Touching Narratives

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‘Why do you strip me from myself?’ Marsyas the satyr cries out as he is flayed by Apollo. In the midst of his agony, against all odds, Marsyas retains his eloquence. As nature writers search for new narratives to express our embeddedness in the more-than-human world, this Greek myth with its allusions to corporeality, psychic development and the connections between writing, the skin and the land speaks to us of passionate resistance to the triumph of humanity over animality. The consistent reappearance of the story of Marsyas during the Renaissance, its representation by Baroque artists and its recent revival in Anish Kapoor’s giant sculpture *Marsyas* in the Tate Modern attest to its undiminished relevance.

Historically, in Renaissance art, the depiction of Marsyas was heavily influenced by allegorical readings which go back to Plato. They acknowledged Dante’s invocation to Apollo at the start of the *Paradiso*, as well as the Florentine Neo-Platonists and their heirs. Marsyas’ fate within this genre tells of the necessary diminishment of the body as a pre-condition for the release of man’s true, inner, spiritual nature; of the victory of divine harmony over earthly passion, or light and reason over primitive darkness realised through the ‘barbaric’ pipes contending with the ‘divine’ lyre.

Today, Marsyas’ loss of his skin is most commonly read as a psychological metaphor for early issues in infancy where the inside and outside of psychic space lacks delineation, and boundaries of self and other need to be established. In this sense it speaks of the split between writing, the body and the land. As a musical contest it is concerned with the production of sound, including speech, and aesthetic judgement. The rich texture of possible meanings offers a point of departure to consider engagement with the ecological humanities.

For nature writers, Marsyas’ predicament especially resonates with the conflicts inherent in the hybrid structure of nature writing as a first-person account exposing an inward, psychological exploration in conjunction with an investigation of the physical world that aims to eschew an ontology of dominance. Nature writers, including scholars working in the ecological humanities and animal geographers who work poetically, seek to represent the more-than-human world not as a nut to be cracked, an object to be mined for meaning and left vulnerable to exploitation and maltreatment but to evoke this world through a narrative that touches, that calls us to dwell within a nature

full of mysterious forces. A narrative that is open to healing the other within us and the other that is nature. The cruelty of Apollo's knife is balanced in these narratives by the possibility of the healing touch of the physician and the 'talking cure' of psychoanalysis.

Metaphorically, the nature writer's heart-felt response to Ovid's rendering of Marsyas' fate might be embodied in a writerly 'light touch' which caresses the imagination and fleshes the word. Within this economy skin becomes the sign of our transformability, an organ breathing in and out (back and forth, between) that opens the imagination, imbibes language and makes the tentative marks of a shared vulnerability. As Steven Connor remarks, it signifies 'our ability to become other, as well as our identity, our ability to persist and survive in that becoming other' (32).

The transformations undergone by nature writing since its modern manifestations as a celebration of wilderness set apart from the forces of industrialisation to its present day emphasis on interrogations of the place of the human within the natural order and the need to redress the 'failure of the rationalised world to acknowledge and to adapt ... to the ... ecological support base it draws on in the long-denied counter-sphere of "nature"' (Plumwood 4) implicitly look back to Ovid's understanding of language in his portrayal of such figures as Marsyas in his *Metamorphoses*. Lynn Enterline summarises this understanding as a 'desire to "reactivate" the body's material relation to the world in a way that does not separate words from matter, ideas from the flesh' (248). Ovid is fascinated by moments in which the body changes form despite its owner's desire or will. Equally, he is fascinated by the power of words to 'move' us on two levels. First there is the artist's 'touch' signifying power over the world and secondly, there is the power of words that are directed inward, 'penetrating' and affecting us. Together these form a reciprocal link between mind and world that Ovid understands through the classical rhetorical formulation of images not as mere representations of the world but as a force that can alter it. Aesthetics and ethics can be understood as meeting at this point in nature writing where the desire to be emplaced in the wonders of a more-than-human agency and complexity is not a didactic reflection of environmental circumstances but a palpable force expressed through images and figures that are derived from our fleshly, tactile origins in infancy. This configuration conforms to classical rhetoric's aim to both please and to move.

