CANADIAN INCEST AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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CANADIAN INCEST AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction: To Witness

Four Canadian women, Charlotte Vale Allen, Sylvia Fraser, Elly Danica, and Janice Williamson, have written autobiographically about their incestuous abuse. Although their books are stylistically very different, they all wrote about father-daughter incest. They pieced together their secrets and silences then articulated their trauma. This literary process of taking back, owning, and sharing their life experiences led to the publication of *Daddy's Girl* (1980), *My Father's House* (1987), *Don't* (1988), and *Crybaby!* (1998). Because of their first person approach to the subject of incest, the autobiographies make different demands on their audiences than do other forms of incest disclosure. They ask readers to witness women writing personally about sexual violence. Readers can experience four incest survivors making decisions about healing and about articulation. Allen, Fraser, Danica, and Williamson have joined the process of surviving incest with the process of writing. This union has immense personal, social, and literary potential.

The Sub-Genre

Incest autobiographies follow a pattern. Each book's primary, but not sole, focus is the impact of incest on the narrator's childhood and adulthood. It is an account of childhood sexual violence, but it is also a description of the life surrounding and extending

beyond the abuse. The incest autobiographer, as with other autobiographers, describes important people in her life: family members, friends, and teachers. Her characterization, however, is dominated by the role these people played in relation to the child sexual abuse. At the same time, incest autobiography includes relief material: either short storylines or distracting stylistic features which serve as a brief break from the more traumatic material. Incest autobiography usually begins with an adult perspective, the perspective which reassures readers the writer was once a victim but is now a survivor. It moves to the description of the writer's childhood, a childhood which the narrator gradually reveals to be horrific and traumatizing. The autobiography ends in the same fashion it began: with the adult perspective. The narrator reflects on survivorship: her present life that is less tainted by the aftereffects of incest than her childhood was. The incest autobiographer contrasts the child victim with the adult survivor. Incest autobiographies are personal accounts of death and rebirth, subordination and empowerment, and trauma and healing.

Despite the existence of a general pattern, incest autobiographies are not monolithic. Their consistent pattern is the glue of the sub-genre, but their diversity is one advantage of the genre. Autobiography is made up of three parts: the *autos* (the self), *bios* (the life), and *graphē* (the writing). The variations of these parts make for a heterogeneous literature. Autobiography theorist James Olney has studied the three components. His definition of the *bios* shows how a genre can be both uniform and heterogeneous. The *bios* is "the course of life seen as a process...and the unique psychic configuration that is this life and no other" (Olney, "Ontology" 241). The first half of

Olney's definition speaks to the cohesive aspect of *bios*. In incest autobiography, the course of life is seen as a process of moving from incest victimization to incest survivorship. The second half of his definition allows for the differences between the *bios*, despite the uniform quality. Allen's process of becoming an incest survivor is unique from Fraser's, Danica's, and Williamson's. Similarly, their *autos* are different because their understanding of their selfhood is unique. Further, each incest autobiography writer has her own style, her own approach to the *graphē*.

The *graphē* determines what the incest autobiographers included and excluded, how they structured their stories, and how they developed characterization. Allen, used to writing commercial fiction, created an autobiography that is highly accessible to readers because it is driven by plot and strong character development. Being the first Canadian incest autobiographer, she began the tradition of looking at the relationship not just between offender and victim but between mother and daughter. In *My Father's House*, Fraser relied just as heavily on plot development; again her successful writing career undoubtedly made an impact on her autobiographic style. Unlike Allen, Fraser suffered amnesia and, as a result, for forty years she had no recollection of her child sexual abuse. Her *autos*, because of the memory loss, is much different from Allen's. Despite her amnesia, Fraser's fiction writing is full of sexually explicit imagery, violent characters and dismal environments. Her early fiction, therefore, foreshadows her incest autobiography and, in turn, her autobiography operates as a key to her early fiction. She borrowed character names, plot development, even the style of font, from her novels and wove them

into her autobiography. Unlike her two predecessors, Danica was not an established writer. Her *autos* is, again, very different from Allen's and Fraser's: the self in *Don't* is not an established writer. Danica's incest autobiography was her first attempt at writing a book. It has few novelistic qualities; instead, she focused on the *graphē*: the words, such as "don't," itself, and the issue of identity. She chose a unique form, numbering many of the chapters and paragraphs. She ruptured language and the existing conventions, developed in Allen's and Fraser's books, of incest autobiography. Williamson, an academic, indeed once a critic of incest narratives with a special interest in how Danica used language to construct meaning, continued to change the shape of the *autos*, the *bios*, and the *graphē* in incest autobiography. Her academic training heavily influenced her writing style. Embracing French feminist theory, she disrupted patriarchal language by writing in a purposively non-sequential, non-authoritative manner. As a result, her autobiography, similar to her analytical work, is a pastiche of feminist experimental forms and styles.

There are many Canadian incest autobiographies which are part of the sub-genre. Lilian Green (1992) wrote about the incestuous abuse committed against her by both her grandmother and brother. Angela Hyrniuk (1989) also wrote an autobiography about her incestuous brother. Yvonne Johnson (1998) co-wrote her story with Rudy Wiebe about the pervasive violence in her life, including incest committed by her brother and grandfather. Trysh Ashby-Rolls (1991) wrote an autobiographic self-help book primarily about father-daughter incest but also about the more rare aunt-niece incest. Similarly,

Betsy Warland (1993) wrote autobiographically about two forms of incest: the abuse she suffered at the hands of both her father and brother, and Joanna Wong wrote *Songs of My Heart: A Chinese Woman's Story* (1999), a diary in which she mentioned the incestuous abuse her father, brother, and brother-in-law committed. Vanessa Alleyne dealt with step-father/daughter sexual abuse in her incest autobiography (1997). Ellen Prescott (1994) used another perspective, writing autobiographically about the father-daughter incestuous abuse of her children. Liza Potvin's *White Lies (for my mother)* (1992), is a father-daughter incest autobiography, but she wrote almost exclusively about her relationship with her mother.

To study incest autobiography is to examine the *graphē*, for it is in this third part of autobiography that the first two, the *autos* and the *bios*, take form (Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" 22). The existence of the "self" and the "narrated life" is dependent on the act of writing. It would be impossible, however, to study the writing practices of all incest autobiographers or even all Canadian incest autobiographers. In order to be able to closely consider and write about the *graphē*, the study of Canadian incest autobiography has to be artificially limited. Allen's, Fraser's, Danica's, and Williamson's autobiographies are the subject of this study for two reasons. First, they wrote about one form of sexual abuse, father-daughter incest. This fixed contextual point makes it easier to compare differences in their writing styles: the subject and focus, father-daughter incest/offender-victim relationship, remain the same, but the writing styles differ. As noted above, Potvin also wrote about father-daughter incest, but

unlike the four chosen incest autobiographers, she did not focus on the offender-victim relationship; including her in the study, therefore, would require a deeper analysis of focus as well as literary style. Second, the four incest autobiographies span the two decades of Canadian incest autobiographic writing and therein reveal the development of the sub-genre. In short, Allen, Fraser, Danica, and Williamson focused on father-daughter incest and primarily considered the relationship with the offender while bringing their unique literary sensibilities to the sub-genre. As an incest autobiographic study case, they provide rich examples of how women write about their childhood experience of sexual abuse.

Choosing the Genre

Allen, Fraser, Danica, and Williamson had to choose a form that best suited their literary needs. In "Postmodernism and the Biographer," Diane Wood Middlebrook, a writer familiar with the issues of narrating incest from her work on Anne Sexton, asks how and where an incest writer finds her voice: "What controlling authorial point of view can absorb this kind of [abuse] material? Where does the author situate herself to interpret a life that has so many weighted dimensions? How is this author going to express authority?" (160). The four survivors chose to use autobiography to navigate through their incest histories. The *autos* (the controlling authorial point of view, where the author situates herself, and how she expresses authority), the *bios* (the abuse material and the life of weighted dimensions) and the *graphē* (the expression) served their purposes.

Incest autobiographers aim to empower themselves and other victims, offer an alternative to the silence and lies that often surround incest, and counter the forces that have kept them silenced. As trauma theorist Suzette Henke believes, the autobiographical voice can help them accomplish these things because of its ability to rupture:

> Autobiography has always offered the tantalizing possibility of reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject ideologically inflected by language, history, and social imbrication. As a genre, life-writing encourages the author/narrator to reassess the past and to reinterpret the intertextual codes inscribed on personal consciousness by society and culture. (xv-xvi)

Autobiography allows for re-invention because a writer can characterize herself, develop her *autos*, as she chooses. Allen, Fraser, Danica, and Williamson chose to reinvent themselves so they were no longer victims of incest abuse, creations of their fathers, but survivors of incest with rich, diverse, and self-possessed lives. Autobiography allows for reconstruction of the subject, as Henke points out, by addressing the forces that shape the individual then by opposing those forces, resisting their power or influence. The four Canadian autobiographers reconstructed the subject by exposing the negative influence of language, history and society on their childhood and describing a better relationship with the social influences in their adulthood. They chose the genre of autobiography to express their incest experience because it is the literary form that encouraged them to reassess their past and reinterpret their self image. Autobiography can also be a counternarrative (Henke xv-xvi): a quality highly suited for incest articulation. It can counter dominant ideologies: dominant languages, dominant histories, and dominant social institutions. Autobiography

about incest counters gendered language, white washed childhoods, and corrupt patriarchy.

As mentioned above, autobiography is suited to the incest survivor/writer because of its language possibilities. Canadian scholar Marlene Kadar speaks to the potential within the genre of autobiography for women to experiment with the *graphē* or what she calls the "linguistic imperative" ("Whose Life is it Anyway?" 152). There are those autobiographers, specifically Danica and Williamson, who experimented more extensively with language, but all of the autobiographers have had to probe language in order to find the words to use to disclose their child sexual abuse. As autobiography theorist Richard Coe says, writing autobiographically about a child's sexual experience is, in itself, a daunting task: "The sexual experience constitutes, quite specifically, a 'sixth sense', for which no directly related conceptual language exists. Whether the writer realizes it or not, therefore, the description of this experience constitutes a major literary problem" (179-80). The incest autobiographers, then, had to face multiple writing challenges. They had the difficulty of articulating a child's sexual experience and the difficulty of expressing trauma.

