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"THE LITERATURE OF THE COLONIZED":  
FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN THE NOVELS  
OF MARGARET DULEY

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**"The Literature of the Colonized":  
Feminist Perspective in the Novels of Margaret Duley**

**By**

**© Joan Penney, B.A.(Hons.), B.Ed.**

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### *Abstract*

This thesis traces the developing feminist perspective of Newfoundland author Margaret Duley (1894-1968). Her four novels, *The Eyes of the Gull* (1936), *Cold Pastoral* (1939), *Highway to Valour* (1941), and *Novelty on Earth* (1942), constitute a significant addition to Newfoundland literature and embody a transition from imitation of British tradition to the establishment of Duley's own voice as a Newfoundland woman writer. Duley's novels are clearly feminist in nature, becoming more forceful and outspoken with each new publication. The feminism of her early novels is exhibited often in the use of imagery such as veils, masks, enclosure, and possession; but she moves in her later writing to forthright feminist philosophy and the assertion of the autonomy of the heroines. As an author working in a colonial society, Duley echoes Canadian literary tradition in imitating the literature of Britain as she first begins work as a novelist. She rapidly outgrows models of literature in the British male perspective, however, and, like many nineteenth-century female writers, rejects them. She then moves beyond the implications of her imagery to speak openly from a feminist point of view, thus "de-colonizing" her work, both in terms of geography and gender. In establishing her own position as an author, Duley moves from nineteenth to twentieth-century styles and themes in literature, but, without exception, the work that she produces arises from feminist attitudes and perspectives, uniquely rooted in her experiences in Newfoundland.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

"I consider women's literature as a specific category, not because of biology, but because it is, in a sense, the literature of the colonized."

Christiane Rochefort,  
"The Privilege of Consciousness."<sup>1</sup>

The novels of Margaret Iris Duley are unquestionably feminist in nature. In each of her works, philosophical outlook, internal structure, and patterns of imagery combine to underline her importance as a woman writer. In each novel the reader is undeniably bound to the mind of a woman, and in most instances this woman is herself trapped within the restrictions of her society. Her panic and dismay at her position in life are overwhelming, and the reader is similarly drawn into her despair. In each successive novel, however, the heroine moves closer to an assertion of her own autonomy. As Duley steps away from traditional models of female characters and other features of writing about women, she in essence (to use a term I have derived from feminist criticism) "de-colonizes" her own experience, and in a sense liberates both her heroines and herself from a history of subjugation. Pulling away from the British colonial and literary heritage, she becomes more determinedly individualistic as she develops as a writer. Her first novel is in the Gothic form, with the outport heroine springing from nineteenth-century British literature rather than from Newfoundland life.<sup>2</sup> From the thwarted life of this first heroine, Duley in

subsequent books makes great strides towards the emancipation of her female leads. As she does so, her muted subtext -- the undercurrent of metaphors and similes which tells its own story of the woman's restriction through her constant association with imagery that freezes, possesses, encloses, veils or masks her -- moves more and more to the surface of her work. In her final novel the text and subtext converge as Duley's work leaves any trace of British nineteenth-century writing behind. Here she emerges with a rich twentieth-century style of her own. In the feminist sense, she thus becomes fully de-colonized, writing directly of a new beginning for women authors as she recreates the relationship between men and women, not as she wishes it might be, but as she sees it in her own world. This thesis will follow the movement in Duley's writing from nineteenth to twentieth-century themes and styles, and from her initial quest for a voice as a woman writer to the full vocalization of experience found in her last work.

Margaret Iris Duley, one of five children, was born to Tryphena Chancey Soper and Thomas James Duley on September 27, 1894.<sup>3</sup> Tryphena Soper was a strong-willed, if not overbearing, woman who "seems to have been anxious to move up in the social world."<sup>4</sup> Her marriage to Margaret's father was certainly a step in that direction. He was a quiet, pleasant man who ran a jewelry business which kept the family well maintained until his death. Notably, at Tryphena's death Margaret received fewer bequests from her mother than did her sister. Silverware and other household items were passed to the married daughter so that "although Margaret and Gladys were treated equally in the matter of house and money, there was a distinct implication in the will that a married daughter was more worthy of gifts than an unmarried one."<sup>5</sup> Margaret's background was one influenced by a woman whose views on marriage and the woman's role must

have directly affected, if not agitated, her daughter's feelings.

Little is known of Margaret's childhood. Although several photographs exist, they do hardly more than reinforce the notion of Margaret and her brothers and sisters as children of a period. This in itself is important, however, as Margaret was the product of an era of change. In 1894 the graceful but restrictive elegance of the Victorian era was about to tumble headlong into the twentieth century and its two world wars. Margaret would have to endure the effects of these wars on her family, observe and experience the changing role of women in society, and seek her own redefinition of self as she began to support herself after her father's death in 1920. This last development must have been a difficult turn of events for a girl from a family that went so far as to follow "the prestigious ritual of the upper class Newfoundland families of the time by sending their daughters to finishing school in England."<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Margaret had been prepared for entry into a society which shortly would be in ruins.

Having been raised in the British tradition and actually educated in part in England, Margaret epitomized the upper class colonial whom her mother had hoped to raise. Margaret's experience in Newfoundland, however, was one of harsh reality in both environmental and human aspects. In the outpost realm, women did not serve as mere decorative ornaments in drawing rooms, but were equal to their husbands in making decisions, doing family chores, and earning income.<sup>7</sup> Margaret's experience when visiting her mother's home in Carbonear, Conception Bay, became that of the Victorian maiden dropped suddenly into the pitiless Newfoundland environment. The glimpses of the heritage she saw there were composed of poverty, tragic loss of life, and, too often, ignorance and narrowness of outlook. The Government House dinners she attended as a

"proper" colonial must have seemed ridiculous events in light of the distress she saw in the outport, yet the crude and often repulsive way of life necessary for existence in outport communities did not appeal to her either. Trapped in this dichotomy, Margaret was further frustrated by the lack of development in the intellectual community in St. John's. Since there was no university college in the town until 1925, literary discussions were a rare occurrence. Thus, while the literati in England were relishing Swinburne and the Rossettis, Duley lived in an isolated backwater and was destined to be read more often than not with ridicule. Her stand on feminism, love, and sex would have been considered advanced in any twentieth-century context, and was certainly incredible to the people of Newfoundland. Duley's upbringing, then, would serve only to prepare her for an era which was already in decline, and which would leave her grasping for a means of communicating her response to the newly developing society she could only imagine would eventually extend as far as her island home.

Duley's novels would center upon the relationship between men and women in such an emerging society, but before she was able to write in this vein, her first novel, *The Eyes of the Gull* (1936), would serve to articulate the restrictions she experienced in the world in which she lived. These restrictions were demonstrated appropriately enough in the Gothic tradition in which the book is written. In this work, Duley traces the painful destruction of a girl's dream of escape from her oppressive natural environment, as well as from the oppression of her mother. The novel is set in Newfoundland, and Isabel Pyke is the thirty-one year old innocent who struggles to escape from the harshness she endures there. Duley follows the psychological suffocation of Isabel's dream as well as her physical deterioration and discomfort. The principal literary influence upon



the work appears to be Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). In both novels, women undergo great mental and physical stress. Recent critics of women's literature have noted that this is a common occurrence in women's writing in the Victorian era, and that it differs from the tradition of the male Romantics:

...where the male Romantics glorified the 'buried life' to an ontology, Brontë [and other women writers of the period] explore... the mundane facts of homelessness, poverty, physical unattractiveness, and sexual discrimination or stereotyping that impose self-burial in women. While male poets like Arnold express their desire to experience an inner and more valid self, Brontë describes the pain of women who are restricted to just the private realm. Instead of seeking and celebrating the buried self, these women feel victimized by it; they long, instead, for actualization in the world.<sup>8</sup>

As a woman writer, Duley displays a similar authorial intention which sets her apart from male authors of the period, as she attempts to convey the woman's perspective in and about the world she inhabits.

Isabel Pyke's experience in the novel is that of the child-woman. Although she is thirty-one years old, she plays handmaiden to her mother and is constantly referred to as a girl. Much of her work is onerous; she cooks, cleans, and caters to her obese mother's demands at all hours of the day and night. Her only solace is the private dream she harbours of one day escaping to the warm and sunny land of Spain. Psychologically, this country is linked to a coming of age and new-found sensuality in Isabel, just as Newfoundland in its chill climate is seen as repressive to growth of any kind. Duley herself wrote later in her European journal that

It is useless to say that one does not ache sometimes for kinder skies and softer air than Nfld. will ever concede. Like all wild witchlike places the country can be magnificent - but who wants to live in magnificence that is too heavy for human flesh and bones ?<sup>9</sup>

Isabel's burden is relieved temporarily by the advent of British artist Peter Keen. His appeal to her is not only that of man to woman, but that of dream to dreamer as well. He replaces her need to escape to Spain by allowing her to experience a growing sensuality closer to home. In their relationship the double meaning of the text and the subtext becomes clear. While in the text, Peter brings love to Isabel's world, in the subtext, he thwarts her movement towards autonomy. He is constantly and deliberately referred to as the artist who creates her, who captures and freezes her on canvas, and who ultimately molds her to his own concept of her form. The British male artist's view of the Newfoundland woman, however, proves quite invalid.

Certainly Duley is not merely telling a tale of misguided love here, but is working towards part of a tradition of women's literature which has its own "double" form, making a distinctive "model":

One implication of this model is that women's fiction can be read as a double-voiced discourse, containing a 'dominant' and a 'muted' story, what Gilbert and Gubar call a 'palimpsest'....The orthodox plot recedes, and another plot hitherto submerged in the anonymity of the background [that is, the subtext], stands out in bold relief like a thumbprint.<sup>10</sup>

Patrick O'Flaherty notes that Peter's presence in the novel does little more than confuse an innocent girl's values for a summer:

The poppycock of Peter Keen's ideas, adolescent nonsense really, is embraced as profundity. He gets off scot-free after muddling her values for a summer, and neither he nor the novelist seems to think that he bears some responsibility for her future.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, Duley's point is that it is Isabel and no one else who bears the responsibility for her future. Although Isabel attempts to carry this burden, she is simply not strong enough to endure her hardships and the novel closes with her premature death shortly after Peter's departure.

Interestingly, the subplot of the novel anticipates this outcome as the story unfolds of two lovers of an earlier time who also died from grief and anguish caused by love. Isabel is likened to the dead Elfrieda in her passion and to Elfrieda's lover Josiah in her torment. As Josiah digs up the body of his lover, the allusions to *Wuthering Heights* are clearly evident:

He dug her up to see if there was any token in her coffin: and when he didn't find one he shook the dead thing until her head cracked against the ice. 'Twas a moonlight night, and a couple that was living close by, saw him clear as day. They were afraid to go out, he sounded that wild, but they waited until he was gone and then went across the graves and found the dead creature with her face turned up to the sky and her shoulders froze to the ground.<sup>12</sup>

The links to Brontë at this and other points in the novel are so apparent that Duley's first work may thus be seen not in light of any twentieth-century tradition but rather as an expression of the era of Victorian enclosure. Before Duley discovers her own voice, then, she locates, and echoes the frustrations within her literary heritage as a woman. In *The Eyes of the Gull* she has not found her own voice, but she has found a place to begin searching for it in literary tradition.

*The Eyes of the Gull* is Duley's first articulation of feeling that must in some part have been her own. Isabel's domination by her mother, her sense of the oppressive nature of Newfoundland, and her dream to escape to a country more suitable to her growth as a person, are all movements towards the direct stance on feminism which Duley would later develop. Isabel's death in this novel, however, seems inevitable as she lacks the spirit necessary to survive her continuing ordeal. Duley's later heroines would be drawn with much more force and determination, and thus would appear to be better equipped to deal with their respective societies.

*Cold Pastoral* was published in 1939, and was loosely based on events that occurred in New Melbourne, Trinity Bay, in March of 1936. Lucy Harris was lost in the woods for eleven days, and although she lived through the experience, both her frostbitten legs had to be amputated. Mary Immaculate Keilly, the heroine of *Cold Pastoral*, also becomes lost in the woods, but through the help of a mute woman who is thought mad in the community, she is rescued and brought to St. John's for treatment. Her attending doctor, Philip Fitz Henry, falls in love with her in spite of her teenage years. His family adopts her, and, unknown to them, she becomes involved in an innocent relationship with Tim Vincent, the boy who lives next door. Hannah, Philip's spying housekeeper, informs the doctor of the relationship. He turns on the two young "lovers" and, in the ensuing confusion, Tim and Mary elope. Subsequently they argue over their plight, and Tim, in his rage, leaves Mary, but only to die from injuries he sustains in a car accident shortly thereafter. Mary leaves Newfoundland to start life anew in England with her sister-in-law, Felice. Here she discovers entirely new (if not to her acceptably moral) attitudes towards life. The country girl turned small-town girl comes to see life on a much larger scale and is finally able to reconcile herself to its harshness. In spite of Philip's shortcomings, when he comes to visit her she proposes to him. Although this standard romantic ending can be seen as a weakness in the work, Mary does step forward as the modern woman to take what she wants.

In several respects *Cold Pastoral* represents a marked change in Duley's development as a writer. Unlike *The Eyes of the Gull*, *Cold Pastoral* displays a definite fascination with literary and folk allusions. The references to outside works explode in number as Duley seems to be attempting more than merely

showing off the scope of her reading. Her constant use of quotation from other writers, and from male writers in particular, may in fact be significant in terms of her attempt to find her own voice as author. As two recent critics have argued,

The female [writer]... does not experience the 'anxiety of influence' in the same way that her male counterpart would, for the simple reason that she must confront precursors who are almost exclusively male, and therefore significantly different from her.... On the one hand... the woman writer's male precursors symbolize authority; on the other hand, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity as a writer.<sup>13</sup>

The reasons for the numerous references in Duley's work may go even deeper:

As Elaine Showalter has shown, until the end of the nineteenth century the woman writer really was supposed to take second place to her literary brothers and fathers. If she refused to be modest, self-deprecating, subservient, refused to present her artistic productions as mere trifles designed to divert and distract readers in moments of idleness, she could expect to be ignored or (sometimes scurrilously) attacked.<sup>14</sup>

Duley's span of reading is in any case made very clear. She quotes Cowper, William Penn, James Stephen, Kipling, Catullus, Shakespeare, Poe, the Grimm brothers, Thomas Gray, Wordsworth, Chesterfield, Swinburne, the Bible, and, perhaps most importantly, Keats. The title of the novel is taken from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Certainly the pastoral element is important in the novel, as it is in essence the story of a country girl getting used to city life, and then leading a further double life between house and garden as she innocently loves two men at once. The coldness of her life, as suggested by the title, is twofold as well. Environmentally, she initially endures the same hardship as Isabel, although her nature is capable of producing a magical fairy life in the country. Emotionally, Mary is possessed as Isabel was by those around her; yet Mary has the opportunity to overcome this.

The reference to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is more significant when seen in light of its comment on art and life, however. Certainly the quality of frozen time is important in the child Mary's world, as her development both literally and figuratively is frozen by her experience in the woods, one side of her nature growing into womanhood, and the other, her "tin whistle side" as Tim calls it, remaining innocently in childhood. Keats's freezing of life in art through the representation of the Grecian urn is somewhat similar to the artistry of Peter Keen in *The Eyes of the Gull*. The artist who failed to capture Isabel is paralleled by a male poet who likewise attempts to encapsulate life on an urn. Duley's heroine, in contrast to Keats's static figures, moves from a state of possession to that of freedom, and thus develops a voice and will of her own. However much Duley may have respected Keats as an artist, the reference to him can thus be seen as an ironic one, since she as a woman writer was striving for her own voice in spite of the male tradition which had previously dominated literature. Duley is thus in a sense attempting to de-colonize women's literature, as she comments on her own experience in the colony of Newfoundland. In this the woman writer shares an experience with all literary subcultures, as Elaine Showalter points out:

In looking at literary subcultures, such as black, Jewish, Canadian, Anglo-Indian, or even American, we can see that they all go through three major phases. First, there is a prolonged phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views of social roles. Second, there is a phase of protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally there is a phase of self-discovery, a turning inward freed both from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, Feminine, Feminist, and Female.<sup>15</sup>

By the time that Mary walks into Philip's arms at the end of *Cold Pastoral*

-- and significantly it is the woman who holds the man -- Duley has begun the feminist perspective.

With this new perspective came Duley's own evaluation of her position as a writer, particularly in terms of geographical boundaries. After the publication of *Highway to Valour* in 1941, Duley wrote, "One of the things regarding a Nfld. novel is that there are no writers from the country and I feel we must emerge sometime."<sup>16</sup> Although, as O'Flaherty writes, "Newfoundland's literary links in Duley's day were with America and England, and not with Canada",<sup>17</sup> she herself wrote "I am very desirous of achieving the Canadian market."<sup>18</sup> This was to be achieved against the background of war, as O'Flaherty notes:

A sense of foreboding about what was taking place in Europe was no doubt partly responsible for leading Margaret Duley, in *Highway to Valour*, to take a fresh look at the country to which she belonged.<sup>19</sup>

Duley's own words are in agreement:

The times are sadly out of joint in England and other than that this side of the water has more comprehension of less civilized backgrounds - and Newfoundland is a country very close to the bone.<sup>20</sup>

The novel was dedicated to Newfoundland, "a country which the author loves and hates."<sup>21</sup>

As in *Cold Pastoral*, the action in *Highway to Valour* was based loosely on events that actually took place in Newfoundland. On November 18, 1929, an earthquake struck the Burin Peninsula on the south coast of Newfoundland. Several hours later, a tidal wave followed, killing twenty-seven people and injuring many others. Alison Feder notes that Duley's brother Cyril, "as the Chairman of the Outport Contact Committee... probably engaged his sister to be part of the proposed ladies' auxiliary" to aid the district in the disaster.<sup>22</sup>

Duley's novel was at any rate inspired by the tragedy. Her story centers on Mageila Michelei, the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, who is therefore said to have the gift of healing. Her powers cannot save her outport family, however, as they are all lost in the tidal wave. Like Duley's other heroines, Mageila is dominated by her mother in spite of Mageila's love for her, and is further "pinched between land and sea" as, again, Newfoundland's climate plays a role in the novel.<sup>23</sup> Spiritually crushed by the disaster, Mageila is comforted somewhat by the ministrings of Mrs. Slater, a recluse who comes down from her house on the hill to help the survivors of the tidal wave. Mageila recognizes in Mrs. Slater that "a spirit could be close companioned although its body stooped humbly for its maintenance."<sup>24</sup> In many ways Mrs. Slater epitomizes the independent and kindly spirit that Mageila seeks to develop in herself, almost as if Mageila were meeting a version of herself as she would be in spirit at the end of the novel. As Patricia Donnelly has written, these women

...are women who from childhood stand out as being separate from the crowd. They are more aware of the influence of the natural environment in their lives, and they feel a kinship with, or an animosity toward nature not consciously experienced by the other [less sensitive] women.<sup>25</sup>

Although Mrs. Slater is not in any way mentally deficient, she is looked upon with scorn in the community because she is different, just as Molly Conway, the supposed changeling who rescued Mary Immaculate, was perceived as odd in *Cold Pastoral*. But these women are the spiritual "doubles" for the respective heroines in the novels; a structural device also found in Duley's last work, *Novelty on Earth* (1942).

