so that, when they are moved outside the immediately queered space, they transport a queer signification with them —so enlarge its spatial and temporal influence. (89)

Marçal places women's bodies at the centre of (experiencing) the world. 'To write the body' in her poems provides her with the literary tool to rescue women's voices in history and to explore her own desire from the perspective of *difference*. As Elizabeth Meese argues, 'the lesbian writer

seeks to intervene in language, reinvent, or better, re-work its texture, to produce an exploratory language through which we can find ourselves as subject and (of) desire'. (90) Hélène Cixous would define the act of writing the body:

As an act that will also be marked by woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*. To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become at *will* the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process. (91)

Placing 'Solstice' within the theoretical framework of 'writing the body' affords to the poet an understanding of her place and time, even as it transforms both.

## **Chapter 4: 'Behind the frozen mirror': Marçal's later work**

My poems come from a woman who is aware of this fact, and who has thought very much about it. (92)

*Desglaç* (1989), which translates as *Thawing*, was Marçal's last collection of poems and the most extensive book to be included in *Llengua Abolida* [*Abolished Language*], the volume of her collected poems assembled before she died in 1998. Barely two years passed between the publication of *The Never Land* [*Terra de Mai*] (1982) and the writing of *Thawing* (1984-1988). During this interval, a sequence of events arose to complicate Marçal's perception of lesbian identity. In 1984, her father died and the author began her unique novel about the life of lesbian poet Renée Vivien, *The Passion according to Renée Vivien* [*La passió segons Renée Vivien*], which was finally published in 1994. Therefore, according to the critic Julià, *Thawing* must be read from two different perspectives: first, 'as the return of love, as the thawing of the lover' and second 'written immediately after the death of her father, *Thawing* is an attempt to recover him after various differences, distances and disagreements'. (93)

As a result, the lyric ‘I love you when...’ (94) engages in a consistent and profound examination of lesbian identity under the constraints of Catalan society and culture in which absence, figured as the death of the father, and the presence of the ‘apparitional’ (95) lesbian body, are conjugated, creating an intricate link between ‘existence’ and ‘absence’. Marçal herself articulated an equation between: ‘the death of the father —real and/or symbolical— and the love, which makes its appearance in the shadow of *the other* woman on the complete or broken mirror’. (96) Taking these themes as a primary intensity, Marçal subverts the post-dictatorial iconography of femininity on the grounds of ‘a leafy and emergent landscape, a new poetics’ [‘un paisatge frondós i emergent, una poètica nova.’] (97)

In ‘I love you when...’ Marçal returns to the relationship between the subject and her ‘disposition’, in a manner reminiscent of what Julia Kristeva describes as the place of *chora* ‘as rupture and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality’. Kristeva later asserts that ‘our discourse —all discourse— moves with and against the *chora* in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it’. (98) Marçal lamented that the patriarchal system and canonical rules

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Have left us with only man's fantasies about women: as has been said repeatedly, they leave only the woman as a literary object and deny the role of subject, of builder and elaborator of the discourse, about herself and about the world. (99)

The poem 'I love you when...' can be read as a sublime meditation on how a woman's body is placed in the symbolic order. By tracing the stages of this insertion, Marçal provides, through her poetry, a rereading of the laws of the symbolic that would bring to light the presence of the lesbian body. She returns us to the mythic origins of the Western civilization, wherein 'woman' was born from 'man'. This is represented in the myth of Athena, who was born from the head of Zeus. The critic Julià claimed that 'Marçal re-invents or restores the primordial birth, the man born from a woman rather than inversely as in the classic tradition of Athena: only thus is the ancient paradise recovered, without the atavistic vigilant eye —the source of punishment and castration'. (100) As a result, 'I love you when...' can be read as a restoration of the 'natural laws of the symbolic order', where man is born from woman.

Before going deeply into this thematic, I will first offer a brief description of the poem: a difficult task given its high level of abstraction. "I love you when..." begins with the poet's confession of love to her lover, and through the depiction of

a series of abstract images, describes the characteristics and intensity of that love. The progression of these images seems to correspond to a surrealist (101) universe: the images are reminiscent of a Dali canvas.

This poem (102) consists of four four-line stanzas. It is further divided in half by the parallelism (103) of the first lines of stanzas one and three: ‘I love you when I know you naked like a little girl’, [T’estimo quan et sé nua com una nena,] and ‘I love you when I know you naked like a knife,’ [T’estimo quan et sé nua com la navalla]. These two passages suggest that the poem is conceived as a puzzle formed by two pieces that can be read independently one from another but which nevertheless achieve coherence as a whole. This is not only a formal configuration, but also a thematic one. In accord with this structure, the poem moves from one dimension, the physical (body), to another, the metaphysical (mind). In alignment with this, the mind (it is implied) can be understood without considering the body but is not independent of it. Placing the body/mind dichotomy as the central point from which to understand the poem, I will analyse how Marçal articulates this couplet to dismantle the assumption that the mind, insofar as it involves intellectual exercise, is necessarily associated with men and the masculine, whereas the body, due to its biological functions

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—menstruation, reproduction— corresponds to women. As Mary Nash has shown, this dichotomy has had particular, and particularly toxic, consequences for Spanish culture: ‘the notion of “natural” was constantly evoked to justify the separation of public and private spaces. By attributing certain “natural” traits to women, it determined their aptitude for motherhood in the home while contending that men’s natural biological and psychological capacities geared them towards activities in the public arena.’ (104)

The axis of the piece ‘I love you when I know you...’ [T’estimo quan et sé nua com...] establishes that love becomes possible when knowledge informs the lover’s feeling. Thence, Marçal conceives know/ledge as the medium through which thawing would become a reality. As Elizabeth Grosz reminds us: ‘Knowledge is an activity; it is a *practice* and not a contemplative reflection. It *does things*. As product or thing, it denies its historicity and asserts its indifference to questions of politics in such a way that it functions as a tool directed to any particular purposes its user chooses.’ (105) Western thought and culture, Grosz argues, is controlled by binary oppositions. This polarisation implies a relationship between subordinator and subordinated. Hence, an association of women’s bodies with the production of knowledge needs to be forged in

order to change the prevailing presupposition about both. However, this task ‘demands a new use of language and new forms of knowledge capable of articulating femininity and women’s specificity in ways quite different from prevailing alternatives’. (106) Marçal’s exploration of lesbian love in the poem opens up the possibility of considering knowledge not as alien to the body, rather the body as constitutive of knowledge. The poem’s perspective, and the desire of the author, place the focus on the intimacy of her love for another woman. Furthermore, the author disarms the universality of knowledge when she invokes a girl in the first line: ‘I love you when I know you naked like a little girl,’ [T’estimo quan et sé nua com una nena]. But what is innovative in Marçal’s work is the assertion that women are not only subjects capable of producing knowledge but also that (to borrow Grosz’s phrase) knowledge ‘aims to include women in those domains where they have been hitherto absent. It aspires to an ideal of a knowledge adequate to the analysis or representation of women and their interests’. (107) This possibility is materialized in the first stanza (line 2) ‘like an open hand, like a high and tender call’ [com una mà badada, com un reclam agut], where the poet loves and knows ‘like an open hand’. She can hear an offer that comes from a woman,

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and this provides a means of relating knowledge to her own interests as a woman.

