July 7, 1977: at the International Airport in Athens I board a Pan-American flight to New York City. I can already envision my homecoming. I will come back from the States with a graduate degree in American literature, with an understanding of American culture, with a greater competence in the English language. As I take a last look at the Greek landscape, nostalgia is already my invisible companion. It embraces both my past and my future. My present is practically non-existent. I am up in the air. My farewell rituals culminated a week prior to my departure date. I burnt my diary, the beginning of an aborted novel called *A World of Silence* which I had started when I was sixteen, and pages of bad prose poems heavily influenced by my reading of the French surrealists and symbolists during my high school years. I now think of this act of burning as a betrayal of myself, but a week ago it seemed to be a way of erasing personal traces, traces of language, whose absence could set me free and open to receive what is on the other side of the ocean. No matter what that burning in the kitchen sink meant, it was a gesture that defined me through language. It was the written word I was after. For the written word has always been after me. Playing hide-and-seek with one’s mother tongue is one of the many ways of adopting a second language, of entering into the labyrinth of Language.
August 1, 1978: I haven’t seen myself off to Greece yet. Instead, I cross the American border at Fort Erie and enter Canada. I carry in my purse my passport and the journal I kept the past year, a journal written in broken English. English words put together in Greek syntactical patterns.

December 5, 1983: Winnipeg is my home. I am writing my dissertation on the Canadian long poem. I am married to a Canadian. I dream in English. I write in English. And I’ve become a landed immigrant today. A status that legalizes my feelings about this city, about Canada, that allows me to live permanently where I already feel at home. But this permanence is provisional. I inhabit a plain that has many edges.

This is the first time I used the word immigrant with reference to myself. This word hits me in the face and in the heart. It ejects me from what I cannot leave (my past/my Greek language), and throws me into a place that constantly excludes me on the principle of difference. My ideas, my habits, my amorous moods, my temperament are, quite often, not seen as expressions of me, but as specimens of the Greek stereotype I am supposed to represent. How can I explain that, although I am a Macedonian like Aristotle, I am not a mimetic being, a signified brand. I am expected to be homogeneous at the expense of my personal heterogeneity. I’ve said “No” to those who invited me to recite Homer by heart. I’ve given no response to those who described to me, very vividly, the dirty washrooms they visited in the small island towns of Greece.
Immigration is a form of abjection. It is a desire for a yet unknown object, a desire that kills its subject. I sit beside myself in everyday life. I look over my shoulder when I write. I said that I'm at home here. Yes, but I don't feel at home with myself. My immigrant condition affords me the (perverse?) pleasure of a doubled view. My language is the window that looks onto my home and into my homelessness. My language knows no boundaries. It does not express the geography that puts labels on writing, speech, thought.

It is perhaps natural for Canadians born in this country to want to trace their origins, to visit places their ancestors left behind a long time ago, to try to learn the language of a past they didn't live. It is definitely difficult for recent immigrants who came over to Canada with their families, or left their countries as refugees, to cope with their duality, to measure both the old and the new country. But it is almost impossible for me to practise these measuring tactics, these acts of discovery. I am an immigrant here without a family; I am an immigrant who left my country not out of deprivation or disillusion. To look back would mean for me to undergo an Orphic journey, to marry the possibility of a re-encounter with my past, to be lost in the shades of a world that cannot absorb me now, to be caressed by memories that belong to my other. For I am not the same person I was on July 7, 1977. I am what I've become after I got lost in the open space of the Canadian prairies. I am what Canadians have made of
me, those anonymous faces that turn toward me when they hear my accent (not my voice), those friends who embraced me and my otherness together.

Writing in broken English does mean translating from one language into another. It is instead a translation of contrasting systems of perception, a simultaneous rendering of the past and the present. Broken English is written in the rhythm of a being that lives beneath language. This being exists through violent silence, instinctual knowledge, restlessness. Its language is the bastard child of the coming together of two selves, of two geographies, of two languages. This being suspends itself on the edge of dying and of giving birth. It has an aleatory nature, for it is constantly becoming its other, what it is not, what it can be, ultimately, what it is being.

My life seems to draw its own map, straight lines, and a few curves, that delineate the trajectory of my movements in ways I still cannot comprehend. It is a reversible map: on the one side there is the map of the Greek language and geography that slowly expels me from its territory; on the other side there is the map of the English language and Canada that gradually adopts me. The edges are sharper now.

To live bathed in a language other than my mother tongue, I have to partially drown the being that was nourished by the mother tongue. I said partially, which means that I can only gaze beyond the edge. The distance in the eye of the beholder is not one of difference, but of difference. Fighting
with the devilish spirit of English prepositions, making my faith in the second language credible to myself and to others, discovering that meanings of one culture cannot find corresponding words in another culture, all these things reveal to me that the roots of my linguistic behavior lie in langage, not in langue or in parole. When the speaking and writing subject of a second language is a writer, s/he is endowed with an insight that takes her/him to that realm of language where words as signs are not yet divided into signifiers and signifieds. The borderline that marks the conflict between the first and second language marks as well the stage of language where words are beings in themselves prior to becoming the proper names of things.

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The doubleness of my language becomes the precursor of my personality. It is inscribed onto my skin, onto love’s body. It permeates my clothing, my cooking. It is translated as signs that find their integration into the circuits of exchange: Greek/English; Canadian/Greek. These two linguistic identities of the self emerge as a dynamic dyad that insists on being considered as one. Yes, I’m aware of the paradox. But living on the edge of two languages, on the edge of two selves named and constructed by language, liberates the self from a monologic existence. The self becomes a being of multiple meanings and jouissance and many little deaths.

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My accent is the sonorous indicator of the scission that gives my self its shape. I want to get rid of my accent but I also want to keep it. In either case I will be a loser. In both cases words will be wounded. The wounded word is not the victim of doubleness. It is a sign of a lavish complicity.
Not place and language. But place of language. This has been my curse and my blessing as a writer whose imagination takes the shape of foreign letters, the voice of sounds that my tongue imbues with a doubleness. It is all in the ear. And in the self. The place of language.