Mageila is cared for by Mrs. Slater until her grandfather arrives to take her to his home. There she is surrounded by women who do not understand her



interest in books and who prefer the endless creation of doilies. Once again her grandfather rescues her by taking her on a trip to Labrador. On this journey by boat Mageila is forced to come to grips with the sea, and here her frailty of spirit is overcome. Duley thus develops this heroine a step farther than the others: Isabel had been a poor eater, pale and sickly in her mother's eyes, while Mary was constantly treated as the sick little girl who was therefore not allowed to socialize with others. Mageila, on the other hand, who after her ordeal would faint at the mention of the word blood, meets her fear foursquare and emerges strong and well enough to begin to heal people as she had done in the past.

The vapours of Victorianism begin to clear as Duley places Mageila squarely in the twentieth century. Aboard ship she falls in love with Trevor Morgan, a married English civil servant attached to the British appointed Commission of Government in Newfoundland. She is forced to leave him and travels to St. John's to find work as a governess in the upper-class household of Mrs. Kirke. Her husband, a derelict drug user, proves too much for Mrs. Kirke to handle, yet Mageila gives her the strength to carry on. This is possible only because of Mageila's ability to face whatever trials the twentieth century might hold. In this novel, there is thus a transition in Duley's writing integrating aspects of the Victorian era with themes of the twentieth century, as was noted by reviewers even at its time of publication:

'Highway to Valour' by Margaret Duley ... is wholly Victorian in its approach, its basic plot and its rigorous moral development ... [yet her themes have] been able to make her heroine credible in the 20th century world [and this] is no slight accomplishment.<sup>26</sup>

With Mageila's passage into the twentieth-century world of Mrs. Kirke comes the loss of many things. Mr. Kirke and his faithful dog Brin die, Mrs. Kirke sells her home as she is now able to face her life alone, Mageila and

Trevor part in the face of imminent war, and Mageila decides to return to Labrador to serve her own people, recalling Mrs. Slater's efforts earlier in the novel. The reflection in Duley's own life is also clear: her mother's recent death, her brother's degenerating condition, and her own fear of war now absorbed her. She wrote to Ellen Elliott on December 27, 1940:

Highway to Valour was written under intolerable circumstances - my mother was dying horribly, my brother was a self-destroying invalid and I was a death devoted vessel. That is why I wrote the book - to stay sane - It was written with sincerity.<sup>27</sup>

By 1941, Duley's life had changed and she was able to write half-bitterly and half-whimsically of her own position:

Yes - St. John's is interesting if you like the pound of lorries - the tread of army boots - and men around with faces full of past and present, full of wives - They all look so buttoned up - when you know it is a disguise for the mere male animal - and how can you expect them to behave like a horse-hair sofa, when the lover's instincts are being tamed and intensified - military men have no minds - naval men are all wet - flying men are too high - so what? The perfect feminine life should comprise a stalwart well-washed policeman at the front gate - on guard - a philosopher or two remote and exalted in the attic to absorb one's sense of higher thought - and then, one might wish to be a tool of nature, so imagine the conflict over policeman and philosopher.<sup>28</sup>

These were the words of the author of *Novelty on Earth*, now working with her own voice in a direction only the freedom of the twentieth century would permit. This final novel was unlike anything she had previously written. In a burst of cutting remarks packaged within her carefully refined sharp-wittedness, leaving the Newfoundland setting for that of "any colony", Duley lashed out at the society in which she lived as well as at the notions of that society as to how the relationship between a woman and a man ought to be conducted. She wrote of the new book to her publisher:

I have a sleek beautiful novel called 'Novelty on Earth' which is infinitely a different genre from 'Highway to Valour'. It is

sophisticated with a sting in its tail but never acid - How do Macmillan's react to the full blaze of the woman's angle in life-written with warm-hearted candor and emotion but no sentimentality?<sup>29</sup>

The reviewers reacted with some confusion:

Admirers of Miss Duley's success last year, *Highway to Valour*, should be warned that the theme, mood, and style of *Novelty on Earth* are quite different. The fiction of the present has become so much an affair of standard brands that versatility in a novelist calls for a road sign, if not for justification.<sup>30</sup>

Margaret Duley manages an unusual illumination of that illusive substance, the relation between man and woman. She treats physical love with absolute frankness but never with distaste. What is more, she makes concrete that delicate half-world of feeling and thinking that is ecstatic understanding and awareness for two persons. Too bad that her men and women talk too often in soliloquy, in heavy quotation, in epigram, in poetic numbers. It is all a bit too extravagant.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps the shift in her writing from the previous novel to *Novelty on Earth* was too abrupt. Duley not only wanted to redefine the relationship between man and woman; in many ways, she wanted to change the form of her writing, and perhaps even the way of the world. To do this, she returned to the beginning, and began a relationship between the twentieth-century Adam and Eve:

This is a different thing from 'Highway to Valour' [she writes to her publisher]- and as McBrides say it has the magic that can exist between a man and a woman- in fact definitely it is all of woman and her problems. As someone said, 'It is not Murray and Sara', 'It is Adam and Eve'.<sup>32</sup>

Her vision can be related to that of other twentieth-century women writers:

It is not surprising ... that women, identifying at their most rebellious with Satan, at their least rebellious with Eve, and almost all the time with the Romantic poets, should have been similarly obsessed with the apocalyptic social transformations a revision of Milton might bring about.... More recently, even Virginia Woolf's angrily feminist *Three Guineas* purports to have begun not primarily as a consideration of the woman question but as an almost Shelleyan dream of transforming the world-

abolishing war, tyranny, ignorance, etc.<sup>33</sup>

These were concerns that Duley had expressed in *Highway to Valour*, and of which she later wrote:

I think everyone speculates a little about the privilege of living in these times. My answer would be yes, although humanity is on the march, we hope, towards a better world. At least we can be sure the one we knew of is broken up.<sup>34</sup>

Her readers were not prepared, however, for her reorganization of the male-female relationship.

*Novelty on Earth* is the story of the adulterous affair between Sara Colville and John Murray Blair. Sara interestingly is the same age as Isabel of *The Eyes of the Gull*; and yet they are complete opposites in almost every way. Sara is twice widowed, well-travelled, confident and wealthy. She meets Murray at a dance given at Government House in St. John's and remembers him instantly as the handsome man her father had asked to dinner at her home many years earlier. She reminds him of their earlier meeting, and their relationship begins anew with torrid intensity. Murray's wife and son ultimately call him back to England, and so he leaves his paradise and his Eve for the security of a relationship in which he feels only loyalty. Before Murray leaves her, Sara asks him to give her a child. He is horrified at the idea and flatly refuses. After his departure, Sara is hospitalized for lesions, although the attack was most likely brought on by an episode just prior to Sara's and Murray's parting. Sara's best friend Nora had two children whom Sara loved as her own. The youngest tumbled into the swimming pool one morning, and Sara and Murray awoke together to witness the accident. Sara instinctively ran to save the child while Murray cowered behind the bedroom window in order to save his reputation. The incident renewed Sara's illness and irrevocably altered her

opinion of Murray.

While in hospital, Sara witnesses the entirety of life from birth to death. The episode is a turning point for the remainder of the novel as Sara becomes her own woman again, able to stand alone. Although she and Nora travel to England together, she refuses to renew her relationship with Murray. Instead, she decides to begin work on a novel called *Dark Sunshine* in order to have a "brain child" and to get on with her life, since she knows beyond doubt she now is "Murray's widow."

The major concern of the novel involves that seeking of self-identity which applied not only to women but to all who had been touched by the ordeal of the Second World War. Duley writes:

War neurasthenia increased and people who lived on the ground looked for destruction from the air. The parable of the rock and the sand no longer applied. It was useless to build a house anywhere and feel it had any permanency. Old values were sterile, nerves were rasped and ridden, unpredictable forces were let loose, music was whimpering, and people accepted it because they were afraid of good loud bangs.<sup>35</sup>

In seeking identity, Sara is cast by Duley into the garden of Eden. Frequent images of Sara as Eve and Murray as Adam contrast with the images of Nora as Madonna with her two angelic babies. This may be seen as culminating the series of double-women images begun in her other novels, as the Eve repressed in the "good" heroines of the earlier works is finally released. This "flight" of Eve has been commented on as a significant factor in women's writing:

Significantly, Eve is the only character in *Paradise Lost* for whom a rebellion against the hierarchical status quo is as necessary as it is for Satan... Eve's flight ... foreshadowed fantasies that would recur frequently and compellingly in the writings of both women and the Romantic poets.<sup>36</sup>

This movement towards the rebellious was difficult for certain readers of the

novel to grasp, and this was particularly true in Newfoundland where literary taste was not sophisticated. Duley's candor further complicated matters as she spoke on subjects considered by many to be unmentionable. In her desire to speak out, however, Duley was one with the best women writers of the period. She would have supported this formulation of the position of the woman writer *vis-à-vis* language:

...the problem [in expressing the woman's perspective] is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution. In a series of drafts for a lecture on women's writing (drafts which she discarded or suppressed) Woolf protests against censorship which cut off female access to language. Comparing herself to Joyce, Woolf noted the differences between their verbal territories: 'Now men are shocked if a woman says what she feels (as Joyce does). Yet literature which is always pulling down blinds is not literature. All that we have ought to be expressed- mind and body- a process of incredible difficulty and danger.'<sup>37</sup>

Duley certainly shocked readers with her last novel, so much so that while she was praised for the most part in the British, American, and Canadian literary communities, she was so negatively received at home that by 1946 Ellen Elliott wrote of her that "She's rather fed up with writing and publishing."<sup>38</sup> Her next attempt at fiction was rejected by her publisher, and Duley is said to have burned the manuscript. She published no further novels, and after developing Parkinson's Disease she died in 1968.

The progressions marked in the first three novels, *The Eyes of the Gull*, *Cold Pastoral*, and *Highway to Valour*, must surely reflect Duley's own intellectual and spiritual awakening. She seeks expression for a country, for women writers, for women, and for her own personal development. As O'Flaherty says, "the three books present stages in a spiritual odyssey that leads through suffering to acquiescence and self-discovery."<sup>39</sup> Most importantly,

in imagery, thought, and style she works towards her own autonomy and expression. In *Novelty on Earth*, Duley achieves this goal through the heroine, Sara. In this heroine, "we have a modern woman before us, not strident and destructive, but unabashed, articulate, and free."<sup>40</sup> Duley thus establishes her own form, and, breaking out of any colonial restriction, she experiences the emancipation of women in her own writing, if not in her own life.

## Chapter Two

### Waning Victorianism: "The Pale Pilgrick"

Although Duley's *The Eyes of the Gull* was first published in 1936, its heavy reliance on the Gothic tradition links it more closely with the Victorian era than with any tradition of writing in the twentieth century. This is characteristic of Canadian literature, as colonial writers generally lagged behind the British tradition by twenty or thirty years.<sup>1</sup> In essence, Duley experienced roughly the same imaginative restrictions as nineteenth-century British women writers, and one may therefore expect to find in her work similar patterns of imagery. One critic has defined these recurrent images as follows:

Images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors - such patterns recur... throughout this tradition, along with obsessive depictions of diseases like anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia.<sup>2</sup>

Duley's first novel is clearly a part of this tradition, placing the reader squarely in the mind of a woman suffering under both domestic and cultural tyranny.

Duley's voice as a writer, however, was one which would have to undergo a process of self-definition before she would be able to move into writing that would convey her own experience in the twentieth century. For women writers of her period -- a kind of 1930-Victorian juxtaposition in the lagging literary milieu -- this involved a confrontation with the tradition of male writers who had dominated literature and the portrayal of women to this point, as Gilbert and Gubar point out:

For all literary artists, of course, self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative 'I am' cannot be uttered if the 'I' knows not what it is. But for the female artist the essential



process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself.... [Thus] the woman writer acknowledges with pain, confusion, and anger that what she sees in the mirror is usually a male construct.<sup>3</sup>

It was the woman's role in society as defined by men that was largely reflected in English literature up to and including the nineteenth century. Some Victorian women writers responded to this by presenting in their work the reality of their experiences. The resulting depiction of women by women often became the depiction of sickness and death, as women writers externalized the mentally painful and often debilitating constraints they felt were imposed upon them. Thus, as Gilbert and Gubar write,

...the nineteenth-century cult of such death-angels as Harriet Beecher Stowe's little Eva or Dickens's little Nell resulted in a veritable 'domestication of death', producing both a conventionalized iconography and a stylized hagiography of dying women and children. Like Dickens's dead-alive Florence Dombey, for instance, Louisa May Alcott's dying Beth March is a household saint, and the ultimate shrine of the angel-woman's mysteries. At the same time, moreover, the aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty - no doubt associated with the moral cult of the angel-woman - obliged 'genteel' women to 'kill' themselves... into art objects: slim, pale, passive beings whose 'chains' eerily recalled the snowy porcelain immobility of the dead.<sup>4</sup>

In light of this tradition -- for Duley's first novel clearly belongs in it -- Isabel's death in *The Eyes of the Gull* seems inevitable as the novel's plot unfolds. Her lack of interest in food, the references to her being a "pale pilgarlick", her gradual decline, and her final fever are all details which speak of Duley's participation in a developing feminist tradition.

While relying to some extent on the Gothic tradition, Duley also incorporated into her work elements that raised it beyond the level of escapist romantic fiction. Her first novel is therefore one which stands within and without a tradition as she incorporates various levels and genres into her work.

Once again, however, Duley's work is not alone in failing to "fit" into one specific category of writing. As Gilbert and Gubar comment,

...an extraordinary number of literary women either eschewed or grew beyond both female 'modesty' and male mimicry. From Austen to Dickenson, these female artists all dealt with central female experiences from a specifically female perspective.... [Further,] the writing of these women often seems 'odd' in relation to the predominantly male literary history defined by the standards of what we have called patriarchal poetics. Neither Augustans nor Romantics, neither Victorian sages nor Pre-Raphaelite sensualists, many of the most distinguished late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century English and American women writers do not seem to 'fit' into any of those categories to which our literary historians have accustomed us. Indeed, to many critics and scholars, some of these literary women look like isolated eccentrics.<sup>5</sup>

Duley's experience was exactly that: in her island home she became a curiosity, and among her own people her novels became the grounds for her dismissal. A typical review of *The Eyes of the Gull* noted that "the heroine is one of those childishly simple country girls who are made to appear charming in fiction, but would be called daft, if no worse, in life."<sup>6</sup> Isabel's continuing struggle to maintain her sanity in spite of her environment could be labelled "daft" only by an insensitive reviewer. Isabel is clearly a woman with goals, but one who lacks the strength to carry them out.

Isabel is depicted from the opening of the novel as a person seeking individuality:

At the age of ten she had begun to grope her way towards her individual dream, and to make the rock on the bare headland her lonely sanctuary: the one place where she could be alone in the stark outport of painted houses, straggling at haphazard spots and angles, on a zigzag road and many lanes.<sup>7</sup>

Isabel's dream is one of escape from a community which subjugates and torments her. It is not a male-oriented domination, however, and this must be clearly understood. It is in fact Isabel's uncle whose travels inspire the dream

which sustains her until her death. Thus Duley does not specifically attack men in this book, but rather points a finger at a society which is accepting of ways long antiquated and therefore limiting to its youth, and especially to its women. Isabel struggles against the claustrophobic atmosphere in which she lives, but can escape no further than the rock which becomes her "sanctuary" on the headland.

Isabel's pitiable struggle with the boundaries inflicted on her is heightened symbolically by her reaction to the gulls of Newfoundland, or, as she calls it, Helluland. Isabel dreams of escape to the sensuous climate of Spain, but "should she find herself staring into a pair of yellow eyes [of the gulls], her dream was dispelled for the day. They held the spirit of Helluland: savage, bitter, and chill." (p.10) In direct opposition to this world, then, is the world of Spain:

Isabel Pyke had been in spiritual rebellion to Newfoundliand all her life. She called it by the name she had learned at school: 'Helluland, or the land of Naked Rocks.' Ever since she could look at picture books she had wanted to go to Spain: to Southern Spain: Cordova, Seville, and Granada, Andalusia! The word syllabicated on her lips with the smooth sensuousness of Uncle Seth's port wine on Christmas Day.... When the old wine had slipped over her palate and eased into her blood, she could voicelessly whisper, 'Andalusia, Andalusia,' while her outward consciousness repelled the grating dominance of her mother's voice laying down the law to Aunt Dorcas and Uncle Seth. But she could mouth it sensuously to herself when sitting on her special rock, and inwardly change the granite garb of her own headlands to a soft bloom of olive, orange, palm and pomegranate. (p.10)

The implications for a growing sensuousness if not a sexual freedom are clear in the use of such geographical description.<sup>8</sup>

It is Isabel's obese mother, Emily, who thwarts her daughter's coming of age, and it is the struggle with her mother's tradition that so dejects her. It is Isabel's task to nourish her both physically and psychologically by playing her

handmaiden:

Her mother was daily sustained by three large meals and three large snacks; the one snack she prepared for herself being the four-thirty one, when Isabel took her walk on the promontory. (p.11)

As Isabel tries to placate her rotund mother, she in contrast remains thin and fragile. Her mother describes her as "a pale pilgarlick like her father." (p.15) Isabel's tiny appetite takes on a larger meaning when seen as a reflection of her state of mind. This is the first sign of Isabel's opposition to Emily -- an opposition seen also in Isabel's desire to escape from the house through lengthy solitary walks on the headlands of the bay. On these walks Isabel's "hair blew back tautly from the hair-line, and she stood like a figure-head over a ship's cutwater." (p.11) Clearly the image of the figure-head represents the independence which Isabel seeks, and savours only momentarily.