In the first instance, the reader is seduced by the pathos of the first stanza through the simplicity of the language and the depiction of fragmented images that complicate the narration of the poem. On the one hand, the oneiric landscape resembles the gardens that Plato depicted in his dialogues: the peace of nature is reconciled with the human's mind and soul, it seems the 'perfect' environment to think, to produce knowledge. Beyond that, the child who hears the 'tender call' connotes a utopian sense of tranquility, and peace. This atmosphere endorses the idea of eternity, where the fish forgets the fish hooks and the author hears a tender call: it seems a perpetual setting in which nothing can adumbrate any danger. On the other hand, the 'open hand' suggests the possibility of 'another song', an intense desire of the poet to provide another landscape. Furthermore, the reference to the 'little girl' evokes the romantic imagery of the innocence. She writes:

I love you when I know you naked like a little girl,  
like an open hand, like a high and tender call  
that beckons me from a naked branch,  
like a fish that forgets the fish hooks.

[T'estimo quan et sé nua com una nena,  
com una mà badada, com un reclam agut  
i tendre que em cridés des d'una branca nua,  
com un peix que oblidés que existeixen els hams.]

In the first stanza, Marçal seems to articulate a non-verbal sign, 'a high and tender call' ['un reclam agut']. Through the use of a natural setting 'a naked branch' [una branca nua] 'a fish' [un peix], the poet suggests that an instinctive impulse drives her to express her love for this woman. The imagery recalls Julia Kristeva's notion of the semiotic: Anne-Marie Smith, in her study of Kristeva's work, has emphasised that 'Kristeva's semiotic, pre-verbal sign announces prosody, poetry's departure from prose, musicality and the unspeakable forces, energy and drives, which poets and artists strive to express in their attacks against and modifications of traditional forms'. (108) In the second stanza the poet transforms this idyllic lexicon into the violent imagery of a 'mutilated child' and 'blood that runs':

Like a terrified fish with a fish hook in its mouth.  
Like an axe in the eyes of the mutilated child  
in dreams, in flesh. Like blood that runs.  
Naked like blood.

[Com un peix esglaiat amb un ham a la boca.  
Com l'estrall en els ulls de l'infant mutilat  
en el somni, en la carn. Com la sang que s'escola.  
Nua com una sang.]

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The body appears in fragments: ‘eyes’ that belong to the child, as she says in the second stanza (line 6): ‘Like an axe in the eyes of the mutilated child’ [Com l’estrall en els ulls de l’infant mutilat] and ‘blood’. The ‘eyes’ here may connote traditional knowledge. Marçal elsewhere described traditional knowledge as ‘the focal eye of History’ (109) [‘l’ull focalitzador de la Historia’]. That the ‘eyes’ belong to an ‘infant’ reminds us of what Kristeva refers to as the pre-speech stage, where the ‘infant’ relationship with the mother precedes the language acquisition phase and the subsequent symbolic separation from her. Here, however, the child is always already mutilated. This nightmare is pursued in the next line: ‘in dreams, in flesh. Like blood that runs’. [en el somni, en la carn. Com la sang que s’escola.] The continuous references to sight connote both the possibility, and the danger, of hitherto unacceptable knowledge. As Marçal said of her work: ‘I am facing a kind of emptiness because everything is written from a particular point of view. We are in the dawn of poetry “from our woman’s eyes”’. (110) The eyes as a metonym of the body and as a metaphor for knowledge converge to suggest that the mutilation of the physical has been produced by the prior violence of the metaphysical. In other words, the metaphysical stage, which precedes the physical, is a mistake, and consequently

her body has entered into a symbolic order that does not represent her body. As in a dream, poetic language ‘brings together the linguistic or symbolic —signification and the pre-verbal or semiotic *sens*’. (111)

In the last line of the second stanza we encounter the simile ‘Naked like blood’ (112) [Nua com una sang]. ‘Blood’ is a synecdoche —a rhetorical figure whereby a part of something is used to signify the whole— (113) while the gratuitous insertion of the indefinite article ‘una’ emphasises that she is referring to the blood of a woman. The image of ‘blood’ throughout the poem becomes a metaphor connoting generation, and with it, matrilineal tradition. Julià has interpreted the image of ‘blood’ here as an image that represents the failure of the attempt to formulate lesbian desire. At the same time, there is a pain and there is a death that suggests a process of transformation: from the pain that causes the death of the flesh to the possibility of another relationship between body and its symbolic order:

In the end, it expresses pain and death. On the other hand, and paradoxically, blood —shed and clotted, seized— opens new paths “innermost body” and in the word; the transformation of pain gives possibility of a new relation, like a kind of a new birth, always from an agreement between women. (114)

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As I have mentioned above, the first line of the third stanza demarcates the second half of the poem, where the body is inscribed again in ‘nature’ through the images of ‘rain’, ‘grass’, ‘thunderclap’, and ‘leaf’. This representation of the natural landscape is not the idealised one of the first two stanzas. Thus, the poem progresses from the physical or symbolic, with an insistence on the body as part of nature, to the metaphysical, that is, the place of the *chora* (115) where the body of the ‘infant’ is not separated from the mother’s body. As a result we can assume that Marçal is deconstructing the process whereby, according to Kristeva, the child is inscribed in the symbolic order. Marçal explores the body to arrive at this beginning of the *chora* in the hope of providing the possibility of challenging the origins of the subject in the symbolic. However, as she writes (line 10-11):

like a vivid and offered leaf, like a thunderclap  
that burns it, blind. Like the grass, like the rain.

[com una fulla viva i oferta, com un llamp  
que la calcina, cec. Com l’herba, com la pluja.]

The body, which is represented by a ‘vivid and offered leaf’ is destroyed by a ‘thunderclap that burns it’. Through the use of this natural lexicon and the series of comparisons, the poet alludes to nature as a landscape that gives birth and generates life but is ultimately treacherous. This natural

force constructs and destroys the body, shaped by impulses and instincts that are driving the love of the poet until death. As we shall see in the last stanza, this is what Kristeva described as the drives, which compel the infant to return to the mother's body to be 're-born'. In Kristeva's words 'drives involve pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother. We must emphasize that drives are always already ambiguous, simultaneously assimilating and destructive', (116) therefore, 'I love you when...' narrates the journey of the 'infant' who reaches death to become the 're-born'.

The use of the antithesis 'life' and 'death' is again reminiscent of Kristeva's *chora*, which is defined as 'the place where the subject is both generated and negated'. (117) Marçal writes in the third stanza: 'like a vivid and offered leaf' [com una fulla viva i oferta], and in the fourth stanza: 'Like the open lip of a toothless old man/ facing death. Like the disarmed/ and open hour of thawing' [Com el llavi desclós d'un vell desdentegat/ encarat a la mort. Com l'hora desarmada i oberta del desglaç.]