Don Scheese historicises this movement when he comments on the profound change brought about in nature writing by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 (31-32). It inaugurated the literature of environmental apocalypse in which the surface of the earth, its 'ecstatic skin' was seen as poisoned and scarred by human actions. It changed the way in which we saw our planet. Later our perception of the earth was again irrevocably altered by

the photographs taken by the Apollo astronauts. A shimmering, fragile world was revealed to us, one that promoted a global effort to reduce destruction, deforestation and pollution. Today nature writers are confronted by the escalating threat of global warming and catastrophic rates of extinction. In the search for narratives with which to respond to this devastation, the myth of Marsyas offers ways to explore new versions of being-in-the-world that refigure the dualistic regime of internal and external, rational and emotional, self and world.

In this reworking, skin figures as an image of abundant connections, of folding and unfolding. Rather than seeing skin as possessing an inside and an opposing outside, it is imagined as complex and manifold, stretched out or involuted, pleated or rucked so the outside is folded over to become an inside. In looking at the possibilities inherent in this reworking I focus on three moments in the history of Marsyas' representation. First in Ovid's account of the 'division' and 're-membering' of Marsyas in his *Metamorphoses*, I argue that marked skin signifies memory, a refusal to forget. The marks and incisions in skin are a model for markings on paper that re-activate our memory of material origins in the maternal body of the earth and the necessity of recognising and accepting our ecological origins.

The second moment is an interpretation of Titian's painting *The Flaying of Marsyas* in which I postulate a movement beyond the thematics of the knife's cut on the individual to a fleshy, corporeal, cultural life that is not necessarily contingent upon ordeal and trauma. Such a move requires a recognition of the necessity of empathy with our more-than-human others. Finally, Anish Kapoor's sculpture *Marsyas* is examined as a 'breathing' space that generates a sonorous perception surrounding us and inspiring the imagination. Overall, the relevance of these three 'texts' for nature writers is couched within a psychoanalytic understanding of a psychic container that is brought into being by skin and sound.

This psychoanalytic understanding is one in which skin literally shapes our world and gives a sense of our shape in it. During birth, mammals experience a uterine massage that stimulates the commencement of breathing. This interaction prepares the skin in its pre-birth stages to an awakening as a being with a surface. Throughout the twentieth century, an understanding of the skin as giving rise to the ego was developed, beginning with Freud's assertion in 'The Ego and the Id' that 'the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity but is itself the projection of the surface'. In the English translation he added a footnote that 'the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly those springing from the surface of the body. The ego is thus

a mental projection of the surface of the body' (26). This understanding of the constitution of the ego in which the outside is an inside culminated in Didier Anzieu's concept of the skin ego.

Before Anzieu's publication of *The Skin Ego*, Esther Bick was the first to undertake an in-depth study of the psychological function of the skin. She speculated that the skin functions as a container from the very earliest stages of infancy, creating a passive experience of being held together. The containing function of the skin, however, has its counterpart in catastrophic anxieties about disintegration. She writes that, 'in its most primitive form the parts of the personality are felt to have no binding force among themselves and must therefore be held together in a way that is experienced by them passively, by the skin functioning as a boundary' (55-6). Only when the infant feels it has a skin that holds its body together can a concept of space within the self arise. This space within 'contains' the imagination which is experienced paradoxically as without bounds—and therefore subject to hubris—and yet given form by the skin—making it subject to corporeality. Anzieu's theory of the skin ego situates the skin as a dynamic psychic and physical interface between the subject and the world. He proposes that 'the ego is the projection on the psyche of the surface of the body' so that a skin ego is 'a mental image of which the ego of the child makes use during the early phases of its development to represent itself as an ego containing psychical contents on the basis of the experience on the surface of the body' (1985: 40). Anzieu here emphasises the positive role of the skin in providing ego consistency rather than being assaulted.

Skin functions not only to differentiate but, as in Luce Irigaray's figure of two hands held together palm to palm, evokes the undifferentiated maternal contact of the womb, where sensory experience is that of being 'palpated without seeing' (154). It is this undifferentiated maternal substratum which lies at the heart of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and which he sees as the origin of the world and of language. For Ovid, a maternal nature possesses the power of the artist's touch over the bodies she creates but the 'birth' of language as a force in the world also violates the maternal body. Marina Warner notes that:

Marsyas' music sang the praises of the Mother ... and so there may be buried beneath the Ovidian story a much earlier account of the Olympian victory over older powers, with Apollo not only asserting Apollonian control over the demi-beast's Dionysian pleasure, but also quelling any nostalgia for the ancient Magna Mater. This relates to flayed bodies: Marsyas in his torment is butchered, reduced to meat on a hook, to the non-individualised raw flesh of form-before-form. (126)

