

Tiré de 'mother, not mother'

di brandt

Des poèmes du corps marqué de / par la mère.

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let me tell you, dear Reader,
about the time

my body was a ship & i
sailed the seas

of downtown Toronto in it,
sails billowing,

full of wind, spirit breath,
baby's breath.

& the young men on Bloor
averted their eyes

& the Portugese construction
workers on Huron Street

whistled through their teeth
& grunted

'ah, now, there's a mama'

& the young women in the park
coming suddenly into view

with their strollers on the green
grass, & i sailing

down the sidewalks past them,
glorious in my pride

ah, dear Reader, let me tell you
how i loved my body then,

my huge floating belly, my nipples
big, dark, swollen

with milk, leaking desire,
golden, liquid,

all over the bed & the pillow
& the floor.

ah, how i loved my lover then,
who filled me with such bounty,

erotic trembling, oceanic bliss.

smacking, sucking, stroking
my sunlit prow, big with child.

it was then, dear Reader,
my brain sank into my womb,

dark lipped, bearded, dripping:
with child, with child, with child.

such a grand billowing
on the high seas, such unfurling,

such a mighty flowering among
the busy streets,

expecting, pregnant.

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what the English audience
didn't understand:

that telling my story
didn't make me one of them.

that my fear of being silenced
isn't obsolete.

i came from far away,
& brought everything with me.

the body remembers being
beaten & tortured & killed.

i stole the language
of their kings and queens,

but i didn't bow down to it,
i didn't become a citizen.

how hard it is to tell a story
so it can be heard.

how easily the reader climbs
on top of it,

pronouncing judgement,
the eternal optimist, tourist,

pointing fingers

it wasn't about being Mennonite,
(or Indian or Jew),

it was about you, you.

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how glad i am to be a human
being & not a Wasp

is this about gender or isn't it?

oceans are drying & here we sit
discussing words.

the roaring in your ears,
the whale inside you: listen.

how much you wanted to cry
in the night but couldn't

how deeply the body carries
its violence, well hidden,

afraid of its own speaking

say it slowly, each syllable,
out loud:

MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM
EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM
EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE
MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH

how much you needed her,
through the centuries,

the here & now

what kind of reaching out,
what kind of holding,

what kind of touch between us,
listener:

between the hiss of consonants,
the inner wail, the heart

beating its old music, deep,
& hot, & unforgiving