The genre of autobiography is sometimes confused with its sub-genre of confession. Both disclose (Arana 64, Gunnars 148). Nevertheless, literary theorist Kristjana Gunnars maintains a distinction between the two. She believes the first is a construction and the second is a dismantling (148). If autobiography is the art of constructing the *autos* out of, as Gunnars says, "bits and pieces," whereas, confession is the dismantling of a public personae (Gunnars 148), writers who articulate their incest are

employing both art forms. The incest survivors are constructing their *bios* out of the fragments of their childhood. At the same time, they are dismantling the personae their fathers had scripted: the silent victim. Nonetheless, autobiography is a more suitable label for the incest stories than confession is. Confession connotes guilt. While incest autobiography does finally disclose the guilty offender, the title, "confession," is unsuitable for a label for incest autobiography, because it may falsely suggest the writer feels guilty. Canadian autobiography theorist Helen Buss believes women's life writing should be called autobiography because reclamation and re-invention begin with this critical name (*Mapping Our Selves* 20). According to an increasing number of scholars such as Buss, Estelle Jelinek, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, Shari Benstock, Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, and Domna Stanton, women who write autobiography challenge its androcentric bias or what literary theorist Adriana Cavarero sees as the patriarchal song of the Western tradition (49-50). Kadar says, "The literary history of autobiography has...been a womanless history" (*Essays on Life Writing* 20). Stanton characterizes female autobiographers as writers who usurp male prerogatives from the tradition (13). She believes "the graphing of the auto is an act of self-assertion that denies and reverses women's status" (14). The denial and reversal leads to what Buss sees as women's reentry into history: "The compilation of women's accounts I am shaping involves a layering of personal maps that are already a palimpsest, in which the adult female sketches her subjectivity inside, over, and around the already inscribed maps of the histories of her significant others" (*Mapping Our Selves* 69). Female autobiographers provoke, as

Williamson has said, interference in canonical habits (Introduction, *Sounding Differences* xi) by adding their voices to the map and, thereby, more completely representing the human experience. The addition of incest to the art of autobiography adds to the denial, reversal, and map. The incest autobiographer denies the offending patriarch further power, reverses her own status of victim, and includes her survivorship in the literary map.

Writing incest autobiography is a particularly feminist act for two reasons. First, as stated above, women who write autobiographically are reversing their status. Second, women who write autobiographically about incest are following the initiatives of second wave feminism. They are focusing on shared social-political concerns. Williamson speaks of the alignment of incest autobiographic writing with feminism: "Life writing about incest intersects with other feminist discourses which develop larger worlds of recovery and retribution" ("Writing Aversion" 224). The movement to write about one woman's experience is an extension of the women's movement: both attempt to impact the power structures and encourage women's empowerment.

Related Writing I: The Freudian Legacy

Incest autobiography is re-articulation. It ruptures and revises Freud's writing on the subject of incest. Understanding incest as a subject in contemporary women's autobiographic writing requires an awareness of incest as the subject in Freud's written accounts of his female patients. In 1894 and again in 1896, Freud declared all thirteen of

his prepubescent patients victims of adult sexual molestation ("The 'Specific' Aetiology of Hysteria" 164). During this time, he also told his friend, W. Fliess, that hysteria was the result of "seduction by the father" ("Letter 52. December 6, 1896" 239). For a period of three years, Freud felt convinced incest was a major and widespread problem. He wrote the following about his treatment of a young girl with insomnia:

> And it then turned out that her supposedly otherwise high-minded and respectable father regularly took her to bed when she was 8 to 12 years old and misused her without penetrating (''made her wet," nocturnal visits). She felt anxiety even at the time. A sister, six years her senior, had told her years afterwards that she had had the same experiences with their father. A cousin told her that when she was fifteen she had had to fend off her grandfather's embraces. Of course, when I told her that similar and worse things must have happened in her earliest childhood, she could not find it incredible. ("Letter 61. May 2, 1897" 247)

Freud firmly believed that the majority of adult molesters were close relatives, specifically fathers and brothers ("Letter 61. May 2, 1897" 246-47), and he wrote extensively about his seduction theory. Incest autobiographic writing is a revision of Freud's writing for two reasons. First, it is no longer an example of a male therapist constructing a narrative for a female incest patient (Showalter 84): it is, instead, the female survivor, once labeled the hysteric, writing about her own experience. The autobiographer is now the story-maker; whereas, before the psychoanalyst was the story-taker (Steedman 172). Second, it is a counternarrative to Freud's infantile sexuality theory. Concerning the latter point, Freud changed his theory on incest. After three years of developing, maintaining, proving,

writing, and publishing his seduction theory, he abandoned it. In 1897, he replaced his seduction theory with his theory of infantile sexuality:

> I no longer believe in my *neurotica*...Then came surprise at the fact that in every case the father, not excluding my own, had to be blamed as a pervert–the realization of the unexpected frequency of hysteria, in which the same determinant is invariably established, though such a widespread extent of perversity towards children is, after all, not very probable. ("Letter 69. September 21, 1897" 259)

Although he still believed incest occurred–in fact, he continued to document his belief in the crime in 1917 in *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (370), in *Moses and Monotheism* published in 1929 (75-76), and again in 1931 in *Female Sexuality* (232)–he refused to believe it was a widespread problem. Further, in suggesting female children had sexual fantasies about their fathers, he made himself and those he influenced blind to the fact that children were still, in many cases, victimized. Today's incest autobiographic writers shift the focus back to the child victim and validate her experience.

Related Writing II: Social Science Incest Books

In Henke's opinion, the act of writing autobiographically about incest is a therapeutic alternative to psychoanalysis (xii-xiii). Writing autobiographically, however, is not *necessarily* therapeutic. Sexton's poetry, for example, did not ultimately help her heal. Nonetheless, the four Canadian incest autobiographers did find their writing therapeutic. That said, they did not write for the sole purpose of replacing psychoanalysis. Incest

writing intended for therapeutic purposes belongs to a separate genre: social science literature on incest. These books focus on people's trauma, politics, and technical and professional support systems. Judith Herman's *Father-Daughter Incest* and *Trauma and Recovery*, Diana Russell's *The Secret Trauma*, Florence Rush's *The Best Kept Secret*, Cathy Caruth*'s Trauma: Explorations of Memory*, Karin C. Meiselman's *Incest: A Psychological Study of the Causes and Effects with Treatment and Recommendations*, Christine Courtois's *Healing the Incest Wound*, David Finkelhor's *Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse*, and Ellen Bass's and Laura Davis's *The Courage to Heal* are well known books in the field.

Despite the shared subject, incest victimization/survivorship, incest autobiographies occupy a different literary space than do social science books. The former is first person narration of victimization and survivorship that *may* be healing; the latter is an analysis of other people's victimization and survivorship intended to be used as a healing tool. Although they are different forms of writing with different purposes, Danica has compared them as if they are part of the same genre:

> We have lots of straight-up narrative that says this happened, that happened, that happened. These are important, but they don't seem to have been enough to get the culture as a whole to look at what it is we are doing when kids have to survive this kind of pain and trauma, or to consider how we disempower not only those children but the adult women and young men these people become. (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 80)

What Danica refers to as "straight-up narrative" Marilyn MacKinnon calls disease discourse (MacKinnon 18). Some social science books use disease discourse, which is, as

MacKinnon explains in *Trust and Betrayal in the Treatment of Child Abuse*, a professional language that threatens to "other" victims of child sexual abuse (18). Janice Haaken criticizes social science books for using this discourse, for decontextualizing abuse and reducing it to psychological variables (1072).

Whether social science books use disease discourse or not, there is a difference in their writing and autobiographical writing. Russell, in her social science incest book, says the following about a survivor having children: "Interestingly, the victims who reported extreme or considerable trauma as a result of the incest were much more likely to have raised one or more children than those who reported some or no trauma" (194). Clearly, her objective was to state the facts. Her language suits her objective. Fraser's writing on the issue of parenthood is very different:

> "I have to admit...the idea of pregnancy itself is...pretty horrendous to me. It's so parasitic..." *like having daddy's wet-ums inside me for nine months, possessing me, growing larger...helpless...out of control...guilt shame fear fear fear... My other self is quite clear about the warning:* If you get pregnant, *I won't be able to stand it and* you will go stark raving crazy. (*My Father's House* 132)

Fraser, unlike Russell, attempted to express the emotional pain attached to the issue of parenthood. She and the other incest autobiographers rarely run the risk of using disease discourse because the personal, autobiographical voice ensures they do not "other" nor decontextualize abuse.

Relating Writing III: Other Sub-Genres

There are other books which are related to incest autobiography because of their approach rather than their subject. Pioneer women's memoirs, the Childhood, slave narratives, and the "father books" predate yet, in many respects, parallel the new sub-genre of incest autobiography. Buss discusses pioneer women's memoirs in *Mapping Our Selves*. She says one interesting attribute of the sub-genre is that critics have never known what to think of books such as *Mrs. Simcoe's Diary* and *The Journal of Mary O'Brien*. They question whether they are traditional autobiography or history. Due to the inability to label these memoirs as part of the patriarchal order, the genre is, according to Buss, more "open to the task of rescuing, through various female arachnologies, the inscription of female selfhood" (*Mapping Our Selves* 61). Because of their existence outside of the male dominated canon and because of their unique, female inscription, the autobiographies of Canadian pioneer women share common ground with the writers of incest autobiography.

Two genres which developed in the mid-nineteenth century also have much in common with incest autobiography. According to Coe, the Childhood genre, autobiographies of childhood and adolescence, began to crystalize in about the year 1835 (40). He postulates that in nine cases out of ten there was a strong element of emotional imbalance in the youth of the autobiographer (140). His characterization of the father figure in many of the Childhoods parallels the offender in incest autobiography: he

describes fathers who forfeit their children's self-esteem (144) and who have been outdistanced by their children (146). But perhaps his most interesting point is his division of the genre into a distinct sub-genre: the Childhood in hell (71). His examples of the sub-genre are Maxim Gorky's, Juliette Adam's, and Hervé Bazin's autobiographies. Incest autobiography, it turns out, is a more specific form of the Childhood and the Childhood in hell. Slave narratives, which crystallized twenty years after the Childhoods, with the publication of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1854), parallel incest autobiography, because they are life stories about victims achieving victory. As with the incest autobiographies, slave narratives expose the inhumanity of a system or institution.