The oscillation in the poem between the symbolic and the choric is achieved via the thematic of death and thawing, whereby the poet moves through violence and hostility to

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reconciliation. Marçal herself defines the process of thawing as

The starting point of *Desglaç*. The time of thawing is painful but opened. There is a death. The carcass disappears that not only immobilises but also sustains, the solid becomes the liquid, contours fuse together. The diction is however controlled. To write as an attempt, still, to give shape to the shapeless, to put in order the attack. The apparent disintegration is also the possibility of flowing. (118)

As in 'Solstice', 'I love you when...' evokes a liquid environment. The thawing process is not conceived as a change of place —as it happened in 'Solstice'— but as a change of state or condition, from solid to liquid. Through the images of fluidity 'blood', 'rain', and 'thawing', Marçal implies to the possibility of changing social structures that determine the subject's position in the symbolic. The three words refer to natural forces, which suggest that the instincts of the lesbian subject can change the symbolic. The poet herself refers to a 'fluid path, again with neither patterns nor schemes which is, at the same time, a path of re-turn, of the revision, of the re-discovery, of the re-identification, of the renaming, of recovering'. (119)

The third stanza ends with the striking image 'Like my shadow, naked behind the frozen mirror'. [Com la

meva ombra, nua rere el mirall glaçat.], which implies the difficulty of the poet to see the reflection of her image on the mirror because this mirror is frozen. Kristeva suggested that the child finds its signification in the symbolic when the mirror provides him with ‘spatial intuition’ and ‘from that point on, in order to capture his image in a mirror, the child must remain separate from it, his body agitated by the semiotic motility’. (120) Marçal’s shadow, which is her body fragmented, cannot be reflected in a mirror that is frozen and so it cannot capture her image. At this point, the poet reconfigures the mirror-stage process whereby castration is effected—when the child is separated from the body of the mother. Thus, if neither the mirror-stage, nor the separation of the child from the body of the mother is successful, the transition from the pre-Oedipal to the symbolic would be ordered by the *chora*, challenging here the laws that, according to Kristeva, help to develop the subject to be inscribed in the symbolic. This separation does not take place, hence, the child will be able to go back to the breast of the mother.

Marçal pursues this idea when, after the failure of the mirror-stage in the third stanza, the fourth stanza begins with ‘As naked as a breast stuck to my lips’ [‘Tan nua com un pit enganxat als meus llavis’]. The powerful eroticism of the image connotes key moments in the development

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of the lesbian subject. Through this metaphor the poet suggests that the symbolic can be re-structured. The child need not be separated from the mother and the pre-Oedipal structure need not exclude her from the symbolic. Marçal undertakes the challenge of re-configuring female sexuality in alignment with a reconciliation with the mother, in terms of continuity. The poet-as-self sucks at the breast of the 'archaic mother'. Kristeva likens the breast to a 'model' or 'pattern': which 'prefigures and sets in motion the logic of object identifications in all object relations, including both discourse and love'. (121) Kristeva aligns the assimilation of the breast with the assimilation of 'the speech of the other'. Marçal proposes this process of assimilation by situating herself, as a 'little girl', at the breast, to assimilate, thus, the speech of the mother. By extension, this adaptation dismantles the culture/nature dichotomy. If the 'little girl' assimilates the 'model' of the mother, by repetition, as her own speech, it implies that the language of the mother would be valid as a medium for producing knowledge.

This change marks a turning point in the treatment of maternity in Catalan literature, especially in Catalan poetry. Marçal places herself in the poem, as a lesbian body, establishing, to some extent, a continuum between the 'infant' and the mother, and between the pre-Oedipal and

the symbolic. The re-encounter with the ‘archaic mother’ offers a re-definition of women and a re-construction of a tradition-genealogy.

Maria-Mercè Marçal rejects this negative choice: of preventing a woman of initiative or, in her distress, of rejecting maternity to embody herself in “culture”; she tries to achieve a ‘place where one can be a woman, without having to choose between being nature or doing culture.’ (122)

The poet sees maternity as both part of nature and as a means of establishing women’s tradition and engagement with themselves and their own history. It is clearly the desideratum to re-encounter ‘the archaic mother’, to re-establish an intimate link between her and knowledge. In other words, there is the necessity to reconcile the body of the mother with the child in order to establish a new symbolic order. Elsewhere Marçal suggests the necessity of re-discovering ‘literary mothers’ (‘les mares literaries’). This conception of ‘motherhood’ is new in Catalan literature. She analyses the process of maternity, rejecting the Francoist conception of maternity as the only function and achievement for a woman in life, as the maximum horizon for women’s self-fulfillment and social role. The body of the mother is not only a source of nurture but also a subject who loves and desires:

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We creatures at the crossroads, creatures of the cross, are living on that frontier. A woman is neither a nomad, nor a male body... a mother, has always been a permanent division, a division of the flesh itself, and consequently a division in language. (123)

Viladot argues that

The poem deals with a maternity achieved by the maturity and enjoyment of sexuality, like a plenitude of the ego, in the self; sexuality in the most private room, this means, like reducing the presence of the macho to the minimum, in a way that female identity remains invulnerable without disrupting the narcissist symmetry. (124)

The irruption of death, in the last stanza of the poem, suggests, from one point of view, absence, and from another, transformation.

As naked as a breast stuck to my lips.  
Like the open lip of a toothless old man  
facing death. Like the disarmed  
and open hour of thawing.

[Tan nua com un pit enganxat als meus llavis.  
Com el llavi desclós d'un vell desdentegat  
encarat a la mort. Com l'hora desarmada  
oberta del desglaç.]

According to Julià the only way for Marçal of reconciling her lesbian body with her father, would be if the father

abandons his law and becomes a baby in his daughter's hands:

The equal encounter between them is a mirage and the only way of loving him is, that he has to reject the ancient law and he has to transform himself into a baby in her hands. The image of the father is transcended to become the sign of authority. (125)

Ending as it does with a moment of thawing and a sense of beginning again, the poem implicitly sends the reader back to the beginning in a circular movement. According to particular religious beliefs, especially the catholic one, death is not the final, but part of an ongoing process, implying the possibility of new perspectives and identities in the 'unborn' ('desneixer'). A poem which starts with the exploration of the child, its disposition in 'nature' and in the symbolic order, thus ends with the possibility of transforming the solid mirror into the liquid milk of the 'archaic mother'.

## **Conclusion**

Though others have often asked me why I write, what occurs to me spontaneously is rather to ask myself why I don't write if too much time goes by without my writing. For many years I have written only, or essentially, poetry, and poetry forms my inner skeleton, my way of addressing myself, of provisionally putting into order the chaos unleashed by the unexpected, through words...like a mirror where for a moment one recognises a fragmentary, formless experience now unified and given sense. (126)

As lesbian love poems, the 'Solstice' and 'I love you when...' provide Marçal's women-identified women with the inspiration and the strength to thaw moral and social barriers, barriers which had become deeply embedded over the long years of totalitarian heteropatriarchy. Marçal's work blends the personal and the political, the individual and the collective, the emotional and the intellectual into a single whole: a whole infused with a highly distinctive yet socially aware poetics.

Her literary creations are born from a particular socio-historical context that she depicts and denounces without ever extricating herself from it. This literary engagement is closely related to her quest to transform her situation, or

space —personal, political, cultural— from the heterosexual to the homosexual. The result is a blurring of the division between private and public. Both homosexuality and women’s bodily experience become available for discussion —become public— for the first time in modern Catalan society.

These thematic concerns are developed through various linguistic and syntactical strategies, most prominently sustained systems of interconnecting metaphors. ‘Solstice’ and ‘I love you when...’ are structured around metaphors of place and position respectively. Through the fluid atmosphere in both poems, the poet has demonstrated that writing about female sexuality offers a starting point for inscribing women’s bodies either into the ‘literary’, as in ‘Solstice’, or into the symbolic itself, as in ‘I love you when...’ Both poems are concerned about what Luce Irigaray calls ‘*le parle femme*’, which she defines as ‘the language of women’ and consists of a particular expression of the body that involves corporeal fluids and touch.