Our primary source for the myth is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, completed in the year 8BPE during the reign of the Emperor Augustus. The short, savage section

on Marsyas is inserted in the midst of a series of divine revenge killings. The entire story is not related in this section but dispersed throughout the text. The tale begins earlier when Minerva, having seen a reflection of herself playing the pipes in a river, was so dismayed by the sight of her puffed out cheeks and reddened face she threw the pipes away. Marsyas found the pipes and became so proficient at playing them he challenged Apollo to a contest. In order to win, Apollo turned his lyre upside down and demanded Marsyas do the same with the pipes. Unable to compete under these circumstances, Marsyas' punishment was to be flayed alive.

Ovid presents the scene as a spectacle of dismemberment rather like those watched by audiences in the Roman arena. As part-goat part-human with furry thighs and cloven hooves, the satyr is associated with uncivilised, instinctual behaviour and appetite. He is linked to Dionysus and distinguished from the human order so a punishment in which he is reduced to meat is seen as fitting. Apollo's position of power permits him to act with gratuitous cruelty within the law but for Marsyas, the victim, time is running backwards: he turns back into undifferentiated matter as the integument that delineates his selfhood is stripped from him.

Ovid presents the first transformation of the satyr into raw meat as punishment for his 'boundless' imagination and consequent challenge of the gods. Marsyas' crisis has come about because he is an animal body that has produced meaningful *human* sound. Fittingly his 'inside' is exposed as mere meat. His cry epitomises the resistance of the flesh to being cast aside by a 'disembodied' discourse that seeks to transcend it. Paula James writes that:

the stripping of the satyr's skin from the surface of his limbs leaves his palpitating insides on view. Within this one wound, which becomes his essence, organs and nerves go on throbbing and beating ... so that the language of the passage describing what remains of Marsyas seems to be mimicking the very lyre that has defeated him ... Marsyas becomes, for one brief moment, a living lyre. (96)

He also becomes, in effect 'singing meat' and through the combination of lyre and singing meat he retains his dual constitution of human and animal. Despite being strung up by his fetlocks and rendered motionless he is still able to move his audience by his music.

This gruesome transformation appears to be balanced by a reprieve in which Marsyas undergoes a natural metamorphosis into a river fed by the tears of his mourners. He is 're-membered' in this reading through the mourning of the textual audience whose tears are absorbed by the earth and transformed into a river named Marsyas, the 'clearest of Phrygian streams'. This transformation

both gestures back to the stream in which Minerva saw her distorted image and forwards to one where the body itself, its tears, are the agent of language. Language emerges in association with grief, pain and loss, although the goddess Minerva's perception of her loss of beauty in her reflection in the stream is a parody of Marsyas' catastrophic loss.

Despite his unequivocal defeat Marsyas does, therefore, acquire a potent identity as the river which carries his name. The weeping of the pastoral world turns into the lyricism of the water that is Marsyas transformed. Elena Theodorakopoulos suggests that the onlookers 'to some degree repair the damage done to Marsyas by Apollo's violence' (156). However, she also notes that Ovid changed the traditional story in which the blood of Marsyas became the river which bore his name and concludes:

Marsyas torn from himself sheds blood which disappears, and leaves behind no better part, no opus, nothing to preserve him at least symbolically besides the grief of those who witness or hear of his demise; his name is attached to the traces of others' mourning instead of his own suffering. (156-7)

The voice of Ovid's unnamed narrator also opposes the re-membering of the satyr. He seeks to have his death remembered solely as an illustration of the power of the gods. The story, therefore, presents its readers with two ways of remembering, those of pastoral lament and cautionary tale.

How might nature writers respond to Ovid's representation of the Marsyas myth with its warning of overreaching and song that 're-members' through the 'veins' of the land, a song that springs from the earth, singing of pain and loss? Marsyas' suffering has undergone a double transformation to be finally filtered through the grief of others who are left to tell his story by replicating the cuts to his body with the markings of words.