There is yet another sub-genre, as Susan Figge discusses in her essay about post-1970 German autobiographical memoirs, known as the "father books," that also has ties to incest autobiography. Figge says, "The biographical inquiry into the father's life and his child's autobiographical inquiry into the origins of the self are linked together in this new German sub-genre of literature, which focuses on gendered authority in the family and its personal and political consequences" (193). With its emphasis on gendered authority and its aftereffects, this sub-genre has much in common with the North American sub-genre, incest autobiography. Of the first, Figge says

> The majority of the father books deal with the legacy of this gendered authority in postwar family, where acceptance of the father's word, no matter how arbitrary, cruel or unfair, was law. The children had nothing to say and the mother very little, and a nineteenth-century Prussian pedagogy supported an immense

> need to uphold bourgeois standards of cleanliness, order, and the appearance of respectability. (194)

According to Figge, the sons and daughters retell their fathers' lives as well as their own in order to uncover old patterns and invent new ones. In books such as Ingeborg Day's *Ghost Waltz* (1980), the narrators confront their authoritarian fathers (Figge 195). It is clear, with its emphasis on breaking silence and rupturing old, authoritarian patterns, the father books share common ground with incest autobiography. They, as Figge points out, also met with resistance: "The often negative scholarly and journalistic German reception of the father books has dealt in charges of confusion of documentary and fiction, irrelevant subjectivity and (particularly) female narcissism, and Oedipal revenge" (200). The negative reactions sound strikingly similar to the False Memory Syndrome Foundation's claims that incest recovery and much of incest literature are insupportable.[1] Finally, what Figge sees as the value of the father books matches one of the achievements of incest autobiography: "The father books embody not their authors' self pity and need for personal revenge, but rather their quest for a usable past in the service of a responsible private and political life in the present" (201). This tracing of a troubled past along with the quest for a better position in the present is the pattern of all of the related genres and sub-genres: pioneer women's autobiography, the Childhood, slave narratives, the "father books," and incest autobiography. These closely related forms of literature point to a

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[1]As discussed on pages 26-27.

literary trend: the writing and analyzing of groups of books which deal with trauma and survivorship.

Related Writing IV: Trauma Writing

Because writing about trauma has become more common, there are new names for the sub-genres. Scriptotherapy is the name Henke applies to Fraser's *My Father's House*, as well as much of Collette's, H.D.'s, Anaïs Nin's, Janet Frame's, and Audre Lorde's writing. She believes the autobiographers were engaged in "the process of writing out and writing through the traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment" (xii). Scriptotherapy is akin to narrative recovery, a currently popular narratology term, which, Henke says, "pivots on a double entendre meant to evoke both the recovery of past experience through narrative articulation and the psychological reintegration of a traumatically shattered subject" (xxii). Scriptotherapy and narrative recovery have much in common with the newly recognized sub-genre of autopathography. According to theorist G. Thomas Couser, autopathography includes autobiographical narratives, mostly written by women, which focus on the corporeal, the human physical condition, specifically disease and disability. Couser uses Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* as one example. Incest autobiography has elements of the scriptotherapy, narrative recovery, and autopathography. It can accommodate the therapeutic, the psychological, and the

corporeal. It is not limited to any one of these inscriptions, however, and it deals with more than the healed mind and body; it is, therefore, a separate sub-genre.

Related Writing V: Writings About Incest Writing

There exists a more indirect form of trauma writing: writing about incest writing. It is related to incest autobiography in that it, too, develops incest as a literary subject. Otto Rank, in 1912, wrote *The Incest Theme*, which looks at child sexual abuse as a literary motif in a variety of genres from folktales and news stories to mythology, the Bible, and the literary canon, in works by Shakespeare, Goethe, and Byron. Not surprisingly, considering the time and social climate, Rank did not consider the incest theme in women's literature, nor did he reflect on the cultural or even emotional impact of the taboo. Nearly seventy years later, Leonard Shengold continued to look at incest and literature in much the same way as Rank. In *Soul Murder* (1989), he focused more generally on all forms of child abuse rather than just incest but continued to trace the latter as a theme in literature written by men: Dickens, Chekhov, Kipling, and others. Because Rank and Shengold were not studying autobiographical accounts of incest, they did not, indeed could not, look at the literary decisions the writers made in their expressions of sexual trauma. Their concern was not how the writers articulated trauma but simply that writers used incest as a theme.

More recently, Karen McLennan, Rosaria Champagne, and Louise DeSalvo have expanded Otto's and Shengold's approach and focused on incest as a theme in women's literature. McLennan's *Nature's Ban: Women's Incest Literature* (1996) is a collection of women's fiction that uses incest as its subject. Champagne's *The Politics of Survivorship: Incest, Women's Literature, and Feminist Theory*, published in the same year, is a more socio-political approach to the subject of incest and literature. Champagne gathered examples of women's literature that she believed were shaped by the effects of the writers' knowledge of sexual trauma. According to Champagne, the writers made their experiences meaningful by connecting their personal understanding of incest with the social text of fiction (7). Seven years prior to the publication of McLennan's and Champagne's books, DeSalvo traced the effects of incest in one woman's collected works. In *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on her Life and Work* (1989), DeSalvo convincingly argued that there are autobiographical references to sexual abuse in much of Woolf's writing. Eleven years earlier, Roger Poole had more briefly considered the idea in his book, *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*. Poole, followed by DeSalvo, McLennan, and Champagne, began to theorize about how women write about incest. Their work, as with the other related incest writing, has begun to develop a space for additional incest articulations, specifically, the sub-genre of incest autobiography and analysis of them.

The Cultural Space for Incest Disclosure

The American market has also helped create a space for the sub-genre. Louise Armstrong's *Kiss Daddy Goodnight* (1978) is recognized as the first incest autobiography. There are also countless American social science books on healing from incest, and the media offers extensive coverage of the subject. One particular episode of Oprah Winfrey's popular daytime talk show is representative of the coverage and the large audiences the media can reach. On September 4, 1992, PBS, CBS and NBC simultaneously ran *Scared Silent*, her program on child sexual abuse. Further, American audiences have supported fictional accounts of incest, Canadian novels included. Earlier this year, Oprah's popular book club chose to include *Fall on Your Knees*, Canadian author Ann-Marie MacDonald's novel that deals with incest.

Although the American market has helped create a space and an audience for incest disclosure, including incest autobiography, it has also largely overshadowed Canada's contribution to the sub-genre. American bibliographical references to incest writing tend to include its nation's own publications rather than Canadian incest autobiographies and incest autobiographies from other countries, England's Jacqueline Spring's *Cry Hard and Swim* (1987), for example.[2] Nonetheless, Canada has contributed as much to the sub-genre as the United States has. In fact, Allen had written her life story

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[2]As discussed on page 30.

nearly a decade prior to Armstrong's (Preface, *Daddy's Girl*; Crosbie 45); however, *Daddy's Girl* was not accepted for publication until two years after *Kiss Daddy Goodnight*.

It was Fraser's incest autobiography that temporarily shifted the American gaze. Fraser had already garnered international acclaim for her journalism and fiction writing when she published *My Father's House*. American audiences, therefore, were receptive to her newest publication. She was even interviewed on two popular American news programs, *The Larry King Live Show* and ABC-TV's *The Morning Show* (Fraser, "Freud's Final Seduction" 58, 59). Indeed, *My Father's House* was so popular, there had been serious discussion of making it into a movie (Steed C3).

American attention for Canadian incest autobiographers largely seemed to end with Fraser, however. Most Canadian incest autobiographies are first published by small Canadian presses; this may be one reason for limited American exposure and attention. Danica's *Don't* was first published by Gynergy Books, a feminist press in Prince Edward Island. Williamson's *Crybaby!* was published by NeWest, a Western Canadian press in Alberta. Williamson's contribution to incest literature, both in the form of her autobiography and in numerous articles published about the sub-genre, has largely gone unrecognized. Instead, Kathryn Harrison's incest autobiography, *The Kiss* (1997), published the year before Williamson's *Crybaby!*, has won acclaim. There are a number of reasons for the differences in the reception of Harrison's and Williamson's book. Harrison's book was published by a large American press, Random House, and

Williamson's was not. Harrison's book is not academic; whereas, Williamson's is. Harrison's book appeals to a more popular audience.

In 1988, writing for a Canadian magazine, Libby Scheier said, "We will see an explosive growth of such writing in the near future–by women who have, in effect, been given permission to write their stories by the brave, ground breaking examples of writers like Fraser and Danica" (32). Two years later, in the introduction to the American anthology of incest writing, *She Who Was Lost is Remembered*, incest autobiographer Margaret Randall wrote "And this is a growing genre. One day it will be as basic a part of our literary canon as those *hundred great books*–so overrated but incomplete a part of the human experience" (xiii). With television coverage of incest, fictional accounts of incest, and many forms of writing about first person accounts of incest, the cultural space will help to fulfill Scheier's and Randall's optimistic predictions. A society that invites incest disclosure will encourage more survivors to find their voices, will make room for more incest autobiographies and other forms of incest writing, and will ensure survivorship stories do not "vanish" (Williamson, *Crybaby!* 70).

A Review of the Response to Incest Autobiography

Some critics say incest disclosure has become too popular. Sandra Martin, writing about Fraser, criticizes the proliferation of incest stories as though they are propaganda: "By the early 1990s, people were flocking to join the sisterhood of the abused" (45).

Margaret Wente, also focusing on Fraser's contribution to breaking the silence about incest, attacks her more directly:

> The irony of abuse literature is very great. There's no doubt it's done some good, by validating the experience of genuine victims and encouraging them to deal openly with their past. There's also no doubt that it's done plenty of harm, by encouraging troubled young women to believe Ms. Fraser's account of her experience is theirs too. It is time to ask if the harm outweighs the good. The evidence of wrecked lives and shattered families suggests the answer is yes. (D9)

Martin and Wente are concerned about the hysteria surrounding incest disclosure and its appeal, as they see it, for those who are searching for an identity, even if it is that of victim. Elaine Showalter, too, is suspicious of the impact of incest autobiography:

> Whether the details of these narratives are demonstrably true may not be as important as their imaginative and spiritual resonance for the individual. But extending private psychoanalytic or artistic testimonies to the media and the courts is risky. We must exercise caution as a society when hystories take on that political, judicial form, when they stop being therapeutic and cross the line into accusation and prosecution. (205)

Showalter is particularly concerned with incest narratives reaching the court system. A concern of equal value is private testimonies not reaching their literary and socio-political potential because voices like hers have silenced survivors.