There is a tangible thematic transition between the earlier and the later poem, from a specifically Catalan lesbian erotics to an exploration that implicitly interconnects the voice (and body) of the lesbian to the problem of language

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more generally. Whereas 'Solstice' harnesses a lesbian erotic imaginary situated in the geographical boundaries of the Catalan Pyrenees to provide a utopian vision within which a sense of sexual freedom is possible, 'I love you when...' explores the origins of the law of the Father through a more profound and philosophical investigation into phallogentrism. The death of the/her father raises the question of the/his Law, which in the later poetry becomes a present ghost, a 'rapacious shadow, falcon, royal sparrowhawk: vigilant, judge, the one who either punishes or exonerates, his absence can be even more worrying than his visible presence'. (127) On the one hand, Marçal's 'Solstice' strives to create a space where dichotomies, differences and binary oppositions are 'abolished' by the interaction of two women's bodies. On the other hand, 'I love you when...' presents a successful exploration of the laws that order the presence of the woman's body in the symbolic, dismantling the binary culture/nature. Marçal investigates the female body and feminine desire, exploring her sexuality from different perspectives in both poems. However, putting the gendered physical back into the metaphysical, Marçal further associates the exploration of the female body with the process of recovering women's tradition. This means, to observe and to live through 'the women's eyes', which inevitably implies a

perspective from an ‘other’ point of view. The investigation of literary precedents —enforced by the lack of a tradition of women’s or lesbian writing in Catalan— becomes an exploration of the body itself, in the sense of placing feelings, anxieties and, in short, women’s experiences in history.

As we have seen throughout this dissertation, Marçal undertakes a deconstructive quest in which she re-defines, re-constructs and re-locates women’s bodies from many perspectives. Located in a site of difference, Marçal sets out to use this as a point of departure for both her politics and her writing. As Joana Sabadell puts it:

This defence of difference as necessary, positive, and desirable led the poet to stand up for her conviction in her political activity, professional work, and personal life, thereby achieving a markedly feminist work, unique in both the Catalan and the Spanish literary contexts. (128)

## **Appendix**

### **Text 1**

#### **Solstici**

El teu sexe i el meu són dues boques.  
No sents quin bes de rou sobre la molsa!  
Quin mossec amb lluors d'ametlla viva!  
Quina parla, amb relent de gorga oberta!  
Quin ball, petites llengües sense brida!  
Quin secret de congost! Els nostres sexes,

amor, són dues boques. I dos sexes  
ara ens bateguen al lloc de les boques.  
A esglai colgat, fos l'eco de la brida  
que domava la dansa de la molsa,  
de bat a bat tenim la platja oberta:  
avarem-hi el desig d'escuma viva.

El teu sexe i la meva boca viva,  
a doll, trenats com si fossin dos sexes,  
entremesclen licors de fruita oberta  
i esdevenen, en ple desvari, boques.  
boques, coralls en llacuna de molsa  
on l'hora peix l'atzar i perd la brida.

Som on l'hora i l'atzar perden la brida,  
on, a cavall de la marea viva,  
llisquen sense velam, pels solcs de molsa,  
el meu sexe i la teva boca: sexes  
al mig del rostre i a l'entrecuix, boques.  
Tot és un daltbaix de sal oberta.

Que cremi tot en un torrent de molsa  
i que ens mauri la nostra saba oberta!  
Que facin el solstici els nostres sexes,  
Que el cor transformi en pluja tota brida!  
Que esclatin els bancals en saó viva!  
Que els boscs floreixin en milers de boques!

I que les boques facin que la molsa  
arrelí, viva, com la pell oberta  
sense brida al mirall del nostres sexes!

## Solstice

Your sex and mine are two mouths.  
Don't you feel what a dew kiss on the flesh!  
What a nip, with the brightness of a living almond!  
What a talk with night-dew of an open gorge!  
What a dance, little tongues without bridle!  
What a secret of a narrow pass! Our sexes,

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love, are two mouths. And two sexes  
rattling us now to the place of mouths.  
A buried terror, the sunken echo of the bridle  
that tamed the dancing of the flesh,  
We have the beach wide open:  
Let's launch here the desire of the living surf.

Your sex and my mouth alive,  
in abundance, twisted together as if they were two sexes,  
intermingling liquors of the open fruit  
and becoming, in full raving, mouths.  
Mouths, corals in lacuna of flesh  
where the hour feeds the fate and loses the bridle.

We are where the hour and the fate lose the bridle,  
where we ride on the spring living tide,  
without sails, sliding along the wake of the flesh,  
my sex and your mouth: sexes  
in the middle of the face and the crotch, mouths.  
Everything is an undulation of open salt.

Sea castles at a party, in the open night  
effacing signs and giving the bridle  
of everything to the madness of mouths.  
Any dead leaf becomes alive  
in the sunlight that gives dark light to the sexes  
and paints in carmine the flames of the flesh.

Let everything burn in a torrent of flesh  
and let our open sap ripen!  
Let the solstice of our sexes happen,  
let the heart convert to rain every bridle!  
Let the patches burst into a living tilth!  
Let the forests flourish in thousands of mouths!

And let the mouths make the flesh  
takes root, alive, like the open skin  
with no bridle at the mirror of our sexes!

## Text 2

### Desglaç

T'estimo quan et sé nua com una nena,  
com una mà badada, com un reclam agut  
i tendre que em cridés des d'una branca nua,  
com un peix que oblidés que existeixen els hams.

Com un peix esglaiat amb un ham a la boca.  
Com l'estrall en els ulls de l'infant mutilat  
en el somni, en la carn. Com la sang que s'escola.  
Nua com una sang.

T'estimo quan et sé nua com la navalla,  
com una fulla viva i oferta, com un llamp  
que la calcina, cec. Com l'herba, com la pluja.  
Com la meva ombra, nua rere el mirall glaçat.

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Tan nua com un pit enganxat als meus llavis.  
Com el llavi desclós d'un vell desdentegat  
encarat a la mort. Com l'hora desarmada  
i oberta del desglaç.

## **Thawing**

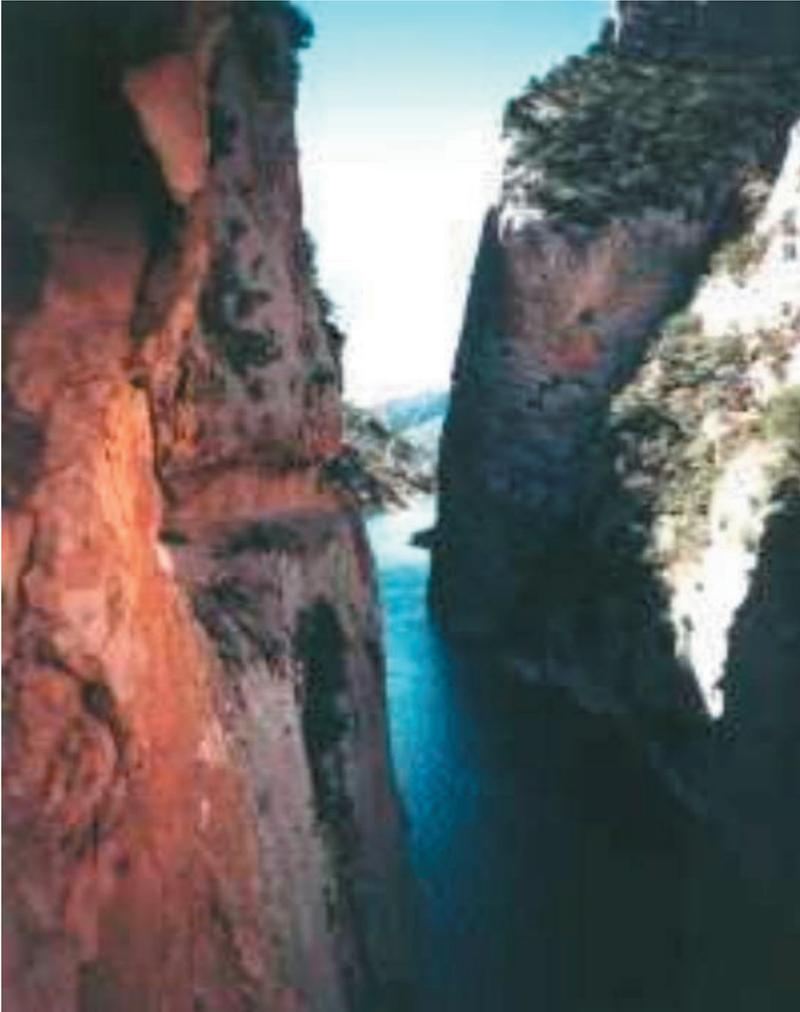
I love you when I know you naked like a little girl,  
like an open hand, like a high and tender call  
that beckons me from a naked branch,  
like a fish that forgets the fish hooks.