The concept of freedom is further accentuated in the novel by the type of dress worn by various women. Isabel's Aunt Mary Ann, for example, representing Canada and the upper class society which Emily ridicules, is particularly singled out:

She wore a black dress of shiny satin with a string of glass beads. The dress had a deep V-shaped neck which showed an expanse of wrinkled skin. Beside the high concealing bodices of Mrs. Pyke and Mrs. Penney she seemed revealed in ugly nakedness. Isabel turned her eyes away, and tried to shut her ears to the bolting and sucking noises of her Mother's eating and drinking. She ate moderately with her wide eyes unseeing. (p.15)

The Pykes are obviously unable to deal with the new style of clothing sported by Aunt Mary Ann, and Isabel herself is repelled by the sight of immodestly naked flesh. The introduction of another way of life, representing a sort of freedom to Isabel, is thus reinforced by the lesser restrictions of dress imposed upon those who enjoy that lifestyle.

As Duley sets up the various strands of imagery within Isabel's search for autonomy, she cleverly weaves a parallel story into the plot. Josiah Pyke and Elfrieda Tucker take their shadowy places as lovers long dead in a tale which Emily relates to Isabel's Aunt Dorcas. Josiah's return from sea to Elfrieda was too late to prevent her sexual indiscretion with another man. Upon his arrival he was told of her death in childbirth, and thus 'ne two parted as irrevocably as Isabel and Peter eventually would. In his grief, Josiah built Head House, the supposedly haunted house which Isabel passed each day on her lonely walks.

The tone of the novel is set by Emily's retelling of the story and the parallels are established between the pairs of lovers in Emily's conversation:

'He [Josiah] was going to be married to a pale pilgarlick like my Isabel -'

'My own Mother told me she was a pretty thing, Emily, and she wrote a bit of poetry.' Mrs. Penney's slow moving figure came to rest in another armchair with her large hands folded serenely in her lap.

Mrs. Pyke snorted. 'Poetry indeed! Pure trash! If she'd been my daughter I'd have knocked the poetry out of her.' (pp.18-19)

The tradition into which both Elfrieda and Isabel were born thus had no place for creativity in the form of women writers. The "freezing" imagery characteristic of women writers in such situations is illustrated by the ghoulish depiction of Elfrieda, quoted earlier, as she is exhumed by her maddened lover. After this incident Josiah built Head House, but ceased to come to the community for food. The people of Isabel's home "thought he must be starved", (p.22) and thus his lack of appetite foretells that of Isabel as he sought a release of his own. Duley's own voice may be heard in the culmination of the story through Aunt Dorcas's words, which come as though they speak in response to tradition and women's writing in general:

Mary Ann Wilkes gave a flat Nova Scotia laugh. 'You're

too cut off from the world, Emily. That's why you cling to stories like that.'

Mrs. Pyke's eyes found the wrinkled neck again. 'And I suppose Lunenburg is London, New York and Paris?'

Dorcas Penney flowed on like smooth oil. 'Emily, I think I like Mary Anne. 'Tis an unnatural tale we've built up ourselves, and it's wrong to pass it on to every lot of children.' (pp.22-3)

With the story of Josiah and Elfrieda looming in the background, Duley creates a novel with obvious allusions to *Wuthering Heights* and the Gothic genre. In such a narrative structure she begins to develop Isabel as a thirty-one year old innocent who falls in love for the first time.

Isabel's capacity for sensuality is suggested by Duley's descriptive passages:

With a jug of boiling water, diluted with icy well water, Isabel carefully washed her golden-coloured body in a white china basin. In the light of the crescent flame from the kerosene lamp her slim figure made elongated shadows on the papered walls. She put on a plain nainsook night-dress and extracted a bottle of olive oil from a drawer of scant contents. Slowly she rubbed the smooth fluid all over her face and neck lingering with slow strokes around the eyes.... Some day she would go to Andalusia, and she couldn't take the leather skin of outport Helluland. (p.24)

The imagining of physical pleasure, the concern for beautiful skin, and the delight in the connection between physical and emotional joy are all intensely related to the fantasy of escape. Isabel's growth as a woman is not only a matter of physical and psychological passage, but one of need for geographical escape in order to attain autonomy. Aunt Dorcas, on the other hand, is capable of another sort of release from her society. When she speaks to Isabel,

The voice was like a well of peace. It overflowed to Isabel's taut muscles and liberated her feet to the kitchen. [Notably this is the one room in the house where Isabel is ultimately in charge, if only of the cooking. In spite of her mother's commands for food, Isabel takes total control of its preparation.] Aunt Dorcas's mind might be chained to the limits of the small outport, but her spirit lay in profundity. (p.27)

Isabel's dream, however, is disrupted by the arrival of the artist, Peter Keen. Although the gulls challenge Isabel's endurance, they do not threaten her dream of escape as Peter does. Even as early as his arrival by train, it is indicated that Isabel's goals will be overtaken by his:

The night after the train had crawled across the curving beach Isabel had a strange dream. All space was full of snowy-breasted gulls, hovering, soaring swooping to the level of her eyes: everywhere she looked she met a yellow implacable gaze. She searched wildly for the horizon but it was full of eyes: she tried to cover her face with her hands, but they were powerless in her lap. Andalusia left her and she spun in the grip of Helluland: desolate, savage, and chill. As she sat in icy paralysis a gull swooped down and hovered in front of her face. Fascinated, she saw that it had blue eyes like a human, warm, vital, and compelling. Freedom came back to her hands, but she no longer wanted to cover her face. (pp.27-28)

Isabel's initial response to the threatening gulls is to cover or mask her face. Powerless, she, like Elfrieda, is lost in the chilling grip of Helluland. Although releasing Isabel into a kind of warmth, the blue eyes which replace those of the gulls are equally dangerous. The life which Isabel now begins to take on is not her own but one of Peter's careless making, and leads to disaster. The action of masking her face as a protection from the gulls would be appropriate also towards Peter Keen. Such masking against a threat to personal freedom is a common device in nineteenth-century women's literature, as Gilbert and Gubar note:

Almost always, it seems, the veil [or mask] is a symbol for women of their diminishment into spectral remnants of what they might have been. Therefore Christina Rossetti, whose role as a 'model' made her extremely sensitive to her entrapment in male 'frames', writes of more than one heroine whose 'strength with weakness overlaid; / Meek compliances veil her might.'<sup>9</sup>

Isabel's first encounter with Peter occurs while she takes her daily walk to Head House. Clearly, she views Peter as an intruder and a usurper of her

territory:

Whatever atavistic blood had mixed in the making of Isabel Pyke it seethed with rebellion at the sight of the intruder. The easel was within a foot of her rock! She slanted into the wind and spoke to the gleam on a copper head.

'This is my rock. I've had it all my life. You've got to go!' (p.28)

Isabel reacts to Peter with "spots of angry colour [that] heightened Slavic cheek bones, and dilated pupils [that] made grey eyes black." Peter's response is to try to capture her in art rather than to deal with her as a person: "'Don't move', he rapped. 'You look like Boreas, North Wind, any wind! My easel is dug into the ground. Don't move for God's sake!'" (p.28)

As they continue to talk, it becomes clear that Peter is Isabel's antithesis. He tells her that he thought he would never paint again because he "was so full of soft living." (p.30) Peter is so wealthy in fact that his butler has accompanied him to Newfoundland: "'My man Isabel is the perfect servant. I can take him from Paris to the Pole and he's equally unaffected.'" (p.31) In this sense the butler is a reflection of Peter, who is able to wander aimlessly around the world without commitment or personal concern. This way of life is completely foreign to Isabel, but although she and Peter are opposites in most respects, they do connect on some significant points. The story of Elfrieda, for example, draws them instantly together:

'Poor Elfrieda,' he [Peter] murmured, and his voice was like a caress to the dead girl. 'She probably met a lovely moment in her life and couldn't resist it. If it had been a local man everybody would have known. Some bold sailor blew in from the sea and swept her off her feet. I wonder if she thought it was worth while.' (pp.32-33)

Their likeness ends here, however, as Isabel's defiance in the face of



Peter's advances underlines her characterization as a figure forced into submission:

She quivered under his grip like a wild untamed thing and he could feel the fine lines of her body.

'Let me go,' she stormed, with the red spots standing out on her cheek bones and the black pupils swamping her eyes....

Like a terrified drowning person she looked into his blue eyes - the eyes of the gull in her dream.... She wanted to get away, and yet she wanted to stay. (pp.35-36)

In spite of her confusion, Isabel knows Peter "would mean the loss of her dream.... 'Let me go, let me go. You're worse than the eyes of the gull. I can't see Andalusia.'" (p.36) Thus, although Peter brings Isabel brief love, sexual freedom, and his own brand of philosophical liberty, she must lose in exchange her own dream of autonomy.

Peter's truest liberation of Isabel is one of words. At last she has someone in whom she feels she can confide:

He liberated her tongue, he aired her mind, he listened to everything she had to say, and when her speech faltered, and her eyes questioned, he pressed her hand and bade her go on. For the first time in her life her dream found verbal expression. (pp.45-46)

While Isabel trusts Peter enough to confide in him, the moments of tenderness and sensitivity between them soon pass, however, as Duley writes that when Isabel's

...tears were wept out of her she drew primly away in sudden consciousness. She saw the slant of the sun, and in a second was on her feet like a hunted thing.... 'Her exits are rather sudden,' he reflected. 'Damn it all, where's my palette?' (p.48)

Isabel, not a woman but a "hunted thing", flees in embarrassment and shame while Peter's only real concern remains for his artistry.

In spite of a lack of real concern for Isabel, Peter is depicted carefully and with purpose by Duley and he is thus not merely a stereotypical male lead

as described by Alison Feder.<sup>10</sup> Although he maintains a glib attitude toward life, his character is such that he remains an unusual combination of sensitivity and insensitivity to Isabel's plight. Most importantly, however, Duley uses Peter to point out that the male artist is not what he seems: thus, rather than liberate he restricts, and rather than represent life accurately, he destroys it through misrepresentation or distortion, at least in the female's perspective.

Further misunderstanding on Feder's part results from the missed significance of the imagery in Peter's painting. Duley writes of Peter that

He drew her in long sweeping lines.... She had a way of lifting [her body]... out of her waist and pointing her breasts to the wind that maddened him with the beauty of its line. He worked with contracted brows and did not throw her a word. (p.48)

Feder's interpretation of what she deems a curious passage is that "with perhaps some justification, Duley's so-called friends laughed uproariously over this image."<sup>11</sup> Looking at the section in a different light, however, one can see that Isabel is associated through imagery with a figure-head, ever travelling and ever free. This is exactly Isabel's longing, of course, although ironically, through Peter's art, she is limited to his interpretation of her life.

It is through Peter's questioning of the way she wants to live that Duley allows Isabel to make her clearest break with tradition. Isabel says of other women her age:

'The girls I used to go to school with are all married.'  
'I know, with lots and lots of babies. Wouldn't you like to have lots and lots of babies, Isabel?'  
'No I wouldn't,' she said in the same uncompromising way. 'It means having false teeth, and being fat and ugly and working from daylight to dark.' (p.50)

In depicting marriage in such a light, and in Isabel's rejection of it, Duley breaks from a tradition which had been part of her heritage, both in a social

and literary context. As has been pointed out in feminist criticism, previous women's novels focused on the marriage of young women. Gilbert and Gubar write that "marriage is crucial [in much women's writing] because it is the only accessible form of self-definition for girls in... society." <sup>12</sup>

Peter promotes the counter position in *The Eyes of the Gull* as he says "people nowadays love for the sake of LOVE, as something delightful, independent of families." (p.50) His philosophy is dangerous in the other extreme, however, as it is love without commitment that he advocates. Isabel's own thoughts on love reflect the "Song of Solomon." She says

'I like to think it could be like the Song of Solomon'.... [Peter] lay back with a smile on his face. 'Isabel you're delightful! Like the Song of Solomon? Sensuous, exotic and beautiful!' (p.51)

Peter sees her in his own terms, then, and continues to point out that she is not like the "little sister" of the verse: "'But the Song of Solomon says "We have a little sister and she has no breasts." You're not like that, Isabel.'" (p.52) Once again he does not see Isabel as she really is, and fails to realize that in every respect aside from her physique she is indeed the "little sister", innocent yet beyond childhood.

Isabel's innocence is further accentuated by her dress:

She had on her Sunday dress and it fell white and soft, and smocked round the shoulders and round the waist.... She had on a large white hat and white canvas shoes. (p.58)

Her mother, on the other hand, reflects another era as she

was buttoned up to the neck in stiff black with a jalot of Battenbury lace. Her hat was hard straw with a jet ornament and her shiny black gloves were tight on her fingers. (p.58)

Isabel's position socially is thus reflected in her dress, just as her dress actually creates the role in which she must live. In literature, too, the clothing creates its

own statement as "the experience [particularly in women's writing]... generates metaphor and the metaphor... creates experience." <sup>13</sup> Isabel is what she is, in part because of the way she is viewed. Her mother, for example, sees her as a child, and thus Isabel fills the role. Isabel may therefore be seen as restricted both socially and psychologically within the frame of her self-image and the image dictated to her by her community. Peter removes her person one stage further as he tells her "I wanted you for my picture." (p.65) Isabel thus exists as someone else within his picture, within her community, within her self-image as a child. The series of boxes is simply too many to escape.

Peter's conception of self is far from one of enclosure. He is first and foremost the product of two diametrically opposed forces in the persons of his mother and his father. As he says, his father

'...was a rigid member of what they call the ruling classes of England, and my sister and I were the results of his very incompatible union with my Mother.... My mother believed in making us all round, and there was nothing my father loathed like anything all round. He believed in a smooth neutral surface, with "made in England" hidden in the grain.' (p.75)

Peter's mother, on the other hand, encouraged his painting. As a result of her influence, he "believed in looking at everything, in picking it up, sampling it, tasting it, and throwing it away it if offended me." (p.76) This modern attitude brought him into direct conflict with his father, who

...was steeped in tradition and wouldn't recognize any modern ideas or forces that couldn't be expressed in old forms. He was dead to the spirit of change, and thought of Impressionism, Post Impressionism, Cubism, or the idea of expressing abstractions in line or colour was madness to him. (pp.77-8)

Clearly, the notions of traditional art opposing old forms, and the resulting chaos, are all a part of the art which Duley herself was struggling to create.

Peter's mother might well be both Duley's and Isabel's "soul sister" on

another continent: "My mother", he says " was beating her wings all her life and I thin' she got very tired." (p.78) He then goes even further in his comparison: "Poor little Isabel, beating her wings in Helluland! And my Mother beat hers in better places, but beat them just the same! It's a mad, sad world Isabel." (p.81) As a result of the parental division of loyalties between the old and the new worlds, Peter is unable to function properly in either. Without permanence of any kind, he is free while Isabel is not, yet without her as the source of his art he is unable to paint in the harshness of Newfoundland at all. Although he survives while Isabel will not, the quality of his life remains questionable. While Isabel longs to leave the old world for the new, Peter embraces the new without any stability from the old. In this contrast between Peter and Isabel, Duley's own sympathies remain elusive, perhaps indicating that she was herself probing for answers in a transitional period.

Peter and Isabel have little time to find answers in their own world as their relationship blossoms. Peter's advances to Isabel come always as from the artist to his creation, even in their first moments of affection: "[Peter] did not kiss her avidly, but like an artist, tentative with an untried canvas." (p.84) Even after their relationship has deepened, Isabel is always seen as a source of art as opposed to the lover she has become. Peter's "capacity to paint would be returned when she appeared, and impatiently he waited.... As long as he stayed, she would be as indispensable as the air he breathed." (p.98) Peter further tells her:

'I think you're going to make me famous, Isabel.'  
She asked somberly, 'Will they make you famous because  
you painted them or because they are me?'  
'Both Isabel. You've been a magnificent model and so much  
more than flesh and blood.' (p.105)

Isabel's realization that she appeared as though dead in Peter's painting comes just shortly before his departure. As she looks at the painting,

She felt for her words. 'There's a picture in our family Bible of Lazarus coming out of the tomb. I always hated it. He looks black and hollow and decayed round the eyes. Don't I look a bit like that?'

'No,' he said in the same sharp tone, but Isabel Pyke said in her uncompromising voice,

'Yes I do Peter, and also like the people I've seen in their coffins only my eyes are open.' (p.105)

The foreshadowing is obvious of course, but the passage is interesting as well in its reinforcing of the "death cult" motif, which portrayed women living as though dead and which was so common in women's writing during the nineteenth century. While Peter's painting freezes her metaphorically, it is her society which is ultimately responsible for the toll on her psyche. Peter can simply put his departure down to the fact that "there's always change", but Isabel must remain in her surroundings where "everything is always the same for ever and ever." (p.118) Before he leaves, Peter realizes his error as he dreams of the dead Elfrieda in her grave transformed into Isabel herself. He awakes "cold in body and in spirit", (p.119) ready to apologize to Isabel. He speaks the hard truth of his actions, but Isabel does not condemn him:

'I have the feeling [said Peter] that I've fashioned you myself: as if I'd begun a canvas that I dearly loved and wanted to perfect to the utmost of my power. Yet I've got to go on my dear, and I can't take you with me.'