Steven Connor writes that:

most cultures seem to have a myth of the primal marking of the skin; whether it is the story of the inauguration of rivalry and blood-guilt ... or the distribution of the animals of creation into different habitats and functions as indicated by the markings on their skins ... All these are imagined in terms of the marking of a previously immaculate surface ... The marking of the skin is the arrival of accident and contingency. Whatever it may be, the first, arbitrary, unnecessary event is a marring, a maculation. Behind every myth of the coming to writing lies a myth of the marking of bodies or faces previously dreamed perfect, by the traces of injury and death, by the lines of age. (73)

These markings are interpreted by psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche (1976) as language's shaping force on the bodies in which we live. For Laplanche the maternal body is deeply involved in the setting up of language as a sign system. This does not, however, constitute a search for origins or an account of biological destiny. Rather, it is a retrospective focus on the distortions brought about by a patriarchal symbolic system. As Lynn Enterline points out 'Laplanche argues that the "marks of maternal care" on the infant's as yet nonsignifying, unmarked body are the beginnings of the sign system that will give that body its cultural significance and value. But he is careful to point out that these words can be called "maternal" only in the sense that they become so as a *result* of cultural practice' (250). In other words, he is not endorsing the constructs that conflate female, the animal and the emotional together as inferior to the male, human, and rational but placing these understandings within a cultural and historical construction.

A similar understanding of a trope of mother-as-matter is posited by David Abram in *The Spell of the Sensuous* where he argues that writing has gradually become divorced from its natural referents, the human body and the land, as a result of the dominance of western rationality. Rather than remembering its origin in the marring of the skin, language has become incorporated into the master narrative of western civilisation that has abandoned its roots in the living body of the earth. What has been lost is the sense that a material, organic body is at the source of the production of both speech and writing and that all bodies, not simply human bodies, are capable of what might be called 'speech'. The non-human, the Marsyas-like of the world, have been relegated to silence and regarded as incapable of speech. Instead, Abram seeks to resurrect the voice of Marsyas by suggesting that what 'lurks behind all the texts that we read is not a human subject but another animal, another shape of awareness (ultimately the otherness of animal nature itself)' (282).

Abram uses the term 'storied' knowledge to refer to a way of understanding that differs from our current abstracted way of knowing, an understanding that reflects the complex ways in which we relate to the living sensuous world around us.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's theories of perception as participatory and of human language as rooted in sensorial experience, Abram goes on to show how the western linguistic model encourages 'a massive distrust of sensorial experience while valorizing an abstract realm of ideas hidden behind or beyond the sensory appearances' (72). To think of human language in this way, argues Abram, is to justify seeing humans as significantly different from other beings and consequently to justify 'the increasing manipulation and exploitation of

nonhuman nature by, and for, (civilized) humankind' (77). Abram proposes an alternative to seeing language as a mere code or signifying system which accords with Ovid's claims for rhetoric.

Ovid's account of the myth of Marsyas suggests to the nature writer the need to reconsider what it means to be subject to language and the body without splitting the two asunder. It suggests that the overarching challenge to the 'gods' can be reinterpreted as the necessary challenge to an overly dominant rationality and an attempt to reinstate language as a force for change in the world and not merely a representation of it. It states that the gratuitous violence of the knife should not be confused with the incisiveness necessary for understanding but that this must be balanced by an affective dwelling in the world. Modifying the legacy of Apollo necessitates a revaluation of the dominant traits of our culture and the embrace of our animal selves. Ovid's story of Marsyas recalls us to an understanding of materiality that cannot be sundered from the earth. He shows us that the earth is saturated by the blood and tears of our bodies and the bodies of others that are re-membered through the voice of narrative.

Titian's painting, *The Flaying of Marsyas*, recapitulates the graphic cruelty of Ovid's story while centring on allegorical significances in Christian-platonic terms. It celebrates humanist ideologies in which Marsyas symbolises the triumph of divine art over human art and the 'redemption of the sufferer' through ecstatic agonies. This may account for the eerie lack of agony on Marsyas' face although it is equally possible that Titian is affirming Ovid's vision of continuous organic transformation in which nothing truly dies but is reborn in a different form.