Like a terrified fish with a fish hook in its mouth.  
Like an axe in the eyes of the mutilated child  
in dreams, in flesh. Like blood that runs.  
Naked like blood.

I love you when I know you naked like a knife,  
like a vivid and offered leaf, like a thunderclap  
that burns it, blind. Like the grass, like the rain.  
Like my shadow, naked behind the frozen mirror.

As naked as a breast stuck to my lips.  
Like the open lip of a toothless old man  
facing death. Like the disarmed  
and open hour of thawing.

Picture 1



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**Picture 2**

**'Scold's Bridle'**



**Picture 3**

**'Horse's Bridle'**



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1. Lines from *Desglaç* (1989), Lluïsa Julià, ed., *Maria-Mercè Marçal. Contraban de Llum, antologia poètica*, (Barcelona: Proa, Clàssics Catalans, 2001), 168 [S'estalonen l'infern i el paradís./ I el bressol i la tomba, i les paraules/ i el cos: país natal, exili.] Translations mine unless indicated.
2. Jean Grugel and Tim Rees, *Franco's Spain* (London: Arnold, 1997), 134.
3. Maria-Mercè Marçal, "Sota el signe del Drac, prologue to *Llengua Abolida*", *Àlbum Maria-Mercè Marçal* [on-line] (Barcelona: Centre Català del PEN Club, desembre 1998 accessed 15 May 2003); available from <http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms/mmmarçal/pdf/marçal.pdf>; Internet. [Donzella esmorteïda, colonitzada i sense llengua. Dues cares de la moneda on es congria el meu –el nostre passat.]
4. Joana Sabadell, "Allà on literatura i vida fan trena. Conversa amb Maria-Mercè Marçal sobre poesia i feminisme," *Serra d'Or*, no. 467 (nov. 1998): 16. [Els poemes reivindicatius no són majoria a la meua obra.]
5. Maria-Mercè Marçal, "Dona i Poesia: més ençà i més enllà del mirall de la Medusa," in *Paraula de Dona: Actes del Col.loqui Dones, Literatura i Mitjans de Comunicació*, eds., Margarida Atzieta i Montserrat Palau (Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, del 26-29 d'Abril 1995), 177.
6. *Ibid.*, 16. [Molt més determinant, en canvi, és tenir un cos, una situació, una història de dona, o l'altre element, que continuava sent molt important, el lingüístic. No puc establir una separació entre aquests elements i jo.]

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7. Joana Sabadell, “Allà on literatura i vida fan trena. Conversa amb Maria-Mercè Marçal sobre poesia i feminisme,” *Serra d’Or*, no. 467 (nov. 1998), 21. [Aleshores, com que a mi des del principi m’han col·locat allò que domino molt la llengua, el neopopularisme, un imaginari determinat i tota una sèrie de coses, quan surts amb alguna cosa que no està prevista, com l’erotisme homosexual, o la maternitat des d’una perspectiva conflictiva i, en síntesi, heterodoxa –en la qual tampoc no han entrat gaire...]
8. Pere Gimferrer labelled Marçal as the poet of love in the introduction that he wrote to her posthumous work *Reason of the Body* [*Raó del Cos*] (Barcelona: Ed. 62-Empúries, 2000).
9. Lluïsa Julià, “Utopia i exili en la poesia de Maria-Mercè Marçal” in *El Gai Saber, Introducció als estudis gais i lèsbics*, ed., Josep-Anton Fernández (Barcelona: Llibres de l’Índex, 2000), 355. [Però, tret d’alguna excepció, han obviat l’evolució posterior, han restat sords a la descripció de la seva sexualitat femenina, explícitament lèsbica des de la tercera entrega poètica.]
10. Fragment from the article translated and included in the section dedicated to Maria Mercè Marçal in the journal *Catalan Writing*, no. 6 (1992): 82.
11. Maria-Mercè Marçal, “Sota el signe del Drac, prologue to *Llengua Abolida*”, *Àlbum Maria-Mercè Marçal* [on-line] (Barcelona: Centre Català del PEN Club, desembre 1998 accessed 15 May 2003); available from <http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms/mmmarçal/pdf/marçal.pdf>; Internet [Aquest darrer llibre ha estat especialment desafortunat en molts aspectes, i, en concret, en la seva difusió.]

12. Ibid., [*Terra de Mai*, com indica el seu nom, representa una instantània –i fal·laç– consecució de la *utopia*. Tot límit s’esborra, tota brida cau, tot és un daltbaix de sal oberta.]
13. Luce Irigaray, “This sex which is not one,” trans. Claudia Reeder for *New French Feminisms*, in *Feminisms*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane P. Herndl (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 351.
14. Maria-Mercè Marçal, “Dona i Poesia: més ençà i més enllà del mirall de la Medusa,” in *Paraula de Dona: Actes del Col·loqui Dones, Literatura i Mitjans de Comunicació*, eds., Margarida Atzieta i Montserrat Palau (Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, del 26-29 d’Abril 1995), 180. [La dona escriptora i singularment la dona poeta –filla també sense mare, com he dit, en el terreny cultural– no és mai del tot aquesta guardiana modèlica de l’ordre patern que Atenea pot simbolitzar.]
15. Translation by Sam Abrams in *Selecció de Poesia Catalana* [on line]. Available from <http://www.proxy.intercom.es/folch/poesia/home.html>; Internet; accessed 1 September 2003. [A l’atzar agraeixo tres dons: haver nascut dona/ de classe baixa i nació oprimida./ I el tèrbol atzur de ser tres voltes rebel.]
16. Maria-Mercè Marçal, “Sota el signe del Drac, prologue to *Llengua Abolida*”, *Àlbum Maria-Mercè Marçal* [on-line] (Barcelona: Centre Català del PEN Club, desembre 1998 accessed 15 May 2003); available from <http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms/mmmarçal/pdf/marçal.pdf>; Internet [Tres dades inicials –ésser dona, de classe baixa, de nació oprimida– en principi no triades, es converteixen, a través d’un agraïment quasi irònic, en conscients i assumides: una arrel ferida que s’arbra, però, en una triple rebelió.]