'No Peter, I know that.' (p.123)

Peter does not leave, however, without doing damage one last time. He crudely offers Isabel money to enable her to go to Spain, and she, naturally, feels cheapened by the thoughtless gesture:

The red blood poured into her face and she snatched her hands away. 'No, no, Peter don't ask me. I couldn't do such a thing. Take money from a man. It's awful. It's like payment.' (p.126)

She does take the money at his insistence as he leaves by train, but before he goes she tells him how she feels:

'Peter,' he breathed from a limitless simplicity of emotion.  
'I love you very much.'  
For an incredible moment of true vision he saw the living  
beauty of her eyes change to a frozen gaze in another body....  
(p.130)

Her truth, strength, and maturity are clearly visible in this statement. Isabel triumphs here, but becomes a soul dead to Peter as he leaves her to her destiny.

The money which Isabel is given serves to raise her spirits sufficiently for her to plan to visit Spain. Her mother's subsequent paralyzing stroke puts an end to any such plans, however, and any hope which Isabel might hold is crushed as surely as if her mother had contrived to do it. In Isabel's despair she ventures to the graveyard, pouring her heart out to Elfrieda's grave:

'Elfrieda, you were a pale pilgarlick too. Perhaps you called it Helluland and hated the eyes of the gulls. Were you happy with your lover?... Did you die inside when he left you?' (pp.167-8)

The preacher who tends to Isabel's mother is the final straw in the building of pressure on Isabel's already strained mind. His sermon at her mother's bedside sends Isabel running back to the house on the Head:

'Oh Gracious Lord and Father, Thou hast seen it  
incumbent on Thyself to burden thine handmaiden with this  
heavy blow, grant that she may be given grace to bear her  
affliction with meekness, humility, and sweet submission to Thy  
will -'

The words whirled to the hot center of Isabel's brain.  
(p.172)

In such circumstances, Isabel's "brain fever" at the realization of her final constraint through her mother's illness is not unlikely. The fit of madness in the house finds "her heart beating its way out of her chest." (p.179) The imagery of the bird, beating its way to a final release, is thus a unifying factor in the

climactic scene of Isabel's death. In her last moments of delusion "she was in Spain!" (p.184) and poetic justice is found by Duley for a heroine whose fate was never really in any question. As the aunts and uncles attend Isabel's wake, her

...pale hands loosely clasped a single rose, folded in a clump of drooping fuschia. In the light of the kerosene lamp the red of the fuschia looked like a spot of blood. (p.199)

The sacrifice of love and life, then, gains Isabel's final release.

Duley's seemingly straightforward tale of the death of a girl left by her lover takes on much larger meaning when read in the feminist perspective, as plot, imagery, and psychological make up of characters testify to the author's fuller intent. Duley is not merely relating the tragic story of a lover's death, but instead is commenting upon changing lifestyles, literature, art, and the basic relationships between men and women. Nature, society, and inner courage all contribute to the woman's position, but ultimately repression in any form leads to the deterioration of her psychological well-being, in Duley's view. Isabel is Duley's first example of a woman subjugated, but the blame for her death lies partially on her own shoulders as a result of her weakness of will. Duley's later heroines express a stronger, more unconquerable spirit as they move closer to the ideals of women in the twentieth century.



### Chapter Three

#### Survival: "The Ice Princess"

The epigraph of Margaret Duley's *Cold Pastoral* is taken from John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." It reads: "...maidens overwrought, with forest branches and the trodden weed- cold pastoral!"<sup>1</sup> The passage has been mistaken in some readings as having little relevance to the concerns of the novel.<sup>2</sup> This is far from true, however, particularly when the novel is seen as a development from *The Eyes of the Gull*. In that novel, Duley established the male artist as the embalmer of feminine experience through her characterization of Peter Keen. It is not surprising that in her next novel she should choose a male poet's work for her epigraph, particularly when that poet writes of the permanence of art and the freezing of life into artistic form. The "overwrought maidens" are the antithesis of Duley's developing depiction of womanhood, and their encapsulation in the poem stands as the ironic opening to a novel in which the heroine will break out of any such stereotype. The movement in Duley's writing from the restrictions of the Victorian tradition to the emancipation of the twentieth century is a shaking off of traditions. These traditions are represented in her epigraph, and create a paradox in which Duley actually opposes the very literary fathers whom she quotes. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's comments are significant here:

[A] paradox of the metaphor of literary paternity is the fact that in the same way an author both generates and imprisons his fictive creatures, he silences them by depriving them of autonomy (that is, of the power of independent speech) even as he gives them life. He silences them, and as Keat's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' suggests, he stills them, or- embedding them in the marble of his art- kills them.<sup>3</sup>

Infused with and inextricable from its metaphors, a secondary meaning (or subtext) in Duley's fiction emerges through close reading, and it is here that there is a quarrel with the tradition of male writers. Duley's imagery moves from that of enclosure to that of emancipation, and this is a key to an understanding of her novels and of her own philosophy. Although male authors as well as female authors in and before Duley's period used imagery of enclosure and escape, Gilbert and Gubar point out that

The distinction between male and female images of imprisonment is- and always has been- a distinction between, on the one hand, that which is both metaphysical and metaphorical, and on the other hand, that which is social and actual.<sup>4</sup>

Duley was speaking through her imagery to the social and actual conditions in which she lived; that is, Duley's own sense of confinement as a woman writer was not only metaphysical, but one with which she lived in her own life every day.

*Cold Pastoral's* heroine is Mary Immaculate Keilly, an important figure in the development of Duley's characterization of women. Even when fully mature, Mary is seen as a dual heroine, both child and adult, whose life in the novel is split simultaneously between immaturity and growth as well as between confinement and fulfillment. Mary's treatment as a child is that of one owned, and in spite of her physical coming of age, her treatment by society in her early womanhood remains as the condescending possessiveness experienced in her youth. Her life as an adult is divided between her secret self, which she shares only with her friend Tim Vincent, and her obedient self, which is presented to please others. The novel itself is similarly split between Mary's childhood in a fishing community and her emergence as a woman in the city of St. John's as well as London. While this change of setting lends some disunity to the work, it

nonetheless parallels Duley's intention to separate Mary's two lives.

The first section of the novel deals with Mary's remarkable childhood. Mary's mother, Josephine Keilly, gives birth to her daughter in a skiff. Duley devotes some time in the novel to the meaning of pregnancy in the community:

A settlement of continual pregnancy, the women took up the cycle again, as soon as Nature could assert itself. Nobody rebelled. Not to conceive was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah!... Women worked up to the last moment of childbirth and rose again very quickly. (p.10)

But Duley does not degrade Josephine's position in society. In fact, her contribution to her family is seen as a crucial factor in their survival:

In Benedict's world a woman could make or break a man.... Josephine made him! By encouraging him to a clean cure of his fish and being unsparing of her own energy they always made both ends meet. (p.15)

Mary is thus born into a family of common but industrious people who see marriage as a partnership of equality through necessity.

The unusual circumstances surrounding Mary's birth become a matter of local gossip and curiosity. As a result, Mary comes to be treated as an oddity. Her neighbours feel that no natural child could have arrived on earth in such an unusual manner. Mary's mother is no less susceptible to this line of thought, and Mary, especially as the only girl in a family of many boys, is treated as her mother's angel. Duley has Josephine constantly refer to her child as an angel, and in Duley's own description, as well as in the descriptions of her by other characters, the word surfaces with great frequency:

'She's the dead spit of the angels in heaven.' (p.14)

Her mother took her to Mass, and she became very devout, praying with the face of an angel. (p.18)

Mary's angelic qualities form an important piece of the mosaic of Duley's portrayal of women. No sooner has Mary been established as the angel figure than her spiritual double is also introduced. Molly Conway, a deaf and mute woman thought mad in the community, becomes a figure strangely attractive to Mary. Mary's own mother makes the initial comparison between the two:

'Did the fairies come out to the skiff to leave me a changeling? If they did, you're a powerful change to Molly Conway! By the sweet face of you I'd say the angels were ticklin' your feet.' (p.14)

Molly and Mary are related in the supernatural stories surrounding their births, as one is thought to be an angel, while the other is thought to have been left as a changeling by the fairies. They are opposites in appearance, however, as one is old, ugly, and feared by the community, while the other is young, beautiful, and treated with reverence. In spite of their differences, they connect on a spiritual level one day as Molly meets Mary on the road. Mary hesitantly offers Molly flowers, and as she does so "She saw the old woman's eyes and knew they were as clean and blue as the wild iris growing on the fringe of the river." (p.26) Mary's own words suggest the depth of meaning the meeting has had for her:

'Mom, I felt good, as if I'd been blessed. Like it must be when you're absolved. Her eyes are like the blue iris and as gentle as the pictures of the Saints in Heaven.' (p.27)

The two women operate in the novel as inverted doubles, both held outside their society, one placed on a pedestal while the other is degraded.

Mary's experience in her home throughout her childhood is a magical one. What follows rises above the magical and becomes the miraculous. Duley introduces the climactic section of Mary's childhood by saying that "what happened then became an unbelievable super-story, satisfying a lifetime of

yearning for romance." (p.13) The key word is romance. Mary's childhood thus far had been one of sensitivity to the beauty of nature, even though her brothers, for example, saw nature only as a means of survival:

Mary Immaculate tried to show them other things: the blue shadows of the evening, the round orange of the sun, and once she took them in a body to see an autumn tree. Branches, from a silver trunk, retained a fall of gold leaves. Wispy and frail, like tissue-paper gold, they drooped over the children.

'Look', said Mary Immaculate in a muted voice.

'Birch! Wood for the stove!' her brother Dalmatius shouted, running home for his axe and his saw. (pp.7-8)

Mary herself could not cope with the darker side of nature: "It was impossible to touch the slime of a cod or press spawn from the belly of a caplin. The sea was something to watch, but its offal offended her." (p.8) Duley, whose fascination with the sea is reflected in each of her novels, writes of the ocean as she foreshadows Mary's coming to terms with harsh reality: "The sea was different from the land! There romance ended and realism began." (p.7) Mary's own life as an adult hinges on her ability to choose reality over the magical world which others create around her and which she in part takes on as her own. As a youngster, however, the culmination of her life in the Cove incorporates the heights of romance, but occurs because the angelic Mary steps for the first time in her life outside the role of the perfect child. She leaves the house without her mother's blessing, and subsequently becomes lost in the woods.

Just before Mary leaves her home, she watches her mother at work. Interestingly, Mary begins to see the Cove as something which confines her:

Captive as the Cove, Mary Immaculate saw her mother. Her hair was fair and oily round a face scorched from the kitchen stove. Her cheeks were plump and loose, sagging away from bones and

muscles. Her lips were soft and open to the air, revealing even teeth needing attention. In the glare of the sun the cavities were black-edged, like the sombre line of a Mass-card. Her body was plump, unconfined in the hips and the bust. Both had the same globe-like lines straining at the wool.... She had been a servant! What did it mean to be a servant? A servant was a creature who did other people's work....Work! That was the Cove! (p.34)

Mary's mother is seen objectively by her daughter even at her young age. In Josephine exists the reality of life for many women of the Newfoundland outport:

Among the outport women are Margaret Duley's best characterizations. Descriptions are precise and accurate and there is no idealization as it is found in the presentation of the heroines. Some of the outport women are types, but they suggest reality for all that.<sup>5</sup>

Mary slips out the door while her mother is busy with other duties, and therefore does not undergo the usual ritual blessing before she leaves the house. Mary thinks the whole episode a great deal of fun, but Duley weaves the angel/devil imagery throughout the section as a foreshadowing of what is to come:

With the face of an angel she [Mary] sang as she went:  
'I've got a sin on my soul. I've lied as big as a dog. I'll go and burn in hell fire. The devil's got horns and a tail. 'The fairies have little wings. Who'll choose, who'll choose? Left hand, right hand....' (p.37)

It is not without significance, then, that the "devil" complement to Mary's "angel" should rescue her, once Mary has lost her way in the woods.

Molly Conway knows precisely where the lost Mary may be located, but her problem is communicating her knowledge to others. She is restrained by relatives who pay no attention to her attempts to convey a message. Like everything else in the Cove, Molly too is thus frozen in a sense. Duley's play on Keats's poem is reaffirmed as both Molly and Mary, "maidens overwrought", are

"held" either by fairies in the woods or by very real relatives. Mary herself attests to the quality of frozen time on that day:

When years had spun strangely away and she heard her husband talking about the sensation of arrested time her mind took an instant leap to that morning in the Cove. Like Molly Conway's eyes it could always become a projection on her mind. (p.33)

Eventually, Molly "was released by relations grown weary of restraining her. Her gaolers were... acquiescent to let things be." (p.45) Although most would take no notice of her, an officer from St. John's follows her lead. Molly walks "like a woman certain of her way", (p.48) and shortly afterwards Mary is found.

Mary's survival through many days of freezing temperatures becomes worldwide news. Conveyed to St. John's, she is placed in the care of Dr. Philip Fitz Henry, a prominent, wealthy, young doctor whose family would eventually adopt Mary. In Duley's description of Mary's recovery, the image of Mary as angel is maintained: Philip "talked to her like an angel and held her in his arms until she went to sleep." (p.59) Duley places the blame for Mary's misfortune squarely on her own shoulders, however, as she writes that Mary "was lying in bed because of her own leap after romance." (pp.55-6)

Philip's family consists of his mother, Lady Fitz Henry, his brother David, David's wife Felice, and Hannah, the witch-like housekeeper who jealously keeps watch over her household. Lady Fitz Henry is the embodiment of a past era: graceful and elegant, but dangerously frail. David is the artist and dreamer who appeals to Mary's imaginative side and who, like her, cannot accept the harsher side of nature:

The killing of the seals [in the annual seal hunt] distressed him, and when one of his father's captains told him they wept real tears, he no longer went to the wharves when the laden ships came in. (p.69)

Arthur, David's elder brother, had been in the first World War with him. David was wounded, but Arthur was killed. As David discusses war ... some detail in the novel, Duley introduces a significant concern. David angrily writes: "War is uncomfortable, and so very inglorious and dirty.... I see nothing in war to commend it, and my mind seethes with heresies." (p.72) Readers of Duley's work were impressed at a woman writing so well in this "male" domain, and Duley herself seemed pleased by this:

Leo Cox [a British poet and friend of E.J. Pratt] is reading it [ *Cold Pastoral* ] and he called me this morning to say anyone who created Mary Immaculate must be worth knowing better- and that I have written the background with real power- and as that [the background of war] is a masculine subject he is confounded at a woman doing it.<sup>6</sup>

This chauvinist attitude must have surprised Duley, who, to judge from her own writing, felt that war affected both genders.

David met his wife, Felice, during the war. He describes her as

...at her best with lame ducks, and [she] wants a world where a cat, a dog, and a bird can lie down with the lion and the lamb....Her mother went mad round fifty and Felice is haunted she may do the same thing. Her mother began by hiding under trees. In view of their preponderance round the place I intend to take a cottage by the sea. (p.73)

Felice's idealism aligns her with Mary while her association with madness aligns her with Molly. Her living by the sea as opposed to being secluded by trees may also have an added significance. Mary will come to escape the Fitz Henry home by playing in the trees in the garden. Once again she will find "romance", this time with Tim, the boy next door, and the relationship will have disastrous effects. Mary must leave this "Eden" to face the reality of life if she hopes to become her own person. Felice, living by the sea, will be her guide. In this capacity, Felice plays an extremely important role in the novel, and is hardly



the "merely...nice girl"<sup>7</sup> described by some critics.

Mary's life at Fitz Henry House, or the Place, as it is known, begins to alter her impressions of the world. The most notable comparisons are made between Mary's mother and Lady Fitz Henry:

[Lady Fitz Henry's] clothes were as harmonious as the smoothness of a shell round a kernel. Gloves enclosed her hands without restriction, and all of the fingers were smoothed down to the tips. Instantly there came a picture of her own mother's hands in Mass on Sunday mornings. Gloves and a pair of grey stays represented Josephine's difference between Sunday and Monday. Many times, kneeling beside her, Mary Immaculate had heard the creak of corsets and noticed the cushion of her fingers seep damply through the gloves. Beyond the wet spots, there were always points the fingers could not reach.

Contrasts were beginning to shape in her mind. (p.78)

Clearly the new mother figure in Mary's life represents a marked change from Josephine. A similarly drastic change in her new home involves Hannah, the housekeeper. Her "dislike was deep and dark, mute as an ancient rock. Hannah was old, loose in the skin and disapproving...[she] resented [Mary's] intrusion." (p.83)

Though Hannah is a threat to Mary, she does not attempt to change the little girl as Philip does. Mater, as Lady Fitz Henry was known to her family, warns Philip of the danger of such a pursuit:

'It's wise to take people as they are, Philip, and not as one wishes them to be.'

Philip went, conscious of a warning. On his way to surgery in another part of town he reflected.... Now she was where he could give her closer direction. She could be moulded! (p.86)

Philip thus begins to treat Mary as though he owns her, and tells her as much when she questions her future:

'Philip,' she said in distress, 'don't let...[Mater] die. Where would I be without her now?'

'With me,' he said possessively. 'You're my child.' (p.88)

David, on the other hand, does not try to possess Mary but shares in her vision of life, especially through his art. Mary sees a distorted picture of the Place which he has painted, for example, and recognizes it at once: "‘Is’t that the Place falling down?’ [she asks.] ‘Yes, though I wonder you recognise it.’" (p.89) Both Mary and David seem to have a sense of the era passing. They recognize reality even in distortion, yet they are not always able to deal with it. This is further demonstrated symbolically by a bronze statue which David owns and which Philip does not understand:

Three nude girls were running off a stand. Elongated, eager and elfish, they bent forward in an attitude of flight. Hand in hand they suggested intensified youth speeding full tilt into life. In touching the bronze her hands held the same long look. Replacing it on the mantlepiece, her hands stayed on it with a sensuousness of touch....