Showalter concludes her argument with an attempt to discourage women from reading incest narratives:

> But the feminist embrace of all abuse narratives and the treatment of all women as survivors have troubling implications. Claiming hysteria and admiring its victims may have had

> inspirational functions in the 1970s: feminism, like other insurgent movements, needed martyrs. But Saint Dora's days are over. Today's feminists need models rather than martyrs; we need the courage to think as well as the courage to heal. (61)

Showalter's fear is that abuse narratives will persuade readers to think uncritically and one dimensionally. She does not want readers, specifically feminists, to celebrate all abuse narratives and only revere survivorship. If readers responded to incest autobiography in these two ways, Showalter's argument would be apt. Readers need not embrace all abuse narratives, however, and see the narrators as examples of martyrs. They need, instead, to read a number of incest autobiographies in order to witness the differences between them: in order to see the individual ways of healing from abuse and writing about it. Then readers, despite Showalter's fears, will see that incest autobiographies, because of their diversity, encourage readers to *think* as well as *heal*.

Showalter, as the title of her book suggests, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media*, sees incest autobiography as a product of the larger problem of the media sensationalizing abuse and recovered memory therapy. She feels the market economy and therapy are seducing people into victimization (149). Allen, herself, shares the same fear: "Some things in this world make me very angry, and one of them is the fact that I laboured for many, many years to bring the issue of child abuse out into the open, and they [advocates of recovered memory therapy] have turned abuse into a marketing strategy" (Scott-Kermode 1661). Showalter explains the strategy in this way: "Recovered memory is big business in the United States, with self-help tapes, T-shirts, recovery groups, and

even a mass-market best-seller"[Bass's and Davis's *Courage to Heal*] (149). Showalter, at this point in her argument, does not criticize incest autobiography but the related issue of psychological treatment for incest victims. The latter has affected her response to the former.

She is one of a growing number of people who believe Freud's psychoanalysis has encouraged therapists to practice irresponsible therapy in the form of recovered memory therapy, also known as incest resolution therapy. According to the critics, this form of therapy encourages clients to invent memories of incestuous abuse. The critics accuse the therapists of mimicking Freud and his original belief in the seduction theory (Kihlstrom 5). The mimicry, Jean-Roch Laurence, Duncan Day, and Louise Gaston say, developed out of Freud's commercialization of psychoanalysis (323), which is in itself, Richard Ofshe and Ethan Waters believe, a pseudoscience (289). The patients, according to these anti-Freudians, are victims not of incest but of commercialization and pseudoscience. The anti-Freudians, as a result, would deem the patients' articulations mere commercial and pseudoscientific products. These anti-Freudians would be particularly skeptical of incest autobiographers like Danica, Fraser and Williamson, who openly admit they had repressed their memories of incest.

Many anti-Freudians or critics of recovered memory therapy support the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, a controversial group founded in 1992 by the parents of Jennifer Freyd who claims to be an incest victim. Members of the Foundation, like its founders, are mostly parents who say they were falsely accused of abuse by an adult

survivor who retrieved memories with the help of a therapist. The FMS Foundation, as it is known, has made the problem of child sexual abuse a problem of false memories and bad therapists not of child victims. Because of groups like the Foundation, the incest autobiographers who have experienced amnesia find themselves having to defend their belief in their child victimization.

Fraser did this by suggesting she was unaware her story was a text book example because she had not researched incest (Steed C3) and by denying having recovered her memories in therapy. In fact, she suggested therapy impeded her recovery process: "I didn't want to involve myself with professional healers because I didn't want that to interfere with the spontaneous process that had already begun" (Muzychka 6); "By failing to hear my voice through the static of Freudian theory, my analyst unwittingly buried the real cause of my anxieties twenty years deeper in false dogma" (Fraser, "Freud's Final Seduction" 20).

FMS Foundation supporter, Terence Campbell, however, accuses Fraser of lying. He calls her "grossly inconsistent" because in her autobiography she claimed she had little experience with psychoanalysis but in her essay, "Freud's Final Seduction," she implied the opposite (Campbell 276). Campbell has exaggerated the differences between Fraser's account of her involvement with therapy in her critical writing and her account of it in her autobiographical writing. He has also failed to recognize that Fraser was engaged in very different writing in her essay than she was in her autobiography. In the former, she was writing about the general relationship between Freud, incest, survivors, and public opinion.

In the latter, she was writing about her personal relationship with an incest-offender rather than writing her opinions about therapy.

Showalter attacks Fraser on the same grounds Campbell does. Fraser said it was a series of dreams and physical shocks that had made her remember her incestuous childhood (*My Father's House* 212), but Showalter denies or ignores her claims. Showalter asserts that Fraser had forgotten about her incestuous abuse until a therapist conveniently reminded her: "Under hypnosis with a sympathetic therapist Fraser recovered memories of abuse" (165). Showalter does not include the sources for her material, so it is her word against Fraser's. Readers who want to believe autobiography is truth telling will side with Fraser. Readers who are skeptical of recovered memory therapy and frustrated with the publicity surrounding incest, will side with Showalter.

Regardless, criticism like Showalter's affects the writing and reading of incest autobiography. Readers will know more about the debate surrounding recovered memories of incest and, therefore, may demand more evidence of truth in incest autobiographies. Writers may be more conscious of including a defence of the evidence of abuse; that is, their articulation of incest will address the skepticism of some readers. Williamson incorporated the debate into her incest autobiography. She studied both Fraser's autobiography and responses to it, so she would have been aware of the attack on Fraser's credibility. Williamson addressed the issue of truth and fallibility by expressing her own mistrust of her memories. She admitted she did not know which memories to believe. She wrote about a series of "Waking Dreams" which she labeled "Evidence" and

"Denial." This format accommodated her own trust and mistrust in her memories while recognizing, and perhaps diffusing, those who may be skeptical of her incest accusations. At the same time, she was adamantly against those critics who deny victims the right to recover their memories: "But make no mistake: don't ask us to give up the facticity of our stories meekly. While reconstructed in the present, our reminiscences are something more than dissimulation. Our hystorical lives don't inevitably lie" (*Crybaby!* 181). As Williamson's approach to the debate of recovered memories proves, criticism of incest autobiographies need not silence the writer; instead, it can inspire the writer to address more issues in creative ways.

Although the popularity of incest disclosure has sparked a heated debate, to date, there is no comprehensive criticism of incest autobiographies. There are a number of book reviews, as well as interviews with the writers and articles published in national newspapers, such as *The Globe and Mail*, and Canadian literary journals, *Essays on Canadian Writing*, for example. Writers of more extended criticism in the form of chapters or whole books refer to the Canadian autobiographers but do not provide much contextual background. Ross Dawson (1986) in one of ten essays in a book on incest simply mentions Allen's *Daddy's Girl* as an example of an autobiographical account which demonstrates the new acceptability of public discussion of child sexual abuse (70). Ann Decter (1994) in a chapter in *By For & About: Feminist Cultural Politics* uses Green's *Ordinary Wonders* not as an example of incest autobiography but as an example of an editing process (119). Julianne Labreche, in her early study, *Incest: the Secret Crime*

(1983), uses Allen as her only example of a victim who may have developed a multiple personality after being abused (n.pag.).

Much of the larger work on incest trauma is American and only briefly mentions the Canadian autobiographers' contribution to incest literature. In *Rape, Incest, and Child Sexual Abuse* (1994), Pat Gilmartin merely refers to Allen's *Daddy's Girl* as a book that made people aware something was drastically wrong (77). Freyd, in *Betrayal Trauma* (1996), discusses incest narratives and even quotes Green (23, 77) but does not describe her book as an autobiography or as one of many Canadian texts on the subject. In *Hystories* (1997), Showalter gives American writer Armstrong credit for initiating "the feminist investigation of incest" (149) but does not acknowledge Canadian autobiographers as pioneers of incest literature. She does, however, include Fraser in her list of "survivors and therapists" (90) and, as mentioned above, attacks her credibility. In a more recent publication, *Shattered Subjects* (2000), Henke devotes an entire chapter to Fraser. Nonetheless, aside from a footnote about Danica and a comment about Williamson as a critic not an autobiographer (Henke 179), Henke does not mention the other Canadian incest autobiographers.

There are a number of critics, like Henke, who have looked more closely at the contribution incest autobiographers have made to women's survivorship and literature. Alice Miller (1986), who wrote many books on the subject of childhood trauma, was one of the first to fully discuss incest autobiography. Her primary focus was on American incest narratives, however:

> A number of books that have appeared in the United States over the past five years ought to be extremely enlightening for the younger generation. In these works, women writers–some of them quite successful–have tried to come to terms with the traumatic sexual abuse their fathers inflicted on them in childhood by writing about it...they have revealed an ominous cancer in our society, the existence of which has scarcely been suspected by the general public until now.
> (*Thou Shalt Not Be Aware* 319)

Miller does go on, nonetheless, to describe Allen's autobiography in detail, without, however, mentioning its Canadian origin (320-21). Scheier interrogates the new sub-genre of incest autobiography in her essay, "True Confessions Transformed On Writing Our Emotions" (1988). She asks why, in recent years, women writers have brought topics like sexual violence out of the closet (31). She then praises the social value of incest autobiography, commending Fraser, in particular, for legitimizing so many other women's stories (31-32). Williamson has written the most criticism on incest autobiography. Before she recovered memories of her own child sexual abuse, she had read and published her response to Canadian incest autobiographies.[3] No critic, however, has thoroughly analyzed the literary approach to incest and literary value of incest autobiography.

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[3]As discussed in "From Criticism to Autobiography," Chapter 5.

Reading Incest Autobiography

Readers complete incest autobiography. In fact, the story does not become autobiography until someone reads it. Cavarero explains it in this way: "A story is therefore distinct from the narration. It has, so to speak, a reality all of its own, which follows the action and precedes the narration. All actors leave behind a story (storia), even if nothing guarantees that this story will later get told" (28). In incest autobiography, the actor is the incest survivor. She has a story. Until she narrates and publishes the story, however, it remains a secret story. The story of incest becomes autobiography when others read it. The transformation from incest story to incest autobiography turns the subject from being taboo to being a literary and social reality. Champagne describes the crucial shift:

> Without reading, even physical trauma is not "real," because it can never be made real without a Bakhtinian third party who reads its place. (It is important to note that the reader can be an outside 'third party', the writer herself, or both.) When the unnamed topic is incest, one important way to make real the unbelievability of sexual transgression is through writing and then reading. In fact, without the act of narrative, the body of an incest survivor is forever trapped; if the survivor does not construct sexual transgression outside her body, her body will remain only a signifier of despair. (86)

Champagne initially overstates her point. Physical trauma, despite what she says, is always real. Nonetheless, when the victim and others acknowledge its reality, which is Champagne's point, it becomes more difficult for people to deny the existence of the

trauma. The readers, the writer herself and the book's readers, release the incest victim from the trap of denial and silence, turning the once abused child from a signifier of despair into a signifier of triumph.