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17. Jean Grugel and Tim Rees, *Franco's Spain* (Arnold: London, 1997), 130.
18. [Recorde que quan estava en la primaria Doña Pilar, ens feia resar tots els dies abans de començar la classe del matí, me'n recorde perfectament, havíem de resar un Padrenuestro i un Ave Maria. Els dissabtes de matí havíem d'anar a l'escola, perquè abans anàvem a l'escola els dissabtes només pels matins i quan s'acabava la lliçó, dos xiques cada volta en sentit rotatiu tenien que resar el rosari.] Conversation with my mother Concepción Vicedo Jover (20 June 2003).
19. Aurora Morcillo Gómez, "Shaping True Catholic Womanhood: Francoist Educational Discourse on Women" in *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain*, eds., Victoria Lorée Enders and, Pamela Beth Rad (Albany, NY: State University of N, 1999), 57.
20. [Les classes de la vesprà les dedicavem a labors, on ens ensenyaven a bordar a mà per a poder cosir-nos la nostra aixovar o la de alguna dona de la nostra família per a quan es casara.] Conversation with my mother Concepción Vicedo Jover (20 June 2003).
21. Jean Grugel and Tim Rees, *Franco's Spain* (Arnold: London, 1997), 138.
22. David T. Gies, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Spanish Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 123.
23. Raymond Carr and Juan Pablo Fussi, eds., *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy* (Harper Collins Academic: London, 1981), 113-119.
24. Mary Nash, "Towards a New Moral Order: National Catholicism, culture and gender" in *Spanish History Since 1808*, eds. José Álvarez

Junco and Adrian Subert (Oxford UP and New York: Arnold, 2000), 298.

25. Falange was the Fascist party of Spain during the years of the dictatorship.

26. Jean Grugel and Tim Rees, *Franco's Spain* (Arnold: London, 1997), 134.

27. *Ibid.*, 134.

28. Mary Nash, "Towards a New Moral Order: National Catholicism, culture and gender" in *Spanish History Since 1808*, eds. José Álvarez Junco and Adrian Subert (Oxford UP and New York: Arnold, 2000), 298.

29. Xosé M. Nuñez Seixas, "The reawakening of peripheral nationalisms and the state of the autonomous communities," in *Spanish History Since 1808*, eds., José Álvarez Junco and Adrian Subert (Oxford UP and New York: Arnold, 2000), 325.

30. Although Franco's rule finished some years earlier, the Women's Section did not disappear completely until 1981.

31. Isidor Cònsul, "1970-1995: Twenty- Five Years of Catalan Poetry" *Catalan Writing* no. 14 (1995): 5.

32. Miquel Martí i Pol, "Notes on Catalan Poetry of the Post-war Year" *Catalan Writing* no. 8, (1992), 8.

33. Lluïsa Julià, "Utopia i exili en la poesia de Maria-Mercè Marçal," in *El Gai Saber, Introducció als estudis gais i lèsbics*, ed., Josep-Anton Fernández (Barcelona: Llibres de l'Índex, 2000), 354. [Des de l'inici la seva escriptura implica una posició inèdita en la poesia catalana, s'alça

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com a revolta i descriu una indagació: revolta des del moment que assumeix explícitament la identitat de dona més enllà de tot clixé; indagació, perquè la seva escriptura esdevé recerca incessant de la identitat femenina, i gradualment del seu lesbianisme.]

**34.** Ann R. Jones, “Writing the Body, Toward an Understanding of *l’Écriture Féminine*,” in *Feminisms*, eds., R. Warhol Robin and Diane P. Herndl, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 361.

**35.** Toril Moi, ed., *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), 106.

**36.** Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference translated by Alan Bass* (London: Routledge, 1995), 292.

**37.** Ibid., 106.

**38.** Joana Sabadell, “Allà on literatura i vida fan trena. Conversa amb Maria-Mercè Marçal sobre poesia i feminisme,” *Serra d’Or* no. 467 (nov. 1998): 15. [Crec que és molt important, que el cos hi és en tot, que en definitiva no som res més. Per això, si hi ets al text, el teu cos hi és d’alguna manera i, quan no hi és, també aquesta absència és una manera de ser-hi.]

**39.** Paul Ricoeur, “Utterer’s Meaning and Utterance Meaning,” in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 13.

**40.** Joana Sabadell, “Allà on literatura i vida fan trena. Conversa amb Maria-Mercè Marçal sobre poesia i feminisme,” *Serra d’Or* no. 467 (nov. 1998): 15. [A la nostra cultura, la diferència s’estableix de manera evident. Fixa’t com fa variar la perspectiva tenir un cos de dona o

d'home, que és un punt de partida. I és que em sembla que la nostra cultura gira l'esquena al cos, perquè és limitat, és el límit, és mortal i, com que estem molt abocats vers el que és transcendent, cap a la idea d'eternitat....]

41. Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation? Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society" trans. by Annette Kuhn (1981) in *Feminist Literary Theory, a Reader*, ed., Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 322.

42. Toril Moi, ed., *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), 121.

43. *Ibid.*, 145.

44. Mary Eagleton, ed., *Feminist Literary Theory: a Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 289.

45. Through my readings of the academic debates between French and Anglo-American feminist critics, and through my readings of the poet's work, I have come to realise that most of the problems that Anglo-American feminist critics have suggested in the French theories of *l'écriture féminine* stem, to put it in Chomskian terms, from differences in the linguistic structure of the respective language. One of the difficulties of Cixous's and Irigaray's theories for English speakers lies in the Anglophone distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. Marçal's contention in her poems has the same origins. In Catalan as well as in French 'sex' is a word that connotes explicitly gender, whereas in English 'sex' refers to a biological phenomenon and 'gender' is the result of a social construction. For Latin languages, 'gender' cannot be extricated from 'sex'.

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46. Joana Sabadell, “Allà on literatura i vida fan trena. Conversa amb Maria-Mercè Marçal sobre poesia i feminisme,” *Serra d’Or* no. 467 (nov. 1998): 17-18. [En el fons et preguntes: què és un llenguatge de dona? Portant-ho a l’extrem podríem dir que és un llenguatge que les dones produeixen, no? Però bé, el llenguatge existeix, ens és donat, és el que hi ha. I cal preguntar-se fins a quin punt em serveix per a ajudar-me a descodificar la meva experiència, el que jo visc. Tot es troba al llenguatge.]
47. Toril Moi, ed., *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), 164.
48. Julia Kristeva, “Talking about Polylogue French Feminist Thought: A Reader,” translated by Séan Hand, in *Feminist Literary Theory, a Reader*, ed., Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 301.
49. Mary Jacobus, “Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism”, in *Feminist Literary Theory, a Reader*, ed., Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 300.
50. Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” trans., Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen in *Feminisms*, eds., Robyn R. Warhol and Diane P. Herndl (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 334.
51. For the full text and my translation of the poem, see Appendix, Text 1.
52. Lluïsa, Julià, *Maria-Mercè Marçal. Contraban de llum, antologia poètica* (Barcelona: Proa Classic Catalans, 2001), 35. [Surt a la llum el primer poemari català que afronta sense pal·liatius el cant lèsbic. Marçal aborda un terreny habitualment reclòs, conceptuat d’inexistent.]