In *Masks of Difference* David Richards describes the orderly composition of the painting in which arms bent in right-angled shapes repeat themselves across the canvas. Only Marsyas' 'goat's legs and human torso break the orderliness of these lines' (11). The picture's composition, he continues,

divides in two antagonistic directions: out beyond the canvas to an ethereal and unrepresentable vision located somewhere above the middle top of the picture, and diametrically below that point to the middle bottom where a pool of blood is forming. Between these points hangs the body of Marsyas and this place smells of blood even at the moment of exaltation. (11-12)

Like Ovid, Titian presents the audience with contradictory messages. Although the painting evokes the inverted crucifixion of St Peter, Marsyas' death does not speak solely of resurrection but plunges downwards into the darkness of blood on the forest floor. The painting's allegory shows that the refined Apollonian world deals with its wild savage other by wielding a knife. Richards writes that:

the painting radiates from the knife at the centre. The god seems to cut the human half of the satyr from his animal half as his “art” cuts the human from animal nature and the civil from the sylvan. The knife will not be denied its clarifying role as that which separates and divides, once and for all the Apollonian from its other. It is the instrument with which Apollo makes his triumphant acts of designation. ... The knife is the divine caesura, the image of an absolute separation, it makes all the *difference*. (18)

Apollo appears to be triumphant, wielding the knife that divides and structures the world into the civilised and its others. But the contemplative presence of Midas, generally taken to represent Titian himself, is not involved in the action. He seems lost in thought, reflecting on the spectacle of Marsyas’ debasement and questioning Apollo’s triumph. Our attention is drawn to Midas by the gleam on his attire and his separation indicates that what we are looking at is a representation of his meditation projected onto the ‘skin’ of the canvas.

The knife, Midas insists, does not necessarily perform an act of redemption. It also performs torture and execution. It is the rational mind’s need to know taken to the point of madness. Apollo seeks in the body of Marsyas for an answer to the question of how it is that a mortal creature can rival him as a music-maker. The irony is that being omnipotent and immortal he is unable to understand that the power of Marsyas’ art is rooted in his vulnerability, a vulnerability Apollo despises. Unable to feel sympathy or empathy, ignorant of loss, death and ordinary human/animal emotions Apollo is cut off from the world of human creativity that is dependent on suffering and destructiveness even as it endeavours to make reparation for it. Apollo is only capable of annihilating the animal other in the belief that he can in the process find the other’s talents and use them for himself. Although he believes his action is directed by the power of reason, it is a savage act that actually brings him closer to the ‘animal’ other both within and without that he seeks to dominate.

Structurally the painting has an outer containing membrane of colour that follows the rose-coloured curve of the king’s cloak to the belly of the dog, across Midas’ feet to be picked up in the pool of blood and the figure of the musician. It appears on the lines of his bow, on the pan-pipes hanging in the tree, across the top of the canvas and down to the shoulder of the Pan figure and back to the colour of Midas’ cloak. Apollo has his back to this warm skin that contains the world of the picture. He repudiates it as he looks in towards death. Midas/Titian, on the other hand, is wrapped in the warmth of this rosy-glow; his body emerges from it without losing contact with it. By remaining ‘in touch’ Midas is able to contemplate and render manageable the dangerous and threatening emotions within the self, to remain alive and hopeful and to contain all that seeks to be omnipotent by tolerating limits and loving steadfastly. As an artist,

Midas/Titian speaks of the ruthlessness inherent in the pursuit of art, of all that is terrible within us yet is part of the ordinary human process of transforming thought and feeling into art.

Titian creates a canvas replete with the tactile beauty of fur, foliage, clouds and sparkling water as if underscoring the notion that aesthetic pleasure and cruelty are inseparable from the body. He seems to be commenting on the impossibility of the artist bringing the body of his work to fruition without mutilating it. He asks the questions, can psychic interiority, language, aesthetics and ethics be attained without paying the penalty enacted by the knife? Is human subjectivity possible without that cut separating it from the non-human? Is there no alternative to Walter Benjamin's assertion that 'there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'? (258).

Midas' reverie invites the nature writer to contemplate these questions and to consider not simply the centrality of the knife but the desire behind the cutting. Should the knife be repudiated or accepted and balanced by other modes of being? It is the motivation behind the use of the knife that is crucial. Apollo is intent on dehumanising and debasing Marsyas. While Foucault would read therapeutic uses of the knife as a masquerade in which punishment consists, not of flaying, but being forced into a discursive discipline, psychoanalysis insists the self can only be discovered in communication. The price paid for becoming human is to accept the mind being laid open not to the knife but to language.

The 'knife' of language possesses a subtlety that enables it to discriminate between layers, to behave in ways that repudiate grasping, prodding or slashing and opt instead to caress. In the caress, there is an approach or address to another skin that is recognised as possessing sensation and that does not hold self and world apart but allows them to mingle and become manifold.