Readers of incest autobiography come to the story after it has already been read once, for in autobiographical writing there is a first and second reader. The first is the autobiographer who must, as Randall says, rake through memory (*This is About Incest* 61) and construe the signs of her life to form her *bios*. She is the incest survivor who reads back the right to define life experience and name the aftereffects of the childhood sexual abuse (Champagne 16, 20). The second is the audience who engages in the sequence of words or the *graphē*. Autobiography theorist Janet Varner Gunn understands the autobiographer and reader in this way: the first being the reader of her life and the second the reader of a life by association (8). There are a number of ways to label the action of the writer and the reader. Gunn suggests one way, the first and second reader, and Olney, in *Metaphors of Self*, suggests another. He uses a scientific metaphor and refers to the autobiographer as an experimenter observing the experimenter and his experiment (331). The reader, Olney explains, is the third experimenter observing the second experimenter (the autobiographer) observing the first experimenter (the *autos*) observing the experiment (the *bios*). Olney's terms are particularly suited the sub-genre of incest autobiography. The person who writes incest autobiography is truly an experimenter, and the book, in so many respects, is an experiment, because it is a new way of articulating incest experience. The second reader or the third experimenter, as well as the autobiographer, herself, must

not simply be a tourist who visits the life story, but must, instead, be a witness to the experiment. In *Crybaby!*, Williamson queried over the two kinds of readers: "How many times do we rehearse our revulsion, empathy, and rage, before we find ourselves without care. What is the difference between a witness and a tourist?" (182). She does not directly answer her question, but the statement preceding it indicates she thinks the difference is in the level of desensitization. The tourist is someone who is no longer empathic, perhaps, Williamson suggests, because of sensationalized accounts of incest disclosure (182). As a result of the tourist's apathy, he or she does not truly engage with the incest autobiography. The distance between the tourist reader and the incest autobiography makes it impossible, as Champagne says, to exchange meaning (3). The tourist reader does not allow the book to impact him or her. A witness, in contrast, attempts to see into the story and process the material so that he or she is changed by the reading experience. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman sees the witness as the person who shares the knowledge with the survivor (69).

The tourist, unlike the witness, is the person who reads incest narratives as "sensational autobiographies" (Showalter 146) or sees them as "eroticized, disturbing interludes" (Williamson, "Writing Aversion" 204). Danica provided an example of such a reader, an interviewer who did not want to get to "the politics of the issue" and chose, instead, to focus on the "lurid and graphic" (*Beyond Don't* 48). The tourists are the people who even Freud feared would abuse his story of Dora, "choos[ing] to read a case history of this kind not as a contribution to the psychopathology of neurosis, but as a

roman a clef designed for their private delectation" (*Fragment of an Analysis* 9). Danica described these readers as the "people who read a genre of horrible stories because the stories scare them or make them feel creepy and they get a rush out of it" (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 79-80).

These readers may take their cues from media coverage of incest. Danica explained: "The media gives readers, listeners or viewers signals as to how to interpret the information or images that are put before them" (*Beyond Don't* 45). Williamson suggested it is specifically talk shows that have desensitized readers (*Crybaby!* 182). Danica more generally criticized television and its presentation of incestuous abuse:

> What does it mean when a society and the media that represent it are willing to parade the pain of women and children across the television screens of a nation, but are not willing to do anything that in any way points out that there are abusers and an entire system of privilege that supports those who abuse and absolves them of guilt and responsibility for what they do?...As long as the issue of child abuse is made into a freak show on the talk shows every afternoon, any call for change, however passionate–and eventually any reporting of abuse, however horrible–will be effectively silenced, slotted, as it is, in between advertisements for the new tampons, hair colour and that latest super-clean, non-polluting, biodegradable detergent. The abuse of children will not stop, or even become slightly less prevalent, but it will be nicely swept back under the carpet as the media go on with their cultural mandate to manipulate the next issue. (*Beyond Don't* 140-41)

Danica does not believe television programs that "feature" abuse focus on the politics behind and social implications of the crime. She implied that all talk shows turn child abuse into a freak show. This is not the case, nor is it the case that the abuse of children

will be swept under the carpet. Any exposure, whether in the form of sensationalized media coverage (talk shows such as *Jerry Springer*) or more responsible coverage (*Oprah*) breaks the silence and encourages dialogue. Nonetheless, because of the form of television programming, as Danica acknowledged, with its commercial breaks and half hour to hour long time slots, even the most responsible programs must stop and start their discussion of child abuse, as well as cover a large amount of material in a very short amount of time. Unlike in books, when it is the reader's decision to start and stop reading, audiences are forced to be interrupted when watching television. An incest autobiography can sustain an argument and the audience's attention; whereas, a television program on incest disclosure, despite even the best intentions, cannot.

Tourist and witness representations of incest coverage are also kept distinct by their reasons for disclosure. There are some talk shows, and, indeed, some writers, who are compelled to disclose incest for economic reasons rather than for political, social, and in the case of the writers, literary reasons. Williamson wondered if her reasons for writing about incest were related to talk shows' reasons for covering the taboo: "What is the difference between the spectacular exhibitionism of the North-American talk shows and my desire to write about autobiographical incest narratives? How do we distinguish between Oprah and Geraldo and Sally, etc?" (*Crybaby!* 182). Like Danica, she is too dismissive of all talk shows; nonetheless, her underlying concern is valid. Who is capitalizing on incest? If writers address the issue of incest at the same time that incest is a popular subject in the media, is everyone implicated in the sensationalism? As Showalter

and other such critics indicate, the popularity of incest disclosure will mean that incest autobiographers will be under scrutiny. They are part of a more general trauma disclosure movement; therefore, audiences cannot help but compare them to other forms of incest disclosure. A comparison, however, can encourage development. Reader can develop analytical skills needed to distinguish incest autobiography from media incest disclosure, and the incest autobiographer can develop writing skills that insure their articulations of incest are distinct from the media's coverage of the subject.

The incest autobiographer must bring something different to the subject of incest and must encourage empathetic responses in readers. She must write a "text of bliss" rather than a "text of pleasure." Although it may seem odd to apply Roland Barthes's euphonic terms to trauma literature, his definitions suit the sub-genre. According to Barthes, the "text of pleasure" comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading; whereas, "the text of bliss" discomforts and unsettles readers' historical, cultural, and psychological assumptions (*Pleasure of the Text* 14). Television programs like talk shows are "texts of pleasure," because they are part of popular culture. In order for networks to air the programs, the networks must be confident the shows will appeal to a large audience. In turn, for the shows to have this kind of appeal, they must adhere to a particular kind of formula: one that shocks but does not frighten, one that grabs a viewer's attention but does not haunt. Publishers, as with networks, want their books to sell, but they do not have to operate in the realm of popular culture. Incest autobiographies are not part of popular culture and, therefore, they do not

need to be formulaic. At the same time, they make up a sub-genre, so they do have a pattern.[4] This pattern, however, can accommodate change and development. The first incest autobiographies were "texts of bliss," because they disclosed incest. The later incest autobiographies continued to discomfort and unsettle because they addressed incest in a way earlier incest autobiographies and other forms of media disclosure did not.[5]

Conclusion

The four incest autobiographies are examples of how women write first hand accounts of incest. Each incest autobiography is a particular literary expression of the writer's incest and its aftereffects. The incest autobiographers' writing is part of a new sub-genre and an empowering socio-political practice that creates and communicates survivorship in a different way–personally, artfully, and "blissfully"–than do other forms of incest writing and incest media coverage. The incest autobiographers have used their pain to create literature: they have recognized a way to use their damage (Wallace 294). They have witnessed their own abuse, "read" their childhood memories, and wrote and published them. In turning their trauma from personal stories into incest autobiographies, they allow readers to re-witness the abuse. The witnessing and re-witnessing encourage

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[4]As discussed on pages 1-2.

[5]As discussed on pages 3-4.

audiences to empathetically understand victimization and envision survivorship. Allen, Fraser, Danica, and Williamson began to, as Danica, herself wrote, "Fill the space with books" (*Don't* 12.11). They extended the parameters not only of contemporary Canadian women's writing but autobiographical writing and writing about sexual violence against children and women.

Chapter 2. *Daddy's Girl*

Although Allen's *Daddy's Girl* is a father-daughter incest autobiography, it is not solely focused, despite its title, on incest or fatherhood. Readers, assuming it to be a "text of pleasure," due to the commercial appearance of its cover,[6] might expect the narrative to be entirely about Allen's traumatic relationship with her father; instead, they will find it to be a "text of bliss." *Daddy's Girl* surprises by offering readers a wealth of information about Allen's mother and the other women in her childhood and adulthood. Allen experiments with her *bios* and turns it away from the offender through her use of a dual perspective, narrative indirection, and well rounded characterization. By combining details of her adult, healed life with details from her traumatic childhood, she emphasizes re-invention in the form of survivorship as much as victimization. The narrative indirection is her method of focusing less on the offender and more on the victims in the text. She, therefore, characterizes her mother before she characterizes her father. Through detailed and well rounded characterization, she studies her family and friends: not just the male offender but female mentors. She does not allow the patriarch of her life to be the patriarch of her life story. Allen's incest autobiography is a genuine experiment or a counternarrative in two ways. First, she has dared to write personally about her incest experience in a culture and literary world that would rather she remain silent. Second, she

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[6]See appendix.

actually counters her father-daughter focus with the mother-daughter concentration. The relationship between Allen and her mother and the bond between Allen and other women shape the relationship between the reader and *Daddy's Girl* into a meaningful encounter that involves a witnessing of character, text, and taboo.

The Adult Perspective

Allen opens and closes her incest autobiography with an adult perspective: her reflections on her life at the age of thirty-eight (*Daddy's Girl* 1). This *autos* allows Allen to use the critical judgement of a survivor rather than the uncritical emotion of the child victim (Coe 156). She can objectively explain where she is in her healing journey. She shifts between past and present consciousness throughout *Daddy's Girl*. In doing so, she reflects on survivorship as much as victimization. This allows readers reprieve from grieving for the abused child. When reading about the adult Allen, they can celebrate her victories. Readers are aware this story has elements of the tragic but know that it does not end in tragedy.