‘Those things are picturesque if they don’t distort daily life.’[Philip remarks frostily.]

...At that moment she learned of the stifling that could go with the fairest relationship. She felt defrauded, closed up with herself. (pp.90-91)

While Mary here feels stifled, Philip feels confused. Unlike Isabel of *The Eyes of the Gull*, Mary now has the power to alter the artist: "Hitherto [Philip]... had painted his own canvas. Now it was at the mercy of a greater artist. Mary Immaculate was splashing on it willynilly and crowding it rapidly with gobs of crude colour." (p.92) While Mary learns manners, Philip thus begins to free his imagination.

While Mary lives with the Fitz Henrys, she spends much of her time behind the house in the garden which became a retreat for her as it was so neglected. In this garden, a sort of innocent Eden, she meets her neighbour, Tim, and begins a friendship with him. They play out the roles of famous lovers, all as a children’s game. Unknown to them, Hannah watches and waits

for her opportunity to tell Philip that Mary has a "lover."

As Mary develops into womanhood, her "tin whistle" (or innocent) side remains alive with Tim in the garden. Only David recognizes the divided nature of her character and comments upon it to her:

'Philip,' she said quickly, 'is only interested in Mary Fitz Henry.'

'M'mm,' he said frowning. 'No room for Mary Keilly?'

'None,' she said lightly, as if it didn't matter. (p.135)

Duley makes a point to note that Mary answers "as if" it does not matter. But certainly it does. Mary's two sides grow farther and farther apart as the novel builds towards its climax. The sure sign of her adulthood occurs when Mary, usually so repelled by cruelty in nature, is able to kill a wounded bird with her bare hands in order to put it out of its misery. The incident occurs at Felice's cottage by the sea. While Felice, David, and Philip watch helplessly, Mary matter-of-factly takes care of the situation. For a girl who as a youngster could not so much as touch the slime on a fish, this is quite an achievement. Philip and David's chauvinism is demonstrated in their response:

'What did you think of that bit of girlishness, Phil?'

'The doctor in me gave it full marks'....

'Humph!' said David....'But the man waited for her to hide her pretty head.' (p.142)

Mary's real mother later comes to visit her in town and the tension between Mary's two worlds becomes even stronger:

'We're very glad to see you, Mrs.Keilly,' interposed Lady Fitz Henry. Mary Immaculate stood between them like a hostage, and anxiety for the situation made her tall and gaunt. (p.165)

Although Josephine is described as someone close to poverty, there is nothing condescending in Mary's appraisal of her:

Josephine advanced under their eyes, and nothing about her suggested ordeal. Her shoes were dusty, her nose shiny, but her

walk was full of suffused serenity. Days filled with work, and leisure given to prayer, gave her an equality beyond the standards of man. (p.163)

When Mary lies to her mother about saying her prayers -- which she in fact does not say each night -- it is only Felice who understands: "I would have done the same," said Felice in a quick, decided voice. 'It would be unfair to take away a vestige of faith.'" (p.170)

Although Felice and Mary relate well to one another, Mary is generally wary of women:

Schoolmates had bequeathed a wariness of women. They refused to see her for herself.... It was inevitable that she should prefer men. They met her foursquare without staring beyond for the shadows of the cook [her mother]. (p.173)

The woman to whom she best relates is Mater, but Mater's life has almost passed by the time Mary has reached complete crisis with her double life. Tim leaves to go away to school, but wants a definite commitment upon his return:

'But when I come home we must talk and you mustn't put me off with your tin-whistle side.'

'Tim,' she said appalled, 'You're unfair. My tin-whistle side.'

'Yes, that's what I mean,' he said, sticking to his guns. 'The side they don't know at the Place, the side you can't take out with your doctor-'. (p.193)

Mater dies shortly after he leaves. With both Tim's question and Mater's recent death depressing her, Mary almost reaches her breaking point. In the midst of this, Philip demands her strength as well:

His face was in her hair, and his body shook with grief and exhaustion. She guided him to the settee she had sat on when he told her the mater had a weak heart. Kneeling on it with one leg, she knew the experience of holding a man's body in her arms while he cried.... Where was she in all this? (p.208-9)

In total confusion, she questions, "Was she part of Philip's inheritance?" (p.212)  
At this point of crisis, she, like Isabel of *The Eyes of the Gull*, visits the

graveside of one she holds dear. At Mater's grave,

One white angel fascinated the girl.... Holding a basket of flowers, she bent with one bloom in an extended hand....Once ...[Mary] stuck a geranium in the angel's hand, and when she went back it was frozen, making a blood-spot against marble flesh. (p.224)

Again, Duley's use of the statue imagery to parallel Mary's inability to move as her own person recalls Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

With this crescendo of events comes the climax of the novel, as Hannah finally tells Philip what she knows of Tim and Mary, implying that they are lovers. Although Mary has told Tim upon his return that she loves him only as a child would love another child, Tim does not relate this to Philip when confronted, but instead remains silent. Mary is banished from the house. As she leaves, she bitinglly refers to Philip's sense of ownership by saying "'Look after Rufus [the cat], will you, Philip? It's all I own in this house.'" (p.258)

David's response to Philip demonstrates Philip's stupidity and social backwardness:

'Do you mean to say,' he asked with weighted words, 'that you turned her out like a heavy Victorian? Never darken my doors again sort of thing! No conduct could justify such an action.' (p.260)

Philip's treatment of Mary throughout the novel is consistent in its Victorianism. She is not allowed to socialize with people outside the family, and at her graduation Philip hears her referred to by others as a prig. Isolated as she is, and then cast out of her home by Philip, Mary agrees to marry Tim as she sees no other alternative. Philip's actions thus drive Mary to make a fatal error. Mary and Tim marry, but they quarrel shortly afterwards. Tim rushes off in his car, only to be killed in an accident.

Throughout this episode, it is only Felice who maintains a level of

objectivity. She becomes angry even at her own husband for his acceptance of Philip's tale without hearing Mary's side of the story. Felice thinks of David and Philip that

Confronted by the illicit taint in their home, modernity dropped from them. Dismayed at her husband, Felice saw him assume the ancestral aura of a man thwarted in the control of women.... At the very word lover, bitter jealousy had accepted the worst imputation. A growing irritation in Felice questioned whether David should not have more balance....They were smirching ...[Mary] themselves, jerking her from her pedestal.... (p.261)

As Mary is finally pulled from the pedestal on which she has been placed from the opening of the novel, Felice's

...voice startled...[David and Philip] like the vindication of womanhood. 'I'm ashamed of you both....I think you're both blinded by common male jealousy. Snap out of it, and use your brains.' (p.262)

Mary, too, snaps out of her fantasy world with Tim's death:

...the girl was sloughing off a skin something like a cap and bells she had worn too long. The skin held all the trappings of her make-believe, and the changeling heart she had brought from the Cove. She had been jolted to bed-rock reality, and she was utterly dazed. (p.287)

Felice understands Mary perfectly: "She's... only the product of two ways of living." (p.290) Mary's desire now is "to be something by myself." (p.289) Thus she and Felice travel to England to give Mary a fresh start. Felice, certain of the rightness of her decision, writes to David from there that "I think women are...[Mary's] greatest need at the present." (p.306) In England, Mary meets Maxine, Felice's niece, who brings her as close to the harshness of life as Mary can come. Maxine, constantly associated with Satanic imagery, asks Mary for money in order to obtain an abortion. Maxine is the absolute counter to Mary's world, and although "Maxine had devils, and she housed them in a big way...,

Mary Immaculate had set out to find her feet in Maxine's world." (p.316) Mary thus decides to help her.

Mary turns to Philip for the money for the abortion while he is on a visit to England. She realizes he will be outraged by the request, but she does not for a moment think that he will assume that she needs the money for herself. Although she knows she will hurt Philip, she never once thinks that it will be because he will doubt her.

Mary's request to Philip signifies an absolute ability to act on her own decisions. She feels in herself "the child ousted by the woman....She must leap in [to adulthood], go under, become submerged or swim on." (p.325) In light of this development, the last section of the novel, dealing with life in a city on a macrocosmic scale, is of extreme importance, although it has been misread in recent critical analysis as "merely an appendage."<sup>8</sup> In fact, it demonstrates Mary's ability finally to deal with reality, however harsh, even to the point of accepting a woman's right to have an abortion. Thus, Duley has created a novel which is at the forefront of a new movement in women's literature in her period, and this places her in excellent company:

The heroines of women's novels in the 1930's are still passive and self-destructive, but in Lehmann's ...[works, for example], there is a new frankness about the body and about such topics as adultery,[and] abortion.<sup>9</sup>

Duley's work is no less frank in its approach to such issues.

Philip's response to Mary's request is completely in keeping with his character. Once again, he assumes the worst:

It was a split-second of doubt, but it was enough. He collapsed on the couch like somebody felled, dragging her with his fall. Literally she bore the full weight of his body across her knees....Her own stupidity appalled her. So sure of her chastity she had not contemplated he might think it was her abortion. (p.328)

Philip, weak-kneed and untrusting, attracts Mary's love nonetheless. Fortunately, she views him now in a completely adult and objective light: "she knew in that moment of revelation she was one of those whose first love would always be life. But her fantasy about it was transmuted." (p.333)

Mary's conclusions at the end of the novel are thus those of an adult who has reconciled the roles which she played throughout her life. Her encounter with a London street cat, which viciously claws her as she attempts to cross the road, does not upset her because she realizes the duality of nature, and can accept it:

It would take a London cat to suspect her, she who had beguiled wood-creatures for twelve years of her life! Instead of being daunted, she laughed out loud....She sensed unity, making her see London for the first time with balanced eyes. (p.332-3)

As a woman sure of her way, she proposes to Philip: "She had to go the whole way and step into his arms....he held her like a man unsure of happiness. She put her arms round him to reassure him, knowing her first job would be to teach him to recognize joy." (p.335). In this moment, Mary's many selves are reconciled to each other, and as such

...she whirled back to the Cove to tell Josephine she was minding what they said! She whirled to the Place to tell the mater she was doing as Philip said. She stood pat in her own flesh, playing a tune with Tim. She rested in Philip's arms, feeling a man's ecstasy round and about her. (p.336)

Mary Immaculate's life thus takes on unity and completeness because she is able to choose her own destiny and encompass the many women she has been to many people. Most importantly, she survives, as Isabel of *The Eyes of the Gull* does not, because she has the strength of will to determine and create her own way in life. The ice princess of the fairytale childhood is not frozen in the mold which society creates for her, but makes her own decisions, leaving a



fantasy world behind. She walks out of Victorianism and into the twentieth century, confronting both the joys and the harshness of life through her own strength and determination.

## Chapter Four

### Emerging Strength: "The Little Doctor"

Duley's *Highway to Valour*, considered by many to be her best novel, was published in 1941. It was a year of war, of personal tragedies, and of catastrophic upheaval in society. As the most easterly point of North America, Newfoundland became strategically important. St. John's resounded with the noises of American machinery and troops, and Duley's writing carried with it many impressions of American influence on her changing world. *Highway to Valour* was thus "published at a time of changing values, and [was] a response to, and a questioning of, new influences stirring in Newfoundland."<sup>1</sup> Duley's personal life was also in turmoil. Her brother Nelson was now "a self-destroying invalid" and her mother was "dying horribly."<sup>2</sup> With her future in question in many ways, one might expect to find Duley's third novel a reflection of inner distress. It is exactly that, as the heroine, Mageila Michelet, must cope with the destruction of her entire community, the loss of her family, and, finally, the loss of the man she wishes to marry. Her journeys from her home to the home of her grandfather, to Labrador, and subsequently to St. John's, parallel her psychological trek from devastation to strength, as Duley allows the girl once known as "the little doctor" to heal herself, and eventually to give of herself, in spite of loss, to others.

*Highway to Valour* opens in the outport community of Feather-the-Nest, significantly named as a place made comfortable for those who live there. Although Mageila senses small-mindedness in her place of birth, she nonetheless is cushioned from the community by the love sustained within her family, and

particularly by the loving spirit of her father. Descendant of an Irish princess, and seventh daughter of a seventh daughter gifted with an ability to heal, Mageila remains aloof throughout her childhood and grave in her outlook on life.

This outlook derives in large part from "the sea that spat at [the community] and sometimes dared to cross the road to lick at their doors."<sup>3</sup> Mageila senses the danger of the sea, and often likens it to a cat, wondering what it could do "with one great stroke of its forepaw." (p.4) Similarly, the jagged cliffs of the community give "no more refuge than a bird-ledge for a gull." (p.1) Mageila is constantly associated with bird and feather imagery in the novel, and, like the seabird, she is drawn to the destructive element of nature for her very existence. As the author "loves and hates" (p.i) Newfoundland, so Mageila feels ambivalently about the sea. Her flight or "highway" to valour in the novel occurs over or close to the perilous ocean. Mageila painfully discovers that one may not always be carried over these waters with the blessing of an independently soaring spirit. Rather, in times of emotional crisis, the one way back to shore often involves a "walking through waters", (p.324) a spiritually exhausting task made possible only through love. Thus with a sense of predestination before disaster strikes her home,

Mageila became the lonely gull with flesh as cold as winter feathers. The wings of life, spreading to carry her with grave ecstasy, became weighted; and as long as she lived she would go on remembering that the bird must fall. (p.6)

In the opening scenes of the novel, Duley provides quite a vivid description of Mageila's family. Mageila's mother, like many of the maternal figures in Duley's work, is a woman who reigns supreme in her household. Her relationship with her husband is based on that premise:

Not once did she entertain the thought that a man could ask a woman for her children. Not once did she think Pierre would wish to be married in any church but her own. (p.8)

And yet, while Sheila Mageila believes she rules Pierre, "only Pierre could reduce her, and because of him she stayed within tolerable bounds of briskness and bossiness." (p.11) Like Isabel Pyke's mother in *The Eyes of the Gull*, the mother here also dominates the family, but her relationship with her husband is tempered through love to equality, much as is Josephine and Benedict Keilly's relationship in *Cold Pastoral*.

Mageila's nature is like her father's. She shares with him a special understanding, even to the point of extra-sensory perception. While Mageila and her father share a few words in French, he has a sudden premonition:

'Pierre! Pierre! What's the matter? Oh-' Sheila Mageila gave a relieved laugh. 'Just a goose walking over your grave' I thought you were having a fit.'  
'I was cold,' he explained, staring up... like a man surprised at himself. (p.24)

Mageila, watching her father closely, has a similar sense of foreboding, and because of this her departure from him to heal a sick child in a neighbour's house is filled with tenderness:

'Bye, Papa,' said Mageila, leaving a delicate kiss on his hard golden cheek. 'I know your forever.' Then she turned away, feeling sustained, able to go out of doors without fear. (p.26)

Mageila's ability to heal comes as a direct result of her lineage. Her knowledge and acceptance of the harshness of life, however, are developed through her experience in Newfoundland:

Her narrow world had brought her close to the slaying knife, the axe, and the barbed hook striking the fruit of the sea. Blood, blood, she thought unhappily, visualizing the beauty of the slain lamb and the proud strut of the rooster laid low on the block, but she bade herself look at them, firmly knowing such things must

be. (p.27)

This experience gives her a certain resistance to pain and suffering, but she is still unprepared for the disaster which befalls her family in the form of a tidal wave. The event is so catastrophic that as she watches the destruction of her community from the high ground of her neighbour's home, she can interpret the event only in terms of crucifixion imagery:

Her eyes became nailed, feeling they must crucify on Feather-Cake [her home] with its points leaning for a last look at land. Frantically she knew her mother stood in a window like a stony figure weighted on either side by her sisters, but in spite of her dreadful maternity she bent towards the sea. (p.47)

After saving a child's life, ministering to the needs of many victims, and accepting the fact that her entire family perished in the tragedy, Mageila feels "herself in death-throes", (p.50) and collapses, unable to carry herself through the crisis.

Mageila is revived by Mrs. Slater, an old woman whose tendency towards a reclusive life is overcome in the task of helping those who have suffered in the disaster. Mrs. Slater has faced the remorselessness of time and her own personal tragedies, and survived all through great inner strength:

She was a widow with a widow's mite, her husband having gone down in a vessel. She was a mother with sons starkly dead on the ice fields. She was a woman with a hump on her back from stooping for her own maintenance. Recognizing incredible valour, Mageila could not move a finger to live.(p.51)

Although Mageila sits, withdrawn, "like a wooden image with an uneven base", (p.53) Mrs. Slater makes it clear that she must rise above pain and face life once more. It is the sea Mageila must come to terms with, as Mrs. Slater observes, "You've got to go to sea to get anywhere in this country." (p.63) This is true both literally and figuratively, as Mageila must leave Feather-the-Nest to live

with her grandfather and aunts in Ship-Haven, and must travel there by sea. Mrs. Slater, the embodiment of a strength of spirit which Mageila will attempt to achieve, urges her to meet her challenge, and as a kindred spirit, and a product "of the same strong world, speaking the same language, Mrs. Slater could speak and be comprehended." (p.67)

In Ship-Haven Mageila starts on her long road to recovery, although there are many obstacles in her way. Her first difficulty is the nosiness of her relatives. Mageila is the focus of attention as she arrives in Ship-Haven, and her aunts naturally try to capture some of the attention for themselves. They are petty, money-conscious women who "know everyone is watching us", (p.78) and whose main concern for Mageila is to see that she marries well. Her aunts are wonderfully described by Duley:

Unimaginative, living energetically in the exterior world, [and] narrow with their own importance, they needed tragic evidence to call up genuine tears. Unlike the men of their ancestry, they had not learned humility from the indiscriminating seas. Like Sheila Mageila, they were big frogs in little pools- despising everything beyond their range, criticizing what they did not understand. Inactivity was a sin. Books were for people who had nothing to do or for those who would not find things to do. Their interests were fervent, virtuous, and womanly. They hooked balls of twine and cotton as if the world could be redeemed through mats and doilies....A new crochet pattern was of more consequence than the latest news from the European dictators.