Layers of matter are not separated out by the caress into binary contrasts but experienced as a continuum ranging from dense to delicate where the exploration of folds and pleats reveals dark, dense material to be contiguous with light delicate material. There is a kind of equilibrium, a 'delicate balance', or equipoise, in such a caress which is not characterised by passivity on the one side and activity on the other. Instead it is creative, mutual, reciprocated, and actively constituted by both parties.

The caress is not that which delivers up the other as object or animal. The caress is a way of bringing into being that which is touched. It is not the opposite of the knife's incision, however. Knife and caress are complementary; they stand together in opposition to the violence of no contact or withholding. Lack of any touch is the touch that kills without touching. It is touch that refuses contact.

The very lack of any imprint, mark or trace constitutes a profound and deadly violence. It speaks of the silent cover-up that repudiates all music, all narrative voice.

In his sculpture, Anish Kapoor endeavours to trace a direction that opposes the cover-up by creating doorways that open up new spaces. In 'Untitled' (1992) he created a giant monolith of granite with a doorway signifying natural forces in conjunction with human activities and history. By placing your head inside the lintel, Norman Bryson states, you become 'a being that has never altogether broken its connection to the mineral life of the earth from whose elements your own organic body ultimately derives' (104-125). Homi Bhabha describes the convex curves or concave funnels of the 1997 'Untitled' as creating 'a sudden disappearance of surface in a deep, dark hole [that] literally cuts the ground from under our feet' (Bhabha 24, qtd in Forster 122). At other times his sculptures disrupt the relation of surface to body and undercut:

the difference between what we explore only with our eyes and what we can grasp only through the physical sense of touch, that is, the hypothesis that sculpture belongs entirely to the viewer. With utmost precision, the continuously curving surfaces of the sculptures transform the traditional relationship of surface and body into a continuum. (Bryson 122)

Skin focuses Anish Kapoor's imagination in such a way that he has said, 'there's a kind of implied unreality about skin that I think is wonderful' (qtd in Warner 129). He has 'forever wanted to turn the red of earth and body into sky' (Warner 131). The 'skin' of his Marsyas shimmers with an evanescence reminiscent of the photographs of the earth taken by the Apollo astronauts. It appears to tremble from imaginary breezes moving over its surfaces, to rise and fall with the breath of life from within.

Kapoor is not expressing a desire to turn away from corporeality but to turn away from the broken and horrifying body of chaos, to envision an order where destruction is transformed into creative plenitude. As with Ovid and Titian, this plenitude is associated with maternal materiality and the enfleshment and emergence of bodies. Marina Warner writes of the Marsyas sculpture that:

through the vast and passionate web of crimson skin, the skied body of Marsyas reveals to the viewer the invisible fabric of the world, the very impress of the impalpable forces that shape phenomena, that vibrate and pulse in the air, fold and stratify mountains, stellate snowflakes and cause waves to break in scalloped rills. (132)

There is a vast echoing spaciousness to this work that replaces the terrible, howling void, the winds of interstellar space. The viewer is drawn into a visceral

close-up of the body through throat-like openings and whorled labyrinths like giant ears. These open into vast, internal spaces in which it seems natural to imagine the intimate sounds of amplified breathing. The skin envelope becomes a comforting 'sound envelope'.

Anzieu has argued that it is a 'sound envelope' that constitutes the bodily ego's relation to space in terms of breath. Breathing, he claims, is one of the primary ways by which the nascent self acquires interiority. 'The auditory sensations', he states:

produced when sounds are made are associated with the respiratory sensations which give the self a sense of being, a volume which empties and refills itself and prepares the self for its structuring in relation to the third dimension of space (orientation and distance) and to temporal dimensions. (157)

The Marsyas sculpture conjures up a sense of the body as an acoustic container that empties and refills with the voice-producing lungs constantly resonating with potential sound. It presents a shimmering sound bath that eludes all possible cover-ups because sound reaches us from everywhere; it surrounds and passes through us. Sound encompasses the earth with the music of life and hope. A music structured by the gut-strings of the lyre and produced by flesh.

It holds out to nature writers a promise of writing that is flesh and that refuses to objectify what it expresses. It seeks to remain passionately in touch with the more-than-human and to create markings reminiscent of the play of light on rippling water, the texture of a tree trunk, a palimpsest of growing layers. Of sap, like breath, rising and falling, releasing songs of place, echoed in the musical timbre of voice laid down on paper, literally shapely words, lines curving like a cupped hand around space that appears empty yet reveals something, touched and held in the cradle of the musical mother.

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