As well, readers can better understand the process of healing. Allen characterizes herself as believably flawed. Such a characterization adds integrity to her writing in two ways. First, readers would expect Allen to be flawed, or more accurately, scarred, from her incest trauma. In her realistic portrayal of herself, she describes her moments of panic:

> Crowds–in department stores, in supermarkets, in elevators, on

> dance floors–frighten me. Something inside my chest begins to flutter, my head fills with noise, and an unreasoning, irrational anger and panic make me want to start shoving aside bodies to get the people away from me. Making love in the classic man-on-top fashion is a physical, psychological and emotional agony. My breathing goes haywire, hysteria climbs out of my throat and grabs hold of my eyelids, and I know it's merely a matter of another few seconds before my hands open and I helplessly relinquish my grip on the strings of sanity. (8)

Allen depicts herself as vulnerable: an element of her survivorship she is still clearly dealing with. Second, if *Daddy's Girl* was a novel, readers would expect the characters to be realistic: to have strengths and weaknesses. Allen meets these expectations in her autobiography. She makes every character, including herself, believable. For example, to prove she is only human, she recounts experiencing irrational anger with her daughter, Jossie:[7]

> I told her to move so she was more directly under the water. She moved about an inch so that perhaps half her head was properly positioned. I told her to move more. She protested, and I went berserk, screaming at her that she was an idiot. "Just move the hell under the goddamned water and get the soap out of your hair!" When she tried to explain, I dragged the shower curtain aside, grabbed her by the shoulders, and forcibly held her under the water while she fearfully shrieked and sobbed. (65)

In the end, her adult characterization of herself makes her autobiography a story of survivorship more than victimization and makes her a realistic character rather than a one

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[7]In an interview with Barbara Scott-Kermode, Allen mentions her daughter Kimberley (1660). Presumably, she changed her daughter's name in her autobiography in an attempt to protect her identity.

dimensional figure.

It is in her adult perspective that Allen makes her re-invention obvious. She tells readers that when she was twenty (*Daddy's Girl* 257, Crosbie 45), she legally changed her name to Charlotte Vale. This re-naming is clearly part of her new image. Vale replaces the patronymic and, thereby, distances herself from the offender. The issue of the name raises two other issues. The first issue has to do with what Allen chooses to divulge and conceal in her autobiography. While Allen does say she changed her name, she does not explain why she chose Charlotte Vale. It is through outside sources that readers can learn the name comes from a Bette Davis character in the 1942 movie classic *Now, Voyager* (Crosbie 45, Francis 13).[8] In her autobiography, Allen does not mention this character in particular, but she does say she admired Bette Davis's characters for being independent, fierce, and determined (223). Although the particulars of the name decision may not be essential to the *bios*, the absence of detail may encourage readers to look for other absences. For example, they may wonder if Allen has left out more positive memories of her childhood or has neglected to describe the help she received in dealing with her trauma.

The second issue involves the lack of corroborative evidence. In renaming/reinventing herself, Allen has made it impossible for readers to learn anything about her life history other than what she chooses to divulge. Allen, herself, says she

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[8]In 1959, she met and developed a friendship with Davis (Francis 13).

buried her past along with her real name (Francis 13). For those who believe autobiography is unquestionable truth telling, the lack of corroborative evidence is a moot point. For those who believe truth plays no part in the socio-political and literary impact of an autobiography, specifically an incest autobiography, the lack of corroborative evidence is, again, immaterial. Although some people may disagree, *Daddy's Girl* is still meaningful despite the problematic issue of truth. For those, however, who are skeptical of Allen's account of incest or uncomfortable with her writing style, her particular kind of re-invention will pose a problem. There is no way of reassuring anti-Freudians that Allen is not lying, and there is no way of convincing those who think Allen is exaggerating her victimization or over-indulging in self-pity[9] that her childhood was as traumatic as she says it was. The autobiographical re-invention, and in Allen's case, the literal re-invention in the form of the new name, is a mixed blessing. It allows her to shed part of her victim identity but it problematizes the issue of truth in her writing.

Rather than reflect on what she chose to include and exclude, readers can only consider *how* she relates the events of her life. That is, readers cannot know what Allen has left out of her *bios*, so they must instead turn to the *graphē*. Allen rapidly and disjunctively conveys the events that follow the abuse of her childhood and adolescence. At the age of twenty, she says, she not only changed her name, she moved to England and found various employment opportunities: secretarial work (257), singing (258), selling

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[9]As discussed on pages 82-83.

magazines door to door (258), and being a social director at a hotel (146, 226, 256). After three years in England (160), she returned to Toronto, signed with a music agent and toured across Canada (161, 258). She emigrated to the United States two years later, in order, she says, to get away from her father (162, 227, 262). Again she toured as a singer (127, 258), this time in the Midwest (129). Next, at age twenty-nine (258), as she briefly explains, she moved to New York and gave up her singing career for another office job (129). She began writing about her father. It was 1970, the year he had died (*Daddy's Girl*, Preface), and it was also when she received word that he had sexually abused her niece (259). Next, she briefly worked on a cruise ship (258, 130). Later that year, she moved to Hartford, Connecticut (130, 262), married Walt Allen (254), and moved to Manhattan, Stamford, then Darien (133-34). She soon gave birth to her daughter (134). She began to write fiction (135). As is obvious from the number of different parenthetical references, Allen does not describe her adult life in one clearly organized section of her autobiography. Instead she scatters the details as though they are bread crumbs. To include the details in this non-sequential way is to use them as checkpoints only. Within these details is the evidence that she survived. Every time she speaks of a moment in her adult life, she is reminding readers she reached adulthood, survived the abuse. At the same time, she does not encourage readers to focus on the events of her adult life. If it had been her intention, she would have made it easier for readers to follow the details. Instead, she maintains a focus on her childhood and the impact of her childhood, specifically the abuse, on her adult life.

Narrative Indirection

Allen provides details about her father, the child sexual abuse, and the aftereffects throughout the autobiography; these things considered, *Daddy's Girl* is, indisputably, an incest narrative. Nonetheless, she does not begin to fully characterize her father, the offender and his offences, until Chapter Five. This deferral accomplishes four things. First, in postponing his introduction, she, in effect, puts him in his place. He may have had sexual (and physical, emotional, psychological, and financial) power over her, but she now has narrative power over him. Second, the delay in introducing the character of the father may reflect Allen's subconscious: the way in which she herself approached the subject of incest. Third, the indirection does not alienate readers; without having to immediately face the incestuous abuser, they can ease into the text. Fourth, perhaps most significantly, as readers begin to establish a relationship with the text and with Allen, it is the relationship between mother and daughter they encounter; it is the mother's character readers first become familiar with.

Characterization of Her Mother

Despite the title of the book, at the beginning of *Daddy's Girl*, Allen is a mommy's girl; that is to say, her life revolves around her mother. Largely because her father is away at war at the book's opening, Allen develops her mother's character earlier and to a

greater degree than her father's. In doing so, she recognizes the power of her mother: a power her mother could not always exercise because of the patriarch. Through the characterization of her mother, she also conveys the aftereffects of incest and abuse in general on the family unit. At the same time, in so completely characterizing her mother, Allen restores some balance to her family. She counters her father's legacy of abuse with her mother's legacy. The countering is a way of balancing the relationships that impacted her in her life. Although she was greatly impacted by her father's incestuous abuse, her *bios* would be skewed if she did not include the impact of the relationship with her mother.

Allen empowers the matriarch by focusing on her first and by developing her characterization fully, but she does not idealize her. She narratively empowers a woman who already had an uneasy power. Although Allen's father is the patriarch, Allen's mother, during her husband's absence, assumed control. Allen characterizes a woman who sometimes abused her position of temporary authority. The first story Allen tells about her childhood, her first memory, in fact, shows a very flawed mother. At the time, Allen was in nursery school. The teacher, as Allen explains, locked her in a storage room for an entire afternoon. Terrified and confused, Allen hurt herself by pounding her head against the wall (2). When her mother arrived and the teacher unlocked the door, Allen, bloody and crying, ran to her mother for comfort. Allen writes: "My mother was upset and angry. Not, as I had hoped and expected, with the teacher, but with me. She cleaned my face with a tissue, then marched me out of the school demanding to know what I'd done" (3). In this first description of the relationship with her mother, in this early section

of her autobiography, Allen de-centers her incest narrative by focusing on her mother rather than the incest offender and also de-centers the characterization of the mother for, against all stereotypes, she is neither powerless nor maternal. She is not the nurturer Allen hoped for, nor is she the impotent woman readers might expect the wife of an incest offender to be.

Nonetheless, Allen's mother's power is limited. Although she is, for a time, the only parent in the household, her matriarchal status is compromised by financial and social restraints. Allen reveals her understanding of the precarious nature of her mother's power in her layered characterization. In the first layer, she details her mother's abuses of power or character flaws. She provides examples of her mother's cold, accusatory, and dispassionate parenting approach. According to Allen, there were times when she was sick, when her mother, rather than nurture her, would complain, "It's one damn thing after another with you" (73); "Why the hell can't you be more *careful*?" (33). She frequently spoke harshly to Allen: "I'm going out for a decent evening to get the hell away from the bunch of you for a while. Now, if you're finished with that, scram! You're getting on my nerves with all this question stuff" (43). She mercilessly destroyed Allen's most personally meaningful possessions, saying "Oh, that crap, I needed the space, so I threw it all out" (161). According to Allen, her mother rarely worried about hurting her feelings. When Allen told her mother she wanted to be an actress, she responded: "Who says you've got any talent? And you're sure no beauty. Now she wants to be an actress...What next? She wants to take up with all those whores and drug addicts" (230). In this first layer of

characterization, Allen shows her mother's weaknesses. In doing so, Allen proves she is prepared to criticize people other than just the offender. She also begins to depict her environment as un-nurturing: one that made her feel vulnerable and needy even before the incestuous abuse began. *Daddy's Girl* proves to be an incest autobiography which encompasses the pre and post traumas.

In this first layer of characterization, before Allen begins to show another side to her mother and, therein, show her own understanding of her mother's power/powerlessness, she bridges the gap between her mother and father: that is, she comes very near to depicting her mother as an offender, albeit not an incest offender. She describes her mother as having ongoing anger (6). At her worst, she was physically abusive (4, 105). Allen provides examples of her mother's erratic and violent behaviour:

> She might listen and talk quietly and then, the next morning, come at me in a state of rage, her hands like the blades of a fan, administering blows that came almost too quickly to be seen. It seemed that when she had a chance to consider our conversations, she'd usually decide she didn't like what I'd had to say. She'd build herself up to near fever pitch and, by the time I appeared, be well beyond the point where she could simply say she didn't agree. The anger had taken her into speechlessness where all she seemed able to do was strike out at the source of her disapproval. (121)

On another occasion, moments before Allen was going to tell her about the incest, Allen's mother became enraged and physically threatening: "It [the Bible] flew across the room and smashed right through the glass front of the kitchen cabinet...I wanted to get up from behind the table and run, but was afraid to move. I stood up. She bounded across the

room and grabbed me by one of my pigtails" (64). Unfortunately, as Allen explains, it was because of these violent reactions that Allen feared her mother and, therefore, felt incapable of asking her for help. Allen writes, "She'd *kill* me, I thought, if I told her something like The Secret that was really bad" (65). With these descriptions of her mother as violent and terrifying, it almost seems as though Allen is writing about a second villain. Allen further appears as though she views her mother in this light when she expresses her ambivalence toward both of her parents: "I didn't care which one of them decided to give me a nice life, just so long as one of them did" (89). She even wishes death on both the offender and her mother: "I prayed for disasters, for some event to wipe out my family, leaving me to my aunt and uncle" (89).