They thought Hitler a very bad man who might have been saved through church-work....But with the aptitude of domestic ostriches they buried their heads in household sand. There could not be another war! If men had more to occupy their time, they would not sit imagining horrors. A woman's work was never done! (pp.79-80)

Clearly, Duley viewed women of this sort with some disdain. Mageila's aunts refuse to educate themselves in world affairs, and, worse still, ridicule others for making the effort. Duley herself, well educated and obviously very concerned with the "terror in our own time",<sup>4</sup> as she called it, thus points a finger at the

very members of her own society who would have criticized her.

Mageila is uncomfortable in such an environment, but must learn to cope with these women, though they seem oblivious to what is going on in the world outside Ship-Haven. Their sympathy for her is limited, as they expect her to be as "strong" as they purport to be:

We Dilkes don't have head-aches! We Dilkes don't take laxatives!  
We Dilkes marry young! We Dilkes don't take chloroform for our  
children!...[They] would not permit Ella to speak of her major  
operation- considering it an outrage on Dilke female organs. (p.81)

Not only does their talk discourage Mageila, but their choice of home decoration is equally debilitating:

...the end of the hall was savage with another world. Under a window, with light giving it full value, stood a heavy marble-topped table bearing the mounted heads of two stags with tall interlocked antlers....The table was agonized with a stayed picture of unacquiescent death. All the cruelty of nature and the savage battles of the forests were arrested under their eyes....On their polished stand they represented slow savage death, without settling into final peace. (pp.86-7)

Mageila faints at the sight of this grim object. Her aunt attempts to comfort her, but Mageila, surrounded as always in the novel by bird imagery, is beyond her reach: "'Now we won't think of it any more,' [said her Aunt.] 'No, we won't think of it anymore,' agreed Mageila like a dying parrot." (p.87)

It is only her grandfather who is able to rescue Mageila from this environment, and he does so by suggesting they take a trip to Labrador. She consents, and aboard the vessel named the *Assou*, Beothuck for sea-gull, they travel to several coastal communities in Labrador. Her grandfather has not planned the voyage to remove Mageila from harshness, but to give her the opportunity to face up to and conquer it. He tells her

'Well, my girl, I'm not going to take the stags away. It's no good moping against things that won't change, and I'm not one to fill

you up with a belly full of trash. You can't get away from storms, but they're only the other face of calms." (p.95)

Mageila can no longer be "a girl behind a veil", (p.104) but must face the horrors of her world if she is to get on with her life.

From her childhood Mageila had been dominated by her mother. With the death of Sheila Mageila, her daughter has the opportunity to become a woman in her own right. On the trip to Labrador, Mageila begins to take tentative steps towards her own autonomy. Ironically, just as this process begins, she meets a young man who sees her for the first time as she stares "through the port-hole with eyes like wells of martyrdom....he saw her persecuted, Messianic....Was she a virgin, he demanded, finding her mystery a challenge to investigation." (p.116) Once again she is trapped, this time as an image for investigation, just as Isabel of *The Eyes of the Gull* and Mary of *Cold Pastoral* had been for the men they had loved. In Mageila's case, however, the image is very close to the truth. She is not used, as Isabel was used, as a model giving life to painting, nor must she lead a secret double life as Mary did in order to express herself totally. Instead, Trevor is "so different from her Aunt Molly, who could make her feel miserably inadequate in a life bounded by domesticity", that with him, Mageila "felt stripped of every disguise." (pp.122-3) Thus she feels she may confide in him completely, but actually having no defense against him, she is also absolutely vulnerable to his "investigation" and subsequent perception of her.

It is through Trevor that Mageila comes to understand the devastation in the great world outside Newfoundland and beyond her own small concerns. Mageila's catastrophe, as terrible as it was, is but a puny tragedy in the face of war:



'Newfoundland speaks of death,' she said, with such throaty conviction that he was pierced by unyouthful knowledge....'I feel it's the only death.' Then she was startled by his short laugh.

'I wouldn't say that. It's only that you can't see any farther at present. There's wholesale destruction travelling along.' (pp.132-3)

Trevor asks Mageila if she has felt "the implications of Munich." When she does not respond, he suggests "that in isolated places reality doesn't penetrate, or should I say unreality?" (p.133) But Mageila is caught between "submerged girlhood and incipient womanhood" (p.131) and "was spinning between the living and the dead." (p.137) She would have to heal herself to be able to look at the larger world.

The first instance of Mageila's renewal of spirit comes as she cures Trevor's headache. With some surprise she realizes "I'm the little doctor again", (p.142) thus reclaiming a part of her past. Trevor longs to possess Mageila, but unlike Peter in *The Eyes of the Gull* and Philip in *Cold Pastoral*, he realizes the folly of such a pursuit:

But he wished to detain the source of his healing, treasure it, and set it aside for himself; however he reminded himself of the fallacy of possession. Who could possess a mystery? She had come through calamity, preserving the clear thing in herself, and he had nothing to do with its resurrection. (p.142)

Here Duley demonstrates a great shift in the portrayal of men in her novels. While Peter insists on the capturing of Isabel in his art and Philip must own Mary as a possession or child, Trevor does not attempt any such undertaking. Although he wishes he could keep Mageila for himself, he is wise enough not to indulge in such a fantasy. He intuitively knows that Mageila has resurrected herself, and that she is strong, and will be stronger still, on her own.

Mageila's strength comes from an ability to find inner peace. Although

Trevor suggests that she work in France or England, Mageila instinctively decides to work with her own people:

She looked down the rough road with a return of her sleep-walking expression. 'There is different work in Labrador. This winter I used to listen to the Pasteur Institute. They often repeated what Louis Pasteur said, "on the one side blood and death, on the other peace, work, and salvation." I wrote it down because it meant so much.' (p.147)

Trevor agrees, adding "The best we can do is seek an even keel. We're part of a tottering system, being swept along until we drop out." (p.151) Once again, Duley's novel departs from her earlier writing, as Mageila demonstrates no desire to escape from her society, but instead decides to return to help her people. Further, she completely embraces the nature which previously had so horrified her, as she tells Trevor "You couldn't work here [in Newfoundland] if nature didn't work with you." (p.154) The total acceptance of Newfoundland and its way of life is such that Mageila finds Trevor's England almost contemptible. Trevor, for example, scornfully asks of Labrador dogs, "'Good God...can't they bark like decent dogs?' 'They can't bark,' [Mageila]... said serenely [in reply]. 'They've kept the sound of the wolf.'" As if in an effort to emphasize the difference between Trevor's heritage and her own, Mageila sweetly adds, "'English voices do not speak of the wolf.'" (p.155) Duley's writing has found its own heritage, then, quite apart from that of the English voice, or from any emulation of it.

Mageila's development towards autonomy is absolutely secured at a whaling station, where both she and Trevor are exposed to the most repulsive scenes of whale slaughter and rending. Trevor notes that "'It's one of the times when there's perfect equality between the sexes. Nothing the male can do will sweeten the lot of the female.'" (pp.164-5) Mageila stands firmly on her own two

feet and does not faint, as she certainly would have a few days earlier. Trevor does hold her, but she does not rely on him for strength, and he knows and is irritated by this. Some time later, he thinks to himself:

She had no right to be so brooding, so uncomplaining over devastation. She should protest, cry woman's tears, and make some sucker of a man pay for her losses. He was turning on her mentally when he remembered to ask himself how much he protested systems, traditions, and backgrounds. Everything was out of focus, cock-eyed, he thought, frowning.... (p.174)

Duley thus turns the man's world upside down. While Trevor purports to be the modern male, he nonetheless holds the traditional view of the female. His intellect tells him to abolish his old-fashioned attitude, but his ingrained training remains to muddle him. Thus depicted, Trevor epitomizes much of the confusion of the twentieth-century man.

Trevor is nastily portrayed by Duley on board ship after a botanical expedition to the barrens of Labrador. Although he had previously refused to use Mageila's healing powers for his own benefit, he is depicted as whining and self-centered as he is brought down from his high ideals and compassion by a few flies. Mosquito-bitten and irritable, he cannot abide Mageila's patience:

For unaccountable reasons he wanted to blast her from cool composure, and without thought he rushed into words. 'It's much worse than a head-ache. Couldn't you touch the bites- make the rounds of the ship'-.... (p.179)

His request is a crass one, and even he later deplores his own conduct. Worse still, Captain Dilke describes his granddaughter to Trevor as a woman who behaves in such a way as to make a man wonder "if they're not bigger than himself." (p.182) In these scenes Trevor clearly does not measure up to Mageila's level of humanity and tolerance.

Mageila comes to be seen by Trevor as a part of the nature of

Newfoundland itself in the scope of her understanding and acceptance of the place:

...places become deeply significant when they represent people. If unconscious effects are the greatest triumphs, Mageila reflected herself to Trevor through a whole landscape. When he retreated, raising a barrier between himself and the living girl, he saw her everywhere and heard her voice like an undertone of the sea. She became the experience, the place, making him conscious of life and love, of time that was brief- and ominously brief for men of his generation. (p.171)

Mageila even sings in a way that was "half-grave, half-gay, as if she knew every nuance of her country", (p.188) and Trevor "felt a momentary hate for a country's bleakness that could enter and dwell in feminine flesh." (p.186) Duley's representation of Mageila as a part of the country itself links her with Mrs. Slater, the "rock" of Mageila's existence through her tragedy. Mageila has now attained Mrs. Slater's level of comprehension, and rises to her capacity as giver of strength and wisdom.

In opposition to Mageila is Trevor's wife, who is "as frigid as if she never heard of the natural earth." (p.192) Trevor tells Mageila that his wife had

...cotton-wool over a mind full of preconceived ideas. She liked everything traditionally English, houses generations old, men who trimmed themselves for promotion and who licked the boots of their betters. (p.192)

Mageila, on the other hand, is capable of understanding "the achievement of one primrose in Labrador." (p.197) As Trevor sees the difference between the two women, he recognizes Mageila's "womanhood... coming full-flowered to life." (p.199)

Trevor and Mageila part, as he must continue his work. She, in a searching for herself, decides to travel to St. John's. In town, "she felt stronger in privacy", (p.201) knowing that she could maintain a certain level of anonymity.

She discovers that life there is not nearly as cloistered for women as it had been in Ship-Haven. Advertisements catch her attention:

'Difficult Days Made Comfortable.' She felt startled, studying a cardboard girl with a very wry face. Her Aunt Molly would be scandalized. Such talk! The Dilke daughters did not recognize their bodies. (p.202)

While reading advertisements, Mageila sees that a job is available as a companion for a child in the Kirke household. She answers the ad and is given the position by Mrs. Kirke, a woman who seems obsessed by the possibility of war:

England is asleep! [she tells Mageila.] As Priestley say., she's become a nation of inheritors. But the Solomon Slows are going to have a terrible awakening, and while they're feeling profoundly shattered the beautiful boys will go out and die because the deluded old men had no foresight. How pleasant war would be if the right people could be shot! (p.213)

Her anxiety about war is a direct result of the condition of her husband, as Mageila later learns. He is described as "a scarecrow loosely dressed", and in watching him, Mageila is "reminded of being sent out by Mrs. Slater to stare painfully at the sea." (pp.217-8) He endures the first World War, but survives only to be haunted by it. His alcoholism later turns to drug use, and he is now derelict, a walking twentieth-century terror.

Mageila's task is to teach Mrs. Kirke's daughter French. Mageila asks if there is another subject the girl might find useful, and Mrs. Kirke suggests what a child might need to know in this age:

'I'm not a fussy mother, but I insist that the child gets the truth when she asks for it. Teach her to wait on herself, to cross the street looking both ways before she goes, to expect no privilege she doesn't earn, and make her co-operate in a way that will not set up antagonism.' (p.215)

In light of such twentieth-century wisdom, Mageila senses a relationship

between Mrs. Kirke and Mrs. Slater:

Mrs. Kirke mounted the colonial staircase and Mageila followed tentatively, reminded of her creep after Mrs. Slater, finding a quality of similarity between a straight back and a hump. (p.217)

Moirá Brophy, Mrs. Kirke's maid, also has an understanding of nature similar to that of Mrs. Slater. Although Mrs. Kirke is irritated by Moirá's "maddening acceptances of drugging, drunkenness, peace, war, Stalin, Hitler,[and] Mussolini as the will of God", she knows she accepts things as they are "because in some mysterious way...[all] were part of the will of God." (pp.227-8) In this environment, Mageila's understanding of life is reinforced as an acceptance of opposites.

Mrs. Kirke's own life is full of contradictions. In the downstairs portion of the house, she is "full of disquiet and light hail-stone conversation,[yet] she had a gracious simplicity when she arrived in the attic." (p.240) Patricia, Mrs. Kirke's daughter, could "dabble with water-paints [there] and splash so widely that Mageila felt she was getting rid of submerged colour." Downstairs, meanwhile, Mr. Kirke lives alone with only his faithful dog Brin by his side. The divergence between his world and the world of the women upstairs is enormous. In fact, "Mageila felt held between two worlds: the forward ardor of the child and the backward drag of the dog." (p.241) In order to escape the world of Mr. Kirke, the women must create their own sanctuary.

In this sanctuary, Mrs. Kirke and Mageila discuss life, war, men and women, and ultimately give each other a kind of peace. Mrs. Kirke finds Mageila profound, and notes that "men did not like profundity in women. They liked their Greta Garbos in picture-houses and their Mona Lisas in galleries." (p.229) Duley has now created women who shrewdly understand how men can

"capture" them, using them to create decorative illusions in their lives. Similarly, Mrs. Kirke objectively scrutinizes women, seeing both the comedy and the tragedy in their lives:

'Most women's minds are a muddle. You can be neck-high in tragedy and somebody says the refrigerator has gone off, mum, I left on the electric-iron, the dish came apart in me hand, sure the cat ate that bit of left-over chicken.' (p.248)

In Mrs. Kirke's personal life, other women often torment her. Her sister Pauline "was a Colonial who wished to be English." (p.255) Her mother-in-law dealt with her son "in a voice balancing between duty and distaste. Sick, secretive, antisocial, Mr. Kirke would be invaded with resultant misery all round." (p.256) In the confusion attending the visits by such women, only Moira would be able to keep order. Often, Mageila would slip out to walk alone and avoid the ordeal of their visits.

It is on one of these walks that Mageila meets Trevor again. They meet on Signal Hill, where Trevor tells her, "somehow you look both younger and older." (p.264) They visit Mrs. Kirke together, and while Trevor talks, "Mageila sat bemused as a Galatea between flesh and marble.... feeling like the center of widening circles." (p.268) Once again she is torn between two worlds, contemplating a choice which she will obviously have to make. Although Trevor asks his wife for a divorce, Mrs. Kirke warns him that there is no certainty that she will agree to grant it.

While Mageila awaits news from Trevor, Mrs. Kirke learns that her sons have joined the Air Force to go to war. She responds to this event in the same manner that Mageila had responded to the tidal wave: "Instead of talking as if she had a goad on her mind she sat silently, with slack hands and veiled eyes, withdrawn to some world of her own." (p.281) In the midst of Mrs. Kirke's pain

comes a release from her duty to Mr. Kirke. One night a fire begins in his room and he is burned to death. Moira allows Brin into Mr. Kirke's room at the last moment as everyone else escapes from the flaming house, and he too dies in the blaze. Later, there is some question about how the fire began, and it seems likely that Moira had some hand in the "accident." Mrs. Kirke is overcome by despair, and before the funeral she has "the air of a woman adjusting a mask." (p.293) Again, like Mageila, she retreats from the world of terror and destruction in which she lives to a private realm in which no one can reach her.

Mageila is left to bury Brin as well as two cats which Mrs. Kirke has decided to have put down. Trevor helps her, and afterwards they drive to Signal Hill to look at the stars. The entire evening speaks of an era passing. The death, war, and pain surrounding Mageila leave her at the end of one life, and at the beginning of another.

The following day Mageila receives a note from Trevor, asking her to meet him on Signal Hill again. She realizes from its tone that his wife has refused to give him the divorce. Knowing she has lost Trevor forever, and that he will undoubtedly be going to war, spoils all her memories of him. Mrs. Kirke responds to her plight with words of harsh reality about men, war, and the age they live in:

'It doesn't matter in the least what we think ourselves. Goodness knows I've railed to you enough against war; but it's on, so we must be humble. Women who expected lives of their own will be like sleep-walkers in men's shadows. We can't do anything about it but mean something to the men who will die thinking of us. The women's position is more bitter than ever: the older ones will go through it twice, the younger ones will lose their first loves, and beautiful girls will be forced to be spinsters and the mothers of young children will be demented with air raids. But what can we do about it? We can only love the men and live the different future now; that's got to be.' (p.313)



As Mrs. Kirke accepts her lot in life, so Mageila accepts hers. Trevor is to be sent away, but as Mrs. Kirke says softly, he is to be sent away with love.

In Trevor and Mageila's final meeting, Trevor "accepted the circle of her arms." (p.320) Just as Mary embraced Philip in *Cold Pastoral*, Mageila gives her love to Trevor, and each time the woman is in control. Mageila knows in this era there will be no permanence, but she tells Trevor that those who love will be able to "walk through the waters and not feel drowned." (p.324) Her final decision is to return to Labrador, where she will share her love through her healing.

Although *Highway to Valour* fails as a happily concluded romance, it is without question the most realistic and the strongest of Duley's first three works. With her own life in ruins, surrounded by sickness, death, and war, she develops Mageila as a woman of courage and fortitude who can live in and deal with the horrors of the twentieth century. Thus, as one reviewer said, the "book makes no compromises with inner reality."<sup>5</sup> Mageila's story is not a romance, but it is a love story for humanity and a signal from a woman to women to look to the world of national and international events as part of their responsibility above domesticity. As full of suffering as the work is, it is equally full of determination to face whatever might lie ahead.