54. The Sección Femenina (Women's Section) was the women's organisation of the Falangist party that was dedicated to the education and formation of women. See introduction above.
55. Pilar Primo de Rivera, who was the sister of the founder of the Falange party, was the head of the *Sección Femenina*.
56. Victoria Lorée Enders, "Problematic Portraits: The Ambiguous Historical Role of the *Sección Femenina* of the Falange" in *Constructing Spanish Womanhood, Female Identity in Modern Spain*, eds., Victoria Lorée Enders and Pamela Beth Radcliff (State University of New York Press, 1999), 376.
57. Aurora Morcillo Gómez, "Shaping True Catholic Womanhood: Francoist Educational Discourse on Women" in *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain*, eds., Victoria Lorée Enders and Pamela Beth Radcliff (Albany, NY: State University of N, 1999), 55.
58. Maria Antonietta Macciochi, "Female Sexuality in Fascist Ideology" *Feminist Review* 1 (1979): 67.
59. Homosexual persecutions took place in order to annihilate the epidemic (as it was considered for the Church-state). The Law of Social Danger [La Ley de Peligrosidad Social] condemned this practice.
60. The Catalan speaking Countries are Valencian Country, Balearic Islands and Catalonia.
61. Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, "The reawakening of peripheral nationalisms and the State of the Autonomous Communities" in *Spanish History Since 1808*, eds., José Álvarez Junco and Adrian Subert (Oxford UP and New York: Arnold, 2000), 317.

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62. Janet Pérez, ed., *Modern and Contemporary Spanish Women Poets* (Texas: Twayne Publications, New York, 1995), 161.

63. The sestina was not a composition limited to the geographical borders of the Catalan countries but was also the chosen structure for writers such as Auden, Kipling, Pound, Swinburne and the Medieval poets Dante and Petrarch.

64. [Joglar] was the man who transmitted the literary pieces of work written by the troubadour. Generally, the poems were sung with musical instruments. *Gran Diccionari de la Llengua Catalana* [on-line]; available from <http://www.grec.net/GGIBIN/LEXIC.PGM>; Internet; accessed 10 July 2003.

65. Martí de Riquer, Antoni Comas and Joaquim Molas, *Història de la literatura catalana* [book on-line] (Barcelona: Ariel, S.A., accessed 15 July 2003); available from <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/7156>; Internet. [El trobador era, doncs, músic i poeta alhora; i els cançoners medievals ens han conservat bon nombre de notacions musicals de poesies trobadoresques. Aquesta necessitat de compondre musicalment exigia al trobador una elevada formació i una especialització determinada que, en principi, barrava el pas als mers diletants. La rígida tècnica poètica tampoc no permetia les improvisacions.]

66. Anna Montero, “Anna Montero entrevista Maria-Mercè Marçal” *Daina. Revista de Literatura* no. 1 Valencia: ed. Tres i Quatre (1986): 20. [Una sola vegada he planificat un llibre, el de les sextines, *Terra de Mai*. Potser perquè jo estava vivint un moment molt obsessiu al voltant d’un tema.]

67. Lluïsa Julià, “Utopia i exili en la poesia de Maria-Mercè Marçal” in *El Gai Saber, Introducció als estudis gais i lèsbics*, ed., Josep-Anton Fernández (Barcelona: Llibres de l'Índex, 2000), 355. [L'obra de Maria-Mercè Marçal com la primera veu explícitament lèsbica de la tradició poètica catalana.]
68. Liz Yorke, “Primary Intensities: Lesbian Poetry and the Reading of Difference,” in *What Lesbians do in Books*, eds. Elaine Hobby and Chris White (London: The Women's Press, 1991).
69. Adrienne Rich, ed., “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” included in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (London: Virago, 1987), 24.
70. It is important here to remark that ‘molsa’, ‘oberta’, ‘brida’ and ‘viva’ are feminine and ‘boques’ is feminine and plural: the problem of translating them into English lies in the fact that they lose the gender linguistic marks of the words, which is determinative to understand the (lesbian) meaning of the poem.
71. For more information about Campanology and change-ringing see [www.Chaddesley-corbet.co.uk/tower\\_history.htm](http://www.Chaddesley-corbet.co.uk/tower_history.htm).
72. Irigaray, 351.
73. Gabriele Griffin, ed., *Heavenly Love? Lesbian Images in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing*, (Manchester University Press, 1994), 147.
74. Ibid., 147.
75. Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen in *Feminisms*, eds., Robyn R. Warhol and Diane P. Herndl (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 339.

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76. Luce Irigaray, "This sex which is not one," trans. Claudia Reeder for *New French Feminisms*, in *Feminisms*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane P. Herndl (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 351.

77. Irigaray, 353.

78. The origins of the pearl imagery are placed on the Judaeo-Christian theology where they were considered as a symbol of value: the twelve gates of the City of Jerusalem were made from pearls. However, pearls have connotations of both the pure and the fallen, which can be associated with the lesbian: 'facets of a desire for the unattainable as well as for the all-too-readily had'. Nicky Hallet, "Did Mrs. Danvers warm Rebecca's pearls? Significant exchanges and the extension of lesbian space and time in literature," *Feminist Review* 74, no.1 (2003), 39.

79. Gilles Deleuze, "Ethology: Spinoza and us," in *Incorporations*, eds. J. Crary and S. Quinter, (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 626.

80. Gabriele Griffin, *Heavenly Love? Lesbian images in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing*, (Manchester University Press, 1993), 2.

81. See illustrations 2 and 3 in the Appendix.

82. The shape of the 'horse's bridle' connotes the most commonly used instrument to punish women's behaviour: the 'scold's bridle'. It was an artefact designed to silence a woman in early medieval Britain: basically a metal cage with a gag which she had to wear until she promised to behave herself. This bad behaviour was to do with the act of speaking and it was used 'to curb women's tongue that talk too idle'. For more information see <http://www.shropshireghostwalks.co.uk/Ghosthunt/torture.htm>.

83. Irigaray, 354.

84. Gabriel Griffin, *Heavenly Love? Lesbian Images in Twentieth-Century Women's Writing*, (Manchester University Press, 1993), 138.
85. Josep-Anton Fernández, (unpublished essay) "Subversion, Transition, Tradition: The Early Poetry of Maria-Mercè Marçal," paper read in the symposium *Subversive Voices: Poetry under the Regime*, University of Birmingham, 12-13 March, 1999.
86. See illustration 1 in the Appendix.
87. See <http://ptero.valldager.com/glossari/montrebei.html>, ['El Congost', històricament, era l'únic pas dels Pirineus a la plana de Lleida.]
88. Elspeth Probyn, "Lesbians in Space. Gender, Sex and the Structure of Missing," *Gender, Place and Culture* no.1 (1995): 79.
89. Nicky Hallet, "Did Mrs. Danvers warm Rebecca's pearls? Significant exchanges and the extension of lesbian space and time in literature" in *Feminist Review* 74 (August 2003): 37-38.
90. Elizabeth Meese, "Theorising Lesbian: Writing —A Love Letter" in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts, Radical Revisions*, eds., Karla Kay and Joanne Glasgow (New York University Press, 1990), 80.
91. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen in *Feminisms*, eds., Robyn R. Warhol and Diane P. Herndl (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 338.
92. Joana Sabadell, "Allà on literatura i vida fan trena. Conversa amb Maria-Mercè Marçal sobre poesia i feminisme," *Serra d'Or*, no. 467 (nov. 1998): 16. [Els meus poemes provenen d'una dona que és conscient de ser-ho i que hi ha pensat molt.]