Other incest autobiographers have characterized their mothers as the co-villains in their incest autobiographies. To criticize parents, as Miller notes, is now ordinary in contemporary autobiography: "In the last ten years there has been an increase in the number of autobiographical works being written, and it is apparent that this younger generation of writers is less and less inclined to idealize their parents" (*For Your Own Good* 278). Lynn Z. Bloom also comments on this literary trend in her essay about mother-daughter relationships in autobiographies. She looks at the dimensions of the legacies of mothers and the daughters' responses to their heritages as expressed in women's autobiography (302). Although the representation of the mother is often positive, there are cases where the autobiographers write of the anatomization of their rebellion against their mothers (Bloom 294). Potvin, in *White Lies (for my mother)*, takes

this anatomization to the extreme and accuses her mother, though not the prime offender, of committing crimes against her. She writes, "How will I describe the indignities you force me to endure, the way you look away when I need you, the ugly clothing you deliberately choose for me" (32). Potvin denounces her mother for being the greatest liar of all (32) and writes the disturbing, subverted phrase, "Maman, Maman, why hast thou forsaken me" (126, 159).

Unlike Potvin, Allen alters the characterization of her mother and removes her from the villainy. In the second layer of characterization, Allen depicts a more caring and insecure woman. She includes the moments that tell her she is loved by her mother: her being "nervous and upset," "totally sympathetic and fearful" when Allen had an infection in her leg (70); her being patient, gentle, and affectionate when Allen was released from the hospital after her infection (73); her feeling sympathetic when Allen injured her nose and desperately wanted plastic surgery (187). Concerning the last point, Allen's mother showed a great deal of compassion and understanding for her daughter by allowing her to have cosmetic surgery; she was aware Allen's father had destroyed her self-confidence and made her feel ugly. Allen also describes her mother's fears: her phobia of thunder, for example (27). Further, Allen notes the moments when her mother could be fun-loving and entertaining. She would invite her children to play cards (17, 105). Allen also observes that outside the home, in the company of friends, her mother was more soft and engaging (18). Clearly, her mother felt more at ease when she was away from the patriarch's

domain. Allen shows readers the gritty side of her mother while giving glimpses of a more sensitive woman living in a difficult environment.

In the third layer of characterization, Allen suggests the reason for her mother's gritty exterior and imbalanced use of power: she, too, was a victim. Allen explains that her mother was in a deeply unhappy marriage (13). Her husband made her believe "she was a fool who'd bred three more fools. She couldn't ever win" (8). In fact, her husband abused her from the beginning of their marriage. According to Allen, he repeatedly locked his wife in their apartment (50). He also committed adultery (30). His war years may have felt like a reprieve from him but, at the time, she was solely responsible for raising their three children. The break from him did not mean her life was easier. When he returned from war, he continued to abuse her verbally and emotionally. He criticized her family, a common practice of abusive husbands in an effort to estrange their wives from their support systems. He succeeded in hurting his wife's feelings and alienating her from her family with comments like: "Your father was fulla shit! Just like your idiot mother and asshole sisters!" (13). He denied her the opportunity to practice Judaism (21). In short, he denied her her personal, social, religious, and financial rights.

Allen explains that it was his financial control that kept her mother trapped in the abusive marriage. Because he was the sole breadwinner, his money was the tool that allowed him to maintain ultimate control over his wife and children. Allen's mother had to be frugal in order to support her family, and her husband berated her for it:

> My mother chose this time [meals] to talk about money. We

> all knew to the penny what things cost, because she told us. "Do you know what this *cost*?" she'd demand if food remained on the plate, or an apple was discarded half eaten. It seemed a never-ending recital of dollars and cents. A price tag to everything. Daddy ignored her...his annoyance with her or with us radiated from him like heat. He muttered occasional comments. "Goddamn woman's probably got the first cent I ever gave her." (6-7)

Allen describes a typical fight that would occur when her father gave her mother his paycheck:

> She'd open the small brown envelope, take out five or ten dollars and give him the money. Their worst argument took place Friday nights.
>
> "Five lousy bucks for a week's work. Generous of you." His over-full lips would curl into sneer beneath his brushy mustache. "I let you handle the money, we'd have nothing to eat by Monday. You'd spend every stinking cent. We've got three kids here. I'm not letting you get your lousy hands on my money."
>
> "Willya listen to that? *Her* money. *My* goddamned money. Who the hell worked for it anyway? Wasn't for me, you wouldn't have a thing...Go on! Keep on pushing! Plenty of women who'd be glad to have me. Keep it up! Go on! Just keep on pushing!" (13)

He felt he could threaten her because she literally could not afford to have him leave. When, after years of abuse, Allen suggested her mother leave her father, Allen's mother responds, "Sure! And what would we live on?" (197). At this moment, Allen realizes the extent of her mother's victimization and the tools used to victimize her.

Allen has gone from characterizing her mother as a co-villain to characterizing her as a co-victim. At one point, Allen refers to her mother as her best enemy (127). Here, "best" denotes kindest rather than biggest. Although there were times when her mother

appeared to be her adversary, she still clearly depicts her as her best, and her father as her worst, enemy. When her friend says, "The way I see it, your real problem's your mother" (236), she was offering a naive and oversimplified view of the family dynamic–a view Allen corrects in the multilayered characterization of her mother. In an interview published after the autobiography, Allen says her mother apologized for her maternal failures. In response, Allen says, "Given the circumstances, you were the best mother you were capable of being" (Francis 13). She adds, "My mother is still alive and 80 years old and survived the book" (Francis 13). In the end, Allen chooses to depict both of them as survivors.

With her intense focus on her mother's circumstances, readers witness the effects incest has not only on an offender-victim relationship but on a mother-daughter relationship. More than a decade later, theorist Janet Liebman Jacobs joins Allen's inquiry. Jacobs includes an entire chapter on the relationship in her book on the aftereffects of incest, *Victimized Daughters*. Allen helped initiate the dialogue on this important issue.

When Allen speaks of abuse, she cannot separate it from memories of her mother. In fact, Allen situates the mother beside and around the incest. She briefly describes, for example, the first time she was raped by her father, then externalizes the experience by displacing her feelings onto her mother: "Yet my mother wouldn't like this–for any number of reasons. An image of a very angry mother stalked my mind, and warned me she'd shout a lot and very loudly if she found me curled so contentedly beside Daddy this

way" (53). In Allen's mind, her mother was always "present" during the incest. Her father actually encouraged this connection by invoking her mother; he used her hand mirror while he abused Allen (55). Further, during the sexual abuse, Allen would think of her mother: "My mother was always telling me to pull my dress down, keep my knees together. 'Don't sit that way! *Nice* girls don't *sit* that way!'" (56). In short, Allen saw through her mother's eyes and heard her mother's voice:

> A voice in my head recited all the warnings my mother had ever issued: Don't get into cars with strangers. Don't accept money or candy from people I don't know. Don't ever again go alone into the public toilet, and never ever sit on the toilet seat in a public lavatory. Dozens of things I was never supposed to do. This was one of the things and she'd never warned me about it. This was the worst thing of all. I knew it. So why hadn't she warned me about this? (56)

Allen did not, indeed could not, separate her mother from her trauma, because it was her mother that she had developed such a strong relationship with. Her mother was the dominant presence in her life, but her father was dominating.

Characterization of Her Father

When the book opens, Allen's father is absent, fighting in World War II (2). These years impacted her mother, her father, and Allen in distinct ways. For her mother, as already mentioned, they meant she had to struggle to raise a family on her own. For her father, "Nothing before or after ever allowed him as much freedom or that special, limited

brand of responsibility he enjoyed then" (*Daddy's Girl* 19). For Allen, they meant her early, formative years were spent with her mother as the sole care giver and were also spent idealizing her father. Allen says, "He was someone I couldn't remember ever having seen. There was no image of him in my mind, no memories, nothing at all" (3). The image Allen created of her father, as so many children would, was unrealistic. Young Allen imagined her father's return home would make her life perfect by providing her with the nurturing love of a parent she did not feel she received from her mother: "The War ended and my father was going to come home. I waited in a state of high excitement, convinced his return would change everything, make our lives different, better, happier" (5). While the child eagerly awaits her father's return, readers prepare themselves for tragedy.

It is surprising to young Allen, but not to readers, when immediately upon arrival home, the patriarch waves a gun, an obvious phallic symbol, in front of his family. Allen says it lay "impressively dull and heavy across the palm of his hand" (5). This description, combined with the mother's reaction of fear and horror (5), foreshadows the father's threatening sexual character. His menacing side, despite Allen's expectations of him, almost immediately begins to surface. Allen writes, "Something about him was frightening" (7), and later she describes him as often having an expression of brooding menace (50). Her hope that her father would provide a different, better, and happier life for the family, was quickly replaced, at first, by boredom–"In just weeks, it was as if he'd always been there in the apartment"(12)–and later, fear. The suspenseful characterization

of her father and his relationship with Allen may cause readers to relate to the incest autobiography as though it was a mystery novel. The commercial nature of mystery novels makes them more reader friendly than the more unknown incest autobiographies, so likening the opening of *Daddy's Girl* to the formulaic genre might put readers more at ease.

Allen gradually reveals the villain. Her father's initial normalcy is tainted by his more unpleasant qualitites. She says, "He had to have something to hate" (87). He was abusive toward his wife, as mentioned earlier, but he was also abusive toward Allen's two older brothers, Will and Bobby. Rather than fully characterize her siblings, Allen only describes her brothers in order to advance the villainy of her father. Her father makes her brothers miserable. He turns his oldest son into a recluse (3-4) and rids Bobby of his delightful smile and wonderful laughter (4):

> Daddy never did make any effort to talk to Bobby and Will. He'd glare at them as if he didn't much like them and most of the time if they asked him something he either pretended not to hear or made a joke out of their questions, and answered in that piping, mimicking fashion that bothered all of us and made the boys look and feel stupid. (30)

Throughout his children's childhoods and teenage years, he shouted, slammed doors and threw things (199). Allen describes numerous, violent outbursts:

> My father sat staring at his plate his temples throbbing, then announced, "I'm not going to eat this shit!" He picked up the plate and threw it across the table. My mother ducked and the plate smashed against the far cupboard, sending Spanish rice all over the walls, ceiling and floor. There followed a long, weighty silence; then he pushed himself away from the table

and stormed off to the bedroom. (233)

In delineating her father's varied expressions and targets of abuse, not just his sexual abuse of her, she layers his villainy.