## Chapter Five

### The Twentieth Century: "The Full Blaze"

*Novelty on Earth* is the last of Duley's published novels. When first submitted for publication, it was judged by a reader for Macmillan to be "certainly the very finest Canadian manuscript I have ever read."<sup>1</sup> Ellen Elliott, Duley's editor, maintained that "the form and construction of *Novelty on Earth* are sounder [even than *Highway to Valour*], and ... it is a better piece of work ... all round."<sup>2</sup> As the culmination of Duley's literary career, the novel represents the height of her achievement in feminist writing. In construction and style it is easily the best of her works; and in its keen observation of the woman's perspective, its sharp and witty discourse surpasses even the finest passages in her earlier writing.

In spite of its merits, however, it has been labelled as "empty", and "superficial."<sup>3</sup> The reason for such an adverse response appears to lie in the abrupt shift in Duley's handling of a theme which had previously been developed in a less direct manner. In this novel, Duley does not merely evoke imagery associated with the tradition of feminist writing, nor does she circumvent the issues of women in society by a plot designed to cushion her feminist remarks. Instead, she overwhelms the reader with the ideas and feelings of a woman finding her own voice, exploring her own emancipation, and confronting her own century.

Clearly, readers of Duley's work to this point were not prepared for what Duley called "the full blaze of the woman's angle in life."<sup>4</sup> Most readers did not view her work in terms of her perspective as a feminist, and thus her last novel

appeared to be a total break from her earlier efforts. When taken in the context of Duley's emerging concerns for women in society, however, *Novelty on Earth* is the logical conclusion to an articulation of the woman's experience that had been conveyed, if not as sharply, in the first three of her novels.

The title of the novel is taken from Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Duley quotes directly from the poem at the opening of the novel:

Thus Adam to himself lamented loud--

Who thus afflicted when sad Eve beheld  
Desolate where she sat, approaching nigh  
Soft words to his fierce passion she assayed:  
But her with stern regard he thus repelled  
"Out of my sight thou serpent--

-- oh why did God  
Creator wise, that peopled highest Heav'n  
With spirits masculine, create at last  
This novelty on earth, this fair defect  
Of nature, and not fill the world at once  
With men as angels without feminine,  
Or find some other way to generate  
Mankind?"<sup>5</sup>

In using this source, Duley suggests a twofold meaning. First, the novel deals with temptation, in the form of an adulterous relationship between Sara Colville and John Murray Blair. Sara, the Eve figure, clearly means trouble for Murray, her Adam, yet she is not the serpent which destroys their relationship. Instead, it is Murray's considerable and, in Duley's view, ludicrous regard for his reputation that eventually separates the two lovers. Thus Murray, and Adam by implication, are scorned by Duley for their petty self-centredness. Second, Duley uses the Milton quotation as a means of suggesting that her business in this novel was nothing less than a redefinition of the perception of women in society. By the time she wrote *Novelty on Earth*, she had completely rethought the image of the woman in her writing. Sara is truly a "novelty" or new

creation, as she is quite simply the modern woman. From the outset of the novel her latest heroine, unlike the others, is a woman made to stand in an image created by herself, and not in the image created for her by society. Thus Duley demands that society re-examine its perception of women and move into the twentieth century.

The novel opens with an epigraph from *Hamlet*:

Hamlet: Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?

Ophelia: 'Tis brief, my lord.

Hamlet: As woman's love? <sup>6</sup>

Duley's point in using this quotation is possibly to call attention to the stereotypical male opinion of the female's constancy; yet Ophelia, cut to the quick as she is by Hamlet's incomprehensible actions, does drown herself because of him. It is Hamlet who outlives Ophelia, just as John Murray Blair will walk away from Sara to leave her in her own kind of madness and death throes. Yet Sara will survive to begin a new life, as Ophelia does not. Interestingly, the scene in the novel which provokes the final crisis between Sara and Murray occurs as a child almost drowns, only to be rescued by Sara while the cowardly Murray hides behind bedroom curtains to maintain his spotless reputation. It is this near drowning which opens Sara's eyes and begins the series of events which will lead to her revitalization as a woman writer.

It must be conceded that the opening of the novel, while polished and witty in style, does present an awkward introduction to the work. It seems that Duley was moving towards a new form of expression which, in this section, did not come off as well as one would like. It assumes an impersonal omniscient point of view, and is clearly meant to give a backhanded slap to the British, though for what artistic purpose is not immediately apparent. Duley writes

that "nature got tired of the Englishman and took one more drop of nervous fluid to make the American." (p.3) This racial commentary seems arbitrary and out of place. She then says she will pull her story from the dominance of British influence to the shores of America, and implies that this tale will be different from her earlier works, as it is the woman whose actions will constitute the final scene: "This story might go over to America, man meets woman, man gets woman, woman loses man, man loses woman!" (p.4) The "prologue" (as the opening of the novel is called) then continues with a description of the original meeting between Murray and Sara when she was still a teenager. The distant manner in which Duley narrates the event lends the section an air of surrealism. This may in fact be means of differentiating between Sara's past and present:

Everything she felt and did was the result of her contacts with the new and old world, plus the motley that ran in her own blood....[But] somewhere there was liberation, harmony, beauty, and a grand unbuttoned communion with the one nearest her identity. (p.5)

The "new world" which Duley embraces in the novel involves remarkable attitudes on her part. One of the characters of her prologue, for example, speaks of adoption: "'really my dear, I'm not in favour of litters.... I'm going to adopt, and then one can shop at the best places and complain about the nose and ears.'" (p.7) Murray's traditional attitude toward love is scorned, as Duley writes "He had detoured from waste by marrying young, accepting the fact that wives give their husbands well-regulated love to free them for other things." (p.6) Further, Duley writes blatantly of her heroine's own inadequacy in the prologue as she says "[Murray] was blinded by ambition and she by virginity: two ice-cold qualities that foster the empty eye." (p.4) Duley thus is not about to echo traditional views, but overwhelmingly states her own perspective at the

outset of the novel.

The novel itself properly opens only after Sara has been twice married and twice widowed. She lives the life of the idle rich and spends a great deal of time with her friend Nora, who has two small daughters. As Sara is constantly associated with the "Eve" figure, Nora, on the other hand, is often associated with the Virgin Mary: "She gazed at life with the grey eyes of Paradise, set in a face of a dreaming Madonna....When Bob [Nora's husband] saw her like that he must want to pray, and purge himself of earthly desires." (p.11) The two women are thus established as a pair of inverse doubles, each acting out a part of the woman's realm, yet each seeming very foreign to the other.

As Sara and Nora attend a typically mundane dinner at Government House, Duley introduces the theme of war which runs throughout the novel. Sara speaks to a high-ranking military official, who tells her that

Not enough people were being shot, and the whole of America should be exterminated, for giving the world cocktails, and the League of Nations. Not at all squeamish, he was murdering in the grand manner....He did not mind in the least going down with the ship, but he was within his rights in insisting on going down with white people. (p.11)

In the midst of such a world of insanity, Murray re-enters Sara's life as she first sees him across the room and then walks to him with "destiny impelled steps." (p.12) Duley casts their relationship clearly in a biblical light as Sara "dropped her eyes, isolating herself in a ballroom Eden." (p.13) Their chemistry is an instant one, but Duley remains unabashed, and writes that "nothing binds a man and woman together like a straightforward talk about the facts of life." (p.15) Sara is thus far removed from Duley's early heroines. Unlike them, she is able to accept her age and lot in life "with the serenity of a woman who has felt no frost in the years." (p.17)

It is Murray, however, the traditional male, who is unable to deal with Sara's attitudes. After telling her that she should have had children, he goes so far as to say that her husbands should have insisted upon it. She counters by saying that she did go to work. Murray's response is less than modern: "What!" he exclaimed, as if it was the last thing he expected to hear. "You got a job?" Sara explains her need to work as a writer : " I got in a state where I realized that a woman adrift was a danger." (p.20) It is Murray who then firmly establishes their irreconcilable differences:

He sat up with a stiff contending spine. 'Nonsense, my dear, you wouldn't have needed the book if you were left with a baby.'  
She examined him gravely and for a moment their eyes quarrelled, mutely and fiercely, over male and female issues. (p.21)

Sara notes her differences from Murray in outlook, but feels that she loves him enough to overcome this. Instead of pursuing this argument, she changes the topic of conversation to that of her novel. When asked what the novel deals with, she responds, "A man and a woman of course, and the things they do." (p.21) This is a good definition of the theme of Duley's own writing, and suggests a strong parallel between her and Sara's response to the world.

Sara goes on to describe nature as achieving the perfect balance between the male and the female, using as an illustration the relationship among bees. As she describes their mating, Murray suggests she use the word "clinched":

'Clinched,' she said in soft protest. 'Men use strange words! No, embraced, intertwined, whirling for a second in the madness of love ! That's what the book says. Have I blushed yet?'  
'No,!' Murray responds, ' you're a very brazen girl, I'm afraid.' (p.27)

As Sara finishes describing the casting off of the male bee by the female,

The expression on his face delighted her. It was full of disapproval that nature could be so badly arranged. The sacrifice of the male

was an outrageous piece of effrontery, something to be brushed aside at once. The tilt of his head was a defense for all males. (p.27)

In spite of this teasing beyond the point of fun, Murray cannot resist Sara, but he knows she is not the conventional female. He says "There's something male about you, my dear, I mean, you meet a man foursquare." She quietly answers "Is that male?...I didn't know." (p.32) Sara thus both attracts and bewilders him, just as he attracts and yet annoys her.

As Sara and Murray move back to the dance in Government House, it is interesting to note that Duley reverses the imagery which had been employed in each of her three earlier novels. Isabel Pyke had been "frozen" and "veiled" by her artist lover through his painting in *The Eyes of the Gull*, Mary Keilly Fitz Henry had been photographed, and had masked her own face with her hands in *Cold Pastoral*, and Magella Wickert had worn "veiled" looks in *Highway to Valour*. But it is Sara who casts off the mask and is seen as her own person in *Novelty on Earth*. She says in reply to Murray when asked her name: "I've had so many. First, I was Sara Johnson, then Mrs. Colin Campbell, and now Mrs. Bruce Colville. I'm just Sara to you." (p.37) After their lovemaking, she walks back to the ballroom with her heart worn so plainly on her face that "the hunter in the male knew at once that she must be absolutely sure of another man." (p.38) Significantly, however, Murray returns to the room so composed that "his face was a contemplative mask, and she [Sara] knew by the bare movement of his lips, that he was saying the most respectable things to his partners." (p.38) It is the man, then, who wears the mask through his own choice, and not because it has been forced upon him. Murray's concern with his reputation is already so evident that his sense of self is lost. As Duley's heroines



move towards self-expression and control of their own persons, the imagery associated with the male leads moves away from freedom, and towards outright deception.

Although Duley's heroine moves towards autonomy, however, the development of secondary characters parallels the development of the heroines in her earlier novels. Annie, Sara's maid, loves a local taxi driver, but is attracted nonetheless by the exotic appeal of a sailor. She confides in Sara that "Alf [her boyfriend] has never been further than the longest fare his taxi takes him, and this sailor has been everywhere." (p.41) But Sara is wiser than Isabel of *The Eyes of the Gull*, and cautions Annie not to be lulled into security by a charmer who has nothing of substance to offer: "I feel I should say, Annie, that it's not very wise to throw away substance for shadow.... Summer won't last forever." (p.42) After a short lecture, "Annie went cheerfully out, with determination in her back to accept the burden of Eve." Unlike Isabel, she can incorporate both sides of woman depicted by Duley; that is, she plays both the virgin and the temptress, realizing in her wry way that "there's nothing to marry but what they call men." (p.43)

Murray and Sara continue their relationship during his stay in her city, setting up her home as a kind of paradise removed from the real world. Nevertheless, Duley allows ripples of reality to creep into the novel even as the lovers awake: "How did you sleep?" [Murray asks Sara]. It sounded the most important question of the day, infinitely more stupendous than the state of Europe." (p.45) This foreshadowing is reinforced by the imagery Duley uses in relation to Murray. Sara says of him, "You've got such a Good Friday face." (p.46) As Sara and Murray represent Eve and Adam, a reference to Good Friday

takes on larger meaning. Murray will not be the Christ figure, redeeming his kind through heroic action. Rather, he brings about his fall through cowardice. The passing of the traditional male is seen by Duley as a necessity in society if the relationship between man and the modern woman is to survive a fall from the "paradise" of the traditional past. Thus Murray's "Good Friday" face foreshadows the death of his relationship with Sara, and demonstrates a need for a new kind of relationship between men and women in the modern and very non-Edenic world.

Sara's home is the very antithesis of the traditional world for which Murray longs. Sara's cook lectures Annie on the reality of there being "nothing ... worth having like your own money to spend", (p.60) as she impresses on her the importance of self-reliance as opposed to reliance on men. Sara herself pleads with Murray to understand that in the modern world "people have raw nerves, men have no jobs and women are afraid to have babies in case the bombs...." (p.65) Here she breaks off, interrupted by Murray's confident reply:

'A thing like that can never happen. No man could permit it. Common sense will prevail.'

'It won't,' she said in soft disagreement. (p.65)

Even Sara's house itself seems to Murray a symbol of change. He describes it as

'Not very permanent.' He spoke like a man who might have surrounded himself with the solidity of an old house, and the clutter of tradition. (p.67)

Sara, however, lives for intensity as opposed to tradition. She retorts, "'Darling, the pictures are a haphazard Renoir and a Monet, picked for colour.'" (p.67) The question of permanence again pushes Murray to "mask" his emotions, as he realizes that in expressing his desire for a traditional home he is insulting Sara because she suspects he will never be hers. Thus he lives a double standard and

is a man who lives in two worlds, both literally and figuratively. His life in England with his wife and son is quite separate from his life with Sara, yet he expects her to be as conventional as his wife, without receiving any of his wife's security. Sara does not understand this, and conflict, however muted, results:

Their eyes met and clung, with complete repudiation of their surroundings. It was a long visual duel of a man and a woman, full of question, answer, pillage, and an ultimate probe to ask why, of each other's eyes. In sight of her face, his hands dropped back to his sides and his absent son retreated. Inevitably vision had to cloud, veil itself in the face of the insoluble. She gave way first, questioning it in words....

'Will we be like the cottage, not very permanent?' (p.69)

Murray fails on this question, as he does on two others. Sara asks him, hypothetically, whether he would choose to protect the life of the mother or the unborn child should a crisis occur in giving birth. He is unable to respond, and she knows instinctively that he would choose the child: "Understanding of everything went into the way she followed his mood. Inwardly she grimaced, feeling that women would always be squaws." (pp.82-3) He similarly gives her an inadequate response when she asks to have his child: "No, no, positively no!" (p.95) Sara has said that she believes "'in going on and on, with life, more life, through other lives, until we glimpse the enigma of living'", while Murray believes "in hanging on to what you've got." (p.91) In spite of these differences, however, they live "in a calm lotus-land. [But] It was the illusion of a man's arms." (p.93) With Murray's refusal to father her child, Sara thinks

And they said men were gamblers! They weren't! They were too impregnated with caution and suspicion. It took woman to sound the clarion!... There was this separateness of men and women. The story of creation was wrong. Woman was not made from man's rib. She was dropped haphazard, into the Garden of Eden from some separate planet. That it coincided with the moment of man's greatest need was incidental. She merely co-operated, and went her secret way. (pp.96-7)

Thus Duley denies the story of Adam and Eve, and recreates her own tale of the woman's place in creation.

The climax of problems in Murray and Sara's relationship comes as Murray refuses to answer a child's call for help. Nora's daughter, Jennifer, constantly referred to as "a minute angel... conceived on the meadows of heaven", (p.49) toddles to the edge of the swimming pool one morning and falls in just as Sara rises to hear her scream. Murray, who has spent the night with Sara, is terrified that he will be found out in all the confusion. It is at this pivotal moment of crisis that his full weakness of character is disclosed. Sara has previously been characterized as having

...infinite resource in herself. She could spend hours and days alone and not feel empty...she could not be intimidated by noises in the night, or the unexpected ringing of a bell. She was inured to shock, and prepared to walk out and meet it. (pp.52-3)

As well, her relationship to Nora is such that emotional "interchange was as ordinary to them as breath." (p.53) Without hesitation, then, Sara leaps to Jennifer's aid as quickly as would her own mother. Murray, however, hides behind the curtains of Sara's room in order to protect his reputation. Ironically, it is exactly this which he loses in Sara's eyes.

Murray is called home almost immediately after this episode to look after his son, Noel, who has come down with the measles. Before he leaves, Sara releases him from their relationship entirely, and as she saw him "being a Judas for his special conception of thirty pieces of silver, she ached for his shame." (p.159) Murray leaves her, and with his departure comes another attack of the lesions from which she has suffered for many years. Committed to a hospital. Sara tries not "to be full of water like poor Ophelia"; (p.164) but like Isabel of *The Eyes of the Gull* and Mageila of *Highway to Valour*, she is unable to stop

the flood of sorrow.

The entire hospital sequence becomes a symbolic death and rebirth for Sara as she fights to overcome her loss. An old man in a nearby room breathes with a "death-rattle", (p.187) and she reads of Michelangelo "painting the Expulsion from Eden", (p.194) just as she symbolically passes through her own "expulsion" and "death." With a child's birth in a room down the hall, "Sara became a proxy for the woman's labour. Identification did not come through mere sympathy with pain." (p.197) Her own almost mad laughter adds to the noise of the night: "It ...coincided too well with the woman's screech and the old man's cough." (p.198) In her ravings, she believes she holds the body of the dead Murray, "killing him with the small delicate kisses of possession." (p.201) As Sara reaches this revealing moment, she senses that it is the woman who, in her own mind, "kills" and "possesses" the man. This reversal of possession is a new feature of Duley's writing. Sara's delirium breaks, and the next day she returns to her own home.