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93. Lluïsa Julià, “Contra les llengües abolides,” *Serra d’Or* no. 467 (nov. 1998): 26. [Com el retorn a l’amor, com el desglaç de l’amant] i [escrit arran de la mort del seu pare, *Desglaç* és un intent de recuperar-lo després de les múltiples diferències, distàncies, desavinences.]
94. ‘I love you when ...’ or ‘T’estimo quan ...’ is the first line of this otherwise untitled poem from the book *Desglaç*, 75 from the volume *Llengua Abolida*. For the translation, see Appendix, Text 2.
95. This is a term used by Terry Castle to ‘bring the lesbian back into history’ in her introduction of the book *The Apparitional Lesbian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
96. Maria-Mercè Marçal, “Sota el signe del Drac, prologue to *Llengua Abolida*”, *Àlbum Maria-Mercè Marçal* [on-line] (Barcelona: Centre Català del PEN Club, desembre 1998 accessed 15 May 2003); available from <http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms/mmmarçal/pdf/marçal.pdf>; Internet. [La mort del pare –real i/o simbòlica– i l’amor, que fa aparèixer en el mirall, sencer o trencat, l’ombra de l’altra dona.]
97. Lluïsa Julià, “Contra les llengües abolides,” *Serra d’Or* no. 467 (nov. 1998): 26.
98. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 26.
99. Maria-Mercè Marçal, “Dona i Poesia: més ençà i més enllà del mirall de la Medusa,” in *Paraula de Dona: Actes del Col.loqui Dones, Literatura i Mitjans de Comunicació*, eds., Margarida Atzieta i Montserrat Palau (Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, del 26-29 d’Abril 1995), 179. [Quedar-se només amb les fantasies masculines sobre el femení: com s’ha dit repetidament, deixant només la dona com a objecte literari i

regatejant-li el paper de subjecte, de constructora i elaboradora del discurs, sobre ella mateixa i sobre el món.]

**100.** Lluïsa Julià, “Utopia i exili en la poesia de Maria-Mercè Marçal,” in *El Gai Saber, Introducció als estudis gais i lèsbics*, ed., Josep-Anton Fernández (Barcelona: Llibres de l’Índex, 2000), 364. [Marçal reinventa o restitueix l’infantament primigeni, l’home nascut de dona i no a la inversa segons la tradició clàssica d’Atenea: només així es recupera l’antic paradís, sense l’ull atàvic vigilant, castigador i castrador.]

**101.** *Surrealism* was a literary and artistic movement that advocated an eradication of the bourgeois values at the beginning of the twentieth century –in which there is no coherence but an interest in experiencing through dreamlike and nightmarish sequences, and the juxtaposition of bizarre, shocking, or seemingly unrelated images. For further definition of the movement see M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999).

**102.** See text 2 in the Appendix for a complete translation.

**103.** Parallelism is a rhetorical figure, which consists of a similar word – order and structure – in their syntax, see M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), 11.

**104.** Mary Nash, “Un/Contested Identities: Motherhood, Sex Reform and the Modernization of Gender Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Spain,” in *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain*, eds., Victoria Lorée Enders and Pamela Beth Radcliff (Albany, NY: State University of N, 1999), 29.

**105.** Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion* (London: Routledge, 1995), 37.

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106. Ibid., 36.

107. Ibid., 39.

108. Anne-Marie Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Speaking the Unspeakable* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 15.

109. Maria-Mercè Marçal, , “Dona i Poesia: més ençà i més enllà del mirall de la Medusa,” in *Paraula de Dona: Actes del Col.loqui Dones, Literatura i Mitjans de Comunicació*, eds., Margarida Atzieta i Montserrat Palau (Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, del 26-29 d’Abril 1995), 179.

110. Antoni Batista, “Maria-Mercè Marçal. Des d’uns ulls de dona,” *Treball* 22 de Nov. 1979. [m’enfronto amb una espècie de buit perquè tot ha estat escrit des d’una òptica determinada. Estem en una mena d’albada de la poesia ‘des d’uns ulls de dona.’]

111. Anne-Marie Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Speaking the Unspeakable* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 21.

112. It is significant to note that the literal English translation of this line would be ‘Naked like a blood’: it is important to understand the intention of the author to use a rhetorical figure: personification.

113. M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), 98.

114. Lluïsa Julià, “Utopia i exili en la poesia de Maria-Mercè Marçal,” in *El Gai Saber, Introducció als estudis gais i lèsbics*, ed. Josep-Anton Fernández (Barcelona: Llibres de l’Índex, 2000), 361.

115. Kristeva defined *chora* ‘as a modality of significance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as

the distinction between real and symbolic. We emphasise the regulated aspect of the *chora*: its vocal and gestural organization is subject to what we shall call an objective *ordering* [*ordonnancement*], which is dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure'. "The Semiotic and Symbolic" in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), p. 26-27.

116. Ibid., 26.

117. Ibid., 28.

118. Maria-Mercè Marçal, "Sota el signe del Drac, prologue to *Llengua Abolida*", *Àlbum Maria-Mercè Marçal* [on-line] (Barcelona: Centre Català del PEN Club, desembre 1998 accessed 15 May 2003); available from <http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms/mmmarçal/pdf/marçal.pdf>; Internet. [Aquest és el punt de partida de *Desglaç*. L'hora del desglaç és una hora dolorosa pero oberta. Hi ha una mort. Desapareix la carcassa que immobilitza, però que també sustenta, el sòlid dona pas al líquid, els contorns es fonen.]

119. Ibid., [Camí fluid, de nou sense esquemes ni pautes, que és alhora camí de retorn, de reveure, de retrobar, de reidentificar, de reanomenar, de refer-se.]

120. Kristeva, 47.

121. Julia Kristeva, *Histoires d'amour* in *Tales of Love* trans. by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1987), 25.

122. Anna Montero, "Anna Montero entrevista Maria-Mercè Marçal" *Daina. Revista de Literatura* no.1, (1988), 80. [Maria-Mercè Marçal refusa aquesta oposició negativa, de privació d'iniciativa per a la dona

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o, en el seu destret, de rebuig de la maternitat per incorporar-se a la “cultura”, i malda per aconseguir un “àmbit on es puga ser dona, sense renunciar a ser *natura* ni a fer cultura”.]

**123.** Julia Kristeva, *Histoires d’amour* in *Tales of Love* trans. by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1987), 303.

**124.** Guillem Viladot, “Catàleg d’una sexualitat”. *Avui Cultura*, (5 June 1988), 3. [Es tracta d’una maternitat aconseguida per la maduresa i fruïment de la sexualitat com una plenitud del propi jo en el jo mateix gairebé partenogenèticament, de la sexualitat en la més rotunda privacitat, és a dir, com una intervenció del mascle de mínima presència, de tal manera que la identitat de la femella resta invulnerada, sense que la simetria narcisista hagi sofert cap pertorbació.]

**125.** Lluïsa Julià, “Contra les llengües abolides,” *Serra d’Or* no. 467 (nov. 1998): 26 [Però l’encontre d’igual a igual és un miratge i l’única manera d’estimar-lo és que ell abandoni l’antiga llei i es transformi en un nadó als seus braços. La imatge del pare es transcendeix per a esdevenir el signe d’autoritat.]

**126.** Maria-Mercè Marçal, “L’escriptora del mes,” *Catalan Writing* no. 6 (1992): 81.

**127.** Maria-Mercè Marçal, “Sota el signe del Drac, prologue to *Llengua Abolida*”, *Àlbum Maria-Mercè Marçal* [on-line] (Barcelona: Centre Català del PEN Club, desembre 1998 accessed 15 May 2003); available from <http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms/mmmarçal/pdf/marçal.pdf>; Internet. [Ombra rapaç, falcó, esparver reial: vigilant, jutge, castigador o exculpador, la seva absència pot ésser més inquietant que la seva presència visible.]

**128.** Joana Sabadell, “Maria-Mercè Marçal: The Passion and Poetry of Feminism,” trans. by Patsy Boyer in *Recovering Spain’s Feminist Tradition*, ed., Lisa Wollendorf (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2001), 360.