She continues this layering by describing his non-sexual abuses of her. He terrified and intimidated her with his "illogical, unreasoning, permanent anger" (31). One example of his irrational and enraged behaviour which Allen provides is his refusal to stop driving when she felt car sick. After Allen vomited out of the window of the moving car, her father made her get out and clean the side of his automobile (101-02). According to Allen, her father humiliated her on a daily basis, calling her stupid and making her feel ugly by joking about her appearance (87). She clearly describes him as being verbally and emotionally abusive toward her.

Allen carefully studies her father's character. She details the crimes he committed inside and outside of the home. She describes his insurance scams which involved getting in car accidents, collecting the insurance money, and being oblivious to the pain he caused the other victims in the accidents. Allen writes observantly about her father's destructive character within and outside the family. Her own victimization does not appear to limit her gaze. By providing numerous examples of her father's abuses, many of which do not even directly relate to her, she adds to her credibility as a witness. Again, this well rounded characterization of a villainous character is not unlike the characterization of any villain in any book. It is this literary normalcy that allows readers to feel an ironic sense of

comfort/familiarity with *Daddy's Girl* while allowing Allen to write comfortably and with familiarity about a horrifyingly uncomfortable subject.

She continues to characterize the villain of her story, the offender of her childhood, in this well rounded literary fashion: that is, as most all writers do, she does not depict him as wholly villainous. He could be entertaining and good humoured. As a young child, Allen was more susceptible to his highly jocular moods and his ability to become laughingly expansive (19) than she was to his madness, coarseness, and crudeness. He was handsome, bright, clever and witty, had a dazzling smile, could speak more than ten languages, and could be charming, good-natured, engaging, and funny (19, 21, 22, 68). He came from a family, as Allen describes, that "was comprised of wide-eyed laughingly eccentric people...their occasional reunions were loud with music, laughter, frantic with jokes and movement; breathless, motiveless excitement among hard drinkers, high-living types" (22).

His appealing side and his magnetic family not only point to Allen's adept characterization; it is a way for Allen to connect with readers. Would readers find this type of entertaining man charismatic as well? Allen does say he was popular with both men and women (22). Men praised him for being a great guy; women flirted with him (22). Would readers have responded any differently to him? Allen engages readers by involving them in this type of personal interrogation.

Allen also engages readers' sympathy by characterizing her own vulnerability and naivety. She was drawn to her dynamic father; readers would understand Allen's

captivation with her father, because she has skillfully depicted herself as vulnerable: troubles with her mother and longing for her father's return. Further, Allen characterizes herself as a child, in all her naivety. For example, she is attracted to excitement of any sort. For this reason, she finds her father's family compelling:

> But they were so wildly, madly alive that to be with them was as dizzying and thrilling as a ride on the roller coaster. Because beneath the laughter there always seemed to lurk a kind of madness, a coarse, crude tenacity for life that might be lethal. They all had violent, sudden tempers. Yet I was drawn powerfully to their frenzied ebullience. I wanted always to have the guts to be crazy, to drink neat scotch or vodka and then eat the glass. (23)

Allen cleverly juxtaposes the adult narrative voice with the child's naive attractions. She felt drawn to the dynamic family and only later would discover her father's family had committed brother-sister incest (*Crybaby!* 50). She would have no reason, in her limited childhood experience, to recognize the lurking danger in her father's personality.

Readers, in contrast, would be able to scrutinize him from their keen adult perspective. Allen provides an example of one of his jokes: he says a new breakfast cereal should be called lost, the punch line being, "So men, the next time your wife goes out to do the shopping, just remember to tell her to get 'Lost'" (19). Whereas, young Allen might find this joke funny because her father was smiling and being imaginative and original, readers would see the underlying misogyny. Even at this early stage in her autobiography, through careful characterization rather than explicit sexual detail, Allen guides readers to feel fear for the child and fear of the father.

Introducing Incest

Allen allows readers to prepare emotionally for the onslaught of abuse by detailing the relationship between victim and victimizer from its beginning and by slowly leading up to the actual incest. She initially approaches her autobiographic writing as though it is a "text of pleasure" rather than a "text of bliss." This technique may also have allowed her to prepare for the difficult task of articulating the actual sexual abuse. As Coe has said, finding the language to express sexuality as it relates to childhood is difficult for any autobiographer.[10] To introduce the subject of incest into her story, Allen simply writes, "Daddy. A cigarette in the dark. The thick smell of smoke, sleep" (20). Despite the lack of reference to sex in this line, it does carry a kind of sexual tension with her use of words like "Daddy," "dark," "smell," "smoke" and "sleep." Nine pages later she adds to the ominous scene: "Daddy. Lighted cigarette puncturing the nighttime darkness. The thickness, the scent of the dark" (29). Now the cigarette, serving as a phallic symbol, punctures darkness. Still later, she adds more details to the foreboding image of her father: "Daddy. A mound in the bed. Smoke smell, husky voice" (46). With this statement, she introduces the scene of the crime: the bed. In her next reference to her father's nighttime ritual, she has him calling to her: "Daddy. A mound in the bed. Red glow of a cigarette piercing the darkness. Thick sleep smoke smell. And his husky voice

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[10]As discussed on page 8.

murmuring, "C'mere, sweetheart. C'mere" (53). Now the cigarette is piercing not puncturing, and the husky voice calls Allen. This slow development toward the crime adds to the suspense of the story, but it also allows readers into the incest narrative with a minimal amount of discomfort and shock. They can ease into a story about a crime that is more horrific and offensive than, in many cases, anything they have ever read about. Allen, then, slowly leads up to describing the incestuous abuse which took place at least twice a week when her mother went out with friends (40): "Months, years of Tuesdays and Thursdays; hundreds of nights I spent with Daddy in that bedroom. And sometimes there were weekend drives" (100).

After readers are comfortable with Allen's writing style and engaged with the text and characters, Allen turns her autobiography into a "text of bliss" by describing the specific abuses. She explains how he would signal her to come to his bedroom: he would snap his lighter or cough, whistle or scratch at the bedroom door (156, 197). In providing these auditory signals, Allen invites the audience not only to read about the abuse but to actually hear it. Her imagery engages readers' senses, and this increases the possibility that they will become involved with the story and witness the abuse. Allen says the signals make her feel as though she is a summoned animal, an obedient dog (197); readers, in turn, witness his process of training her.

Allen never gratuitously describes the father-daughter rapes. She catalogues the various sexual crimes her father committed in order for readers to understand the extent of the abuse. She explains that he made her fellate him in a stranger's driveway (102). She describes his attempt at anal sex: "But Daddy was always trying to trap me into relenting and turning myself completely over to him. Bribing me, he'd wheedle, 'Let me just put it in a little way'. No, *no*, NO! 'I don't won't hurt you'. NO, NO, NO! 'In the back then'. It hurt terribly. I threatened to scream. He stopped" (110). She avoids using words like penetration and anal sex; instead, in upper-case letters, she emphasizes her futile response and, therefore, his domination. She attempts to state the facts, not the spectacle of the crime:

> He took me into the deserted building and led me up to the third-floor storage area where there were bolts of wrapped fabric stacked to create a sort of rolling, brown-paper ocean that stretched away off down the length of the vast room. Settling on top of some of the lower rolls, he made himself comfortable and beckoned for me to do the new thing: to put my mouth on him. I loathed it. He'd put on one of the little gray balloons he called 'safes' that tasted bitter, powdery. (92-93)

Allen provides just enough information for readers to get the full impact of the crime.

The lack of description of incestuous sex goes against the sensationalism the cover of the book seems to promise. In the most available edition, Berkley Books', *Daddy's*

Girl is in deep pink, gothic font: horror book fashion.[11] A doll sits in the folds of a fuzzy pink blanket. Beside the doll is the sentence: "The shocking true story of a child's ordeal of shame." Across the top are the words "Her story is not unique. That it why it must be told." From the elements of the cover–horror, pink, doll, true, shame, unique–the autobiography looks more like a commercial novel rather than a serious literary expression of incest.

Rather than being a "text of pleasure," or, more specifically, commercial, Allen's narrative is discomforting. Her diction helps make it a "text of bliss." In her scant descriptions of sexual crimes, she includes words and phrases a child victim might use: "put my mouth on him" instead of "fellate him," "gray balloons" instead of "condoms." By grounding her language in a child's, she maximizes the potential for readers to understand and be unsettled by the particularities of incest victimization. A child victim, as she points out, does not even have the language to articulate the crime.

Allen emphasizes the young age of the victim by, at times, using a child's vocabulary, and she emphasizes the victim's inability to understand her guiltless role in the incest by describing bouts of self-blame. Allen implicates herself in the crime from the beginning:

> Being drawn up and in, I climbed into bed alongside him, at once surprised that he wasn't wearing his pajamas; sensing something was wrong in this. But it was so gratifying, the warmth beneath the blankets, so reassuring and comforting to hear his throaty

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[11]See Appendix.

> whisper scratch light strokes across the sinister darkness.
> (53)

She, even after recovering from incest and being "first reader" to her own incest life story, still cannot fully process her first memory of abuse. She describes the darkness, not her father, as being sinister.

Reading Victimization

It is readers' responsibility to process or witness Allen's book. As "second reader" or "third experimenter," readers must combine what they have learned from the experiment–the shifting perspective, narrative indirection and characterization of mother, father, and daughter–into an understanding of the "second experimenter's," Allen's, ordeal with incest and its aftereffects. If readers encountered *Daddy's Girl* when it was a new experiment, that is, when it was first published, they would have been part of the first audience to read an incest autobiography. Being the first Canadian book in the sub-genre, it would not have a defined position in the reading market. Who would read the book and, equally important, how would the book be read?

The genre of autobiography might suggest a method of reading, for as Gunn says in *Autobiography: Towards a Poetics of Experience*, genres are reading tools: "Genre is what enables the reader to locate himself or herself before the text and thereby to have access to the possible meaning of the text" (21). As an autobiography, then, readers of

Daddy's Girl can locate themselves *