Sara's suggestion to Nora on her return home to form a sort of women's union and to "put our foot down on babies until the men make the world fit to live in" (p.207) is made in jest, but her suggestion that she and Nora take a trip together is not. Nora agrees to the trip, citing the fact that Bob wants another child as good reason for indulgence before she must endure pregnancy. The trip is truly one taken in order to nurse wounds and to find truths. Sara seems to speak for Duley as she tells Nora she believes what she once said to another woman: "I said women would never be free. They were bound hand and soul to biology and the same urge would hold them, long after all other freedoms had been conceded." (p.222)

In London, Nora and Sara have a variety of women's lives to scrutinize:

One friend had become a barrister taking her to lunch in the Middle Temple. From the woman's angle she [Nora] found that impressive, but the girl discussed briefs instead of babies. Another high-spirited girl was subdued by marriage into the Army, and inside the walls of the 'Naval and Military' she spoke of India, heat, Hills, and the fear that one day she would walk ahead of the wrong wife. Nora returned with the vague conviction that the British Army was delicately balanced on female precedence. (p.237)

In spite of the unsatisfactory outcome of these lives, Sara and Nora do find one renewed acquaintance to be a real pleasure. Margot, Sara's old school friend, shares their concerns and they connect wholeheartedly, as Margot says: "The world is crazy. I wish women would revolt. They simply must not go on putting up with the threat to the children they so carefully rear." (p.243) Although Margot has a career, she balances it with the love of a man she will never marry. Strong and confident of her own autonomy, she is described by Duley as a "woman sure of her way." (p.247)

Sara's meetings in London inevitably climax in an encounter with Murray and his wife, Elsa. The meeting is a brief one enacted on a street corner. Later, Sara describes Elsa: "One glove was off. Smooth uncomprehending hand, rather matriarchal. She's never been blasted. Just the type to prowl around the garden and stay snug and secure in a Place." (p.255) The reference is so similar to the descriptions of Mater in *Cold Pastoral* that Duley may be seen to use Elsa in the same way as a symbol for a passing way of life for women. Both Mater and Elsa remain secluded from the truth around them as their worlds disintegrate. While Mater was protected by her family and allowed to live out her life in Edwardian custom, Elsa is seen as one who refuses to come to terms with the twentieth century. Duley, through her characters, suggests that the

time has come for women to open their eyes, and to lead their lives in full awareness of the complexities which affect them.

For a fleeting moment Sara is tempted by the kind of life Elsa leads. She says: "I like the illusion of security. I think I'll go back to the land and dig in a garden." (p.258) But Sara realizes that security in the twentieth century can be an illusion, and this is the crucial factor. Unable to permit herself to live in such folly, she turns to the one world of which she is certain. She relies on herself and goes back to her writing.

Disclosed in the last few pages of the novel is the tragic story of a child at whose existence Duley has hinted throughout the work. Sara's best friend, Christina, died while they were both children. She now becomes Sara's "theme, her sublimated child", and is brought sharply into focus through the paintings and statues of "childlike perfection" (p.271) which Sara contemplates after her penultimate encounter with Murray. Knowing that his child is now an invalid for whom he grieves causes her to be even more determined that her "brain child" (p.241) should be celebrated in life. The memory of Christina thus comes to Sara in her sorrow, and in their fusion comes a new life for Sara in the writing of her novel.

Murray comes once more to see Sara before they finally part, and this time "there was no mask." (p.282) Although he says he would now give her a child, she refuses:

"Then it was so very right! Now if I did it, it would be subduing myself to your wish, because I was aching for your unhappiness, and that would be death to the feelings I had before ....[Then] We seemed like perfect mutuality, some great urge that gave me the courage to snatch something for myself and go on alone and bring up a child without a male parent. All I [could be if I did what you asked]... now is the traditional female, the woman who is self-sacrificing, maternal, pitiful, giving way because of the needs of a

man. That w. "Id kill me!" (p.290)

They leave each other, knowing they will never be together. Sara sobs in Nora's arms "because I couldn't be a squaw-woman and give him what he wanted." But Nora understands: "It's the price the modern woman pays, Sara, for the emancipation of something beyond her body." (p.299)

Duley's final novel is completely, painfully, and truthfully of the twentieth century. Sara, beyond all Duley's other heroines, speaks for a generation of women emerging into a world in which they define their own perspective. Past the muted imagery of veils, masks, enclosure, freezing, drowning, and possession, *Novelty on Earth* becomes a document fully ablaze with the woman's own fiery words. No longer colonized by the literature of men, Duley goes so far as to rework the mythology of the creation of women, freeing women from male mythologies which range from the tales of creation to the Victorian ideal of the decorative but voiceless female. Thus she creates her own world of emancipation for the woman's soul, and in so doing, is part of the creation of a new literary tradition for women. Duley's voice is at once poignant, indignant, startling, and irrepressible. It is the voice of generations of women, and a voice whose time has come.



## Appendix

There is some question about the chronological order of the completion of Margaret Duley's last two novels. *Highway to Valour* was published in 1941, prior to *Novelty on Earth*, which was published in 1942. However, the publication dates have not been seen as an indication of the actual completion dates of the two works. Instead, primarily owing to a note written by Duley stating that "[ *Highway to Valour* ] was written while my mother was dying horribly", it has been argued by Alison Feder that in fact *Highway to Valour* was written around November 1940, since Duley's mother died on November sixteenth of that year. As *Novelty on Earth* went to the publisher in January of 1941, it seems impossible for Duley to have written that novel so soon after the completion of *Highway to Valour*. Alison Feder has therefore stated that *Novelty on Earth* was written before *Highway to Valour*. It seems to me, however, that both external documentary evidence and internal evidence from the writing itself may be cited to dispute this view. It appears to me more likely (though there cannot yet be certainty in this matter) that in fact *Novelty on Earth* was written after *Highway to Valour*, as the publication dates would suggest.

It is clear from a study of the novels that *Novelty on Earth* is unlike anything else Duley had written. By far the most cutting and forthright of her works, *Novelty on Earth* may be seen as an expected conclusion to her development as a feminist writer. It would seem improbable that Duley had written in the style of *Novelty on Earth*, and had then returned to the limited range and more muted style of *Highway to Valour*, since it is a far less controversial work, and is far less a novel that directly confronts the twentieth century. In essence, to move from *Novelty on Earth* to *Highway to Valour* is to

move backwards in terms of the issues with which the novels deal.

In terms of factual evidence, the case for *Highway to Valour* being the last of Duley's written novels is also unconvincing. If Duley had finished *Novelty on Earth* prior to *Highway to Valour*, it is very likely that she would have at least mentioned the work before *Highway to Valour* was published. There is also no clear reason for *Novelty on Earth* being withheld from publication for so long.

Although Alison Feder notes that Duley said she was writing *Highway to Valour* when her mother was dying in November of 1940, in fact Duley had written to Macmillan about their response to the novel before October 29, 1940:

I have posted the typescript 'Highway to Valour', which I venture to hope you will introduce to Macmillan. It was written somberly - but I should say has much of the wind blown granite of Nfld - you will judge for yourself -

The novel was thus finished during Mrs. Duley's sickness, but that period could have been seen by Margaret as a period of months before her mother's death. It is very possible in this light that Duley could have written *Novelty on Earth* after *Highway to Valour*, and still have had it ready for the publication procedure it underwent in 1941.

The last piece of evidence which suggests *Novelty on Earth* was written prior to *Highway to Valour* is a letter written to Macmillan which mentions *Novelty on Earth*, and which is dated February 41, 1938. The date is stamped on the letter, and is then crossed out so that the "41" becomes "14". If the rolling date & the stamp is wrong for the day, it may also be wrong for the year. In fact, the letter is addressed from 6 Peel Street, Montreal, where Duley stayed in December of 1940, and in February of 1941. The case for *Novelty on Earth* having been written by and just prior to December 1940 - February 1941

thus becomes plausible. *Highway to Valour* was finished by October 1940 at the very latest. In November and December the new novel could have been written. Duley may even have finished *Highway to Valour* earlier, giving her more time to work on *Novelty on Earth*. Although definitive evidence does not exist for the dating of the two works, in this light it seems likely that *Novelty on Earth* was the last written of Duley's published novels.

### Footnotes: Chapter One

1 Christiane Rochefort, as found in Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, Elizabeth Abel, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.27. In noting Rochefort's use of the term "colonized" in reference to women's literature, I have conversely used the term "de-colonize" to suggest the movement in women's literature (and specifically in Duley's novels) towards a form of writing which does not emulate models of literature written by men. Instead, in de-colonizing their work, women writers speak of their own realm through implementation of plots and patterns of imagery which directly reflect the woman's social and literary experience. In Duley's particular case, there is also a movement to de-colonize the Newfoundland experience from that of Britain. Again, this exists on both the social and literary levels.

2 In M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1957; rpt. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1971), p.89, the term Gothic is defined:

The Gothic novel, or 'Gothic romance', is a type of fiction which was inaugurated by *Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto, a Gothic Story* (1764) - the subtitle refers to its medieval setting - and which flourished through the early nineteenth century.... [In following Walpole's example, the Gothic writer's] principal aim was to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery, cruelty and a variety of horrors.... The best of them opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of the... nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind.... The term 'Gothic' has also been extended to denote a type of fiction which lacks the medieval setting but develops a brooding atmosphere of gloom or terror, represents events which are uncanny, or macabre, or melodramatically violent, and often deals with aberrant psychological states.

Duley's first novel falls squarely into this genre. The feminist element may be seen to arise from the very nature of the Gothic tale. Abrams further states that

"[the Gothic genre] displays simplified characters, larger than life, who are sharply discriminated as heroes and villains, masters and victims; the protagonist is often solitary, and isolated from a social context." (p.112) Thus Isabel may be categorized as a Gothic protagonist, while at the same time she initiates Duley's feminist philosophy.

3 Unless otherwise noted, all biographical information contained in this thesis originates with Alison Feder's *Margaret Duley: Newfoundland Novelist. A Biographical and Critical Study* (St.John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1983).

4 Feder, p.11.

5 *Ibid.*, p.14.

6 *Ibid.*, p.21.

7 See Alison Feder's comments, p.50.

8 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p.402.

9 Margaret Duley, European Journal, MS copy, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, unpaginated.

10 Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, Elizabeth Abel, ed.(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.34.

11 Patrick O'Flaherty, *The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p.133.

12 Margaret Duley, *The Eyes of the Gull* (London: Aurthur Barker, 1936), p. 21.

13 Gilbert and Gubar, p.48.

14 *Ibid.*, p.61.

15 Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.13.

16 Margaret Duley to Ellen Elliot, MS, Macmillan File, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, no date (likely January 1941).

17 Patrick O'Flaherty, "A New Look at Margaret Duley," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 21(1977-1978), p.124.

18 Duley, MS, Macmillan File, undated (likely November 1940).

19 O'Flaherty, *The Rock Observed*, p.141.

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21 Duley, dedication of *Highway to Valour* (New York: Macmillan, 1941.)

22 Feder, p.63.

23 Duley, *Highway to Valour*, epigraph.

24 *Ibid.*, p.14.

25 Patricia Donnelly, "Newfoundland Women in the Novels of Margaret Duley," MS, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1974, p.2.

26 "Flee from Modernity in 'Highway to Valour'," L.S.M., review in Duley Scrapbook, MS, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

27 Duley to Ellen Elliot, MS, Macmillan File, December 27, 1940.

28 *Ibid.*, August, 1941.

29 *Ibid.*, December 27, 1940.

30 Review, *The Globe and Mail*, June, 1942, Duley Scrapbook, MS,

Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

31 "Age Old Theme Makes Good Novel," A.N., *Greensboro Daily News*, Sunday May 10, 1942.

32 Duley to ?, MS, Macmillan File, February 14, 1938, but probably dated in error. Actual date possibly 1940; see Appendix.

33 Gilbert and Gubar, p.205.

34 Duley, *European Journal*, unpaginated.

35 Duley, *Novelty On Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1942), p.7.

36 Gilbert and Gubar, p.202.

37 Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," p.23.

38 Ellen Elliot to Mr. Upjohn, MS, Macmillan File, July 26, 1946.

39 O'Flaherty, "A New Look at Margaret Duley," p.125.

40 *Ibid.*, p.126.

### *Footnotes: Chapter Two*

1 These critical theories are best dealt with in John Moss, *Patterns of Isolation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974) and Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).

2 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.xi.

3 *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

4 *Ibid.*, pp.24-25.

5 *Ibid.*, p.72.

6 Doreen Wallace, review in Duley Scrapbook, MS, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

7 Margaret Duley, *The Eyes of the Gull*, p.9. All subsequent references to

the novel in this chapter are identified in the text.

8 Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 255. Moers expounds a complete theory on "sexual geography" in women's literature.

9 Gilbert and Gubar, p. 472.

10 See Alison Feder's comments in *Margaret Duley: Newfoundland Novelist*, p. 45.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

12 Gilbert and Gubar, p. 127.

13 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

### *Footnotes: Chapter Three*

1 Margaret Duley, *Cold Pastoral* (London: Hutchinson, 1939), epigraph.  
All subsequent references to the novel in this chapter are identified in the text.

2 See Alison Feder's comments in *Margaret Duley*, p. 53

3 Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 14.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

5 Patricia Donnelly, "Newfoundland Women in the Novels of Margaret Duley," p. 12.

6 Margaret Duley to Ellen Elliott, MS, Macmillan File, March 17, 1941.

7 Feder, p. 50.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

9 Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 299.



### *Footnotes: Chapter Four*

1 Patrick O'Flaherty, "Margaret Duley and Newfoundland," *Dalhousie Review* 57(Winter 1977-1978),p.644.

2 Margaret Duley to Ellen Elliott, MS, Macmillan File, December 27, 1940.

3 Margaret Duley, *Highway to Valour*, p.1. All subsequent references to this novel in this chapter are given in the text.

4 Margaret Duley, MS, European Journal, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, unpaginated.

5 Jane Spence Southron, in *The New York Times Book Review*, September 28,1941.

### *Footnotes: Chapter Five*

1 Ellen Elliott, reader's memo, MS, Macmillan File, undated.

2 Ellen Elliott to Mrs. Dickson, MS, Macmillan File, March 10, 1941.

3 Linda Whalen, "Margaret Duley: A Critical Analysis," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 71(Winter 1975), p.29.

4 Margaret Duley to Ellen Elliott, MS, Macmillan File, December 27, 1940.

5 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, quoted in Duley's *Novelty on Earth* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1942), epigraph.

6 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, quoted in *Novelty on Earth*, epigraph. All subsequent references to this novel in this chapter are identified in the text.

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*Cold Pastoral.* London: Hutchinson, 1939. Rpt. Toronto: Griffin House, 1977.

*Highway to Valour.* New York: Macmillan, 1941. English edition, London: Methuen, 1943. Rpt. Toronto: Griffin House, 1977.

*Novelty on Earth.* New York: Macmillan, 1942. English edition, entitled *Green Afternoon*, London: Methuen, 1944. Swedish edition, entitled *Så Stred Sara* [How Sara Struggled], trans. Tore Zetterholm and Nils H. Gyllenbaga, Stockholm: Sohlmons, 1946.

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"Mother Boggan." *Fortnightly* 153(April 1940), pp.401-10.

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*Liverpool 1790 to 1959: A story of his ancestors and successors and their business connections in Newfoundland.* St. John's: The Telegram Printing Company Limited, 1953. Second edition, 1954.

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### III. Manuscript Sources, Listed Alphabetically by Name of Repository

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Margaret Duley's correspondence with Robert Goodyear of the Talks Department of the British Broadcasting Corporation about her broadcast "Town with the Flaming History" on 4 June 1953; and the four "coronation talks" given on the overseas programme, "Calling from Britain to Newfoundland."

#### 2. *Red Cross File*

Copies of the reports by Margaret Duley for the period when she was Public Relations Officer for the local branch of the Canadian Red Cross, October (?) 1950 to 31 March, 1952.

#### 3. *Duley, Florence. Private Collection.*

##### i) *Duley MSS:*

Four MS notebooks; the typescripts of four presumably unpublished short stories; twenty typed pages of a novel, possibly *Octaves of Dawn*, her final unpublished novel; a set of proof sheets of "Mother Boggan"; a copy of Mrs. Duley's unprobated will, numerous family letters, notes from Gladys Duley Courtney; and the remains of Margaret's library.

ii) *Miscellany:*

Letters and recollections from Margaret Duley's friends and acquaintances; taped interviews; Margaret Duley's scrapbook with reviews, photographs, dustcovers, etc.

4. *McMaster University Library, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections*

Correspondence with the Macmillan Company of Canada about the publication of *Highway to Valour* and *Novelty on Earth*; readers' impressions, publicity material, reviews, a script of a short story, "Granny Goes the Last Mile," together with an unidentified coloured sketch of a Newfoundland scene; letters from Marguerite Lovat Dickson, who read for Macmillan, to Ellen Elliot, a director of the firm; letters to and from Margaret Duley and Ellen Elliot.

5. *Memorial University of Newfoundland, Centre for Newfoundland Studies*

i) *European Journal*:

A report written almost daily by Margaret Duley to her sister Gladys chronicling her journey through France and Italy in March and April 1953.

ii) *The Somerset Letters*:

About forty letters from Margaret Duley to her cousin and aunt, Freda Jefferies, and Mrs. Edward Jefferies respectively, in Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset, England. These letters were written between 1952 and 1962 and are in Margaret's hand until 1959(?) when Parkinson's Disease made dictation necessary. There is one letter from Freda Jefferies and one from Muriel Rogerson announcing Margaret's death and describing her funeral in March 1968.

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The following contain notices and reviews of this novel:

*The Daily News* (St. John's), 30 April 1941, p.4.



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*Kansas City Star*, 20 September 1941, p.14.

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*Buffalo Evening News*, 27 September 1941, p.7.

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*Toronto Evening Telegram*, 13 May 1942, p.9.  
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*Note:* This list of reviews of Margaret Duley's novels is incomplete. I have had access to only a limited number of newspaper and magazine files.

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June 11, 1986

I require a three year restriction placed on access to and quotation from my M.A. thesis. My reason is simply that I will begin work on a three year Ph.D. in September, and I intend to use a significant portion of this M.A. thesis as a part of the Ph.D. thesis. Naturally, I hope to publish work based on both dissertations, and as a result, I would like to hold my M.A. thesis until it is prepared for publication, which is most likely to occur after I complete the Ph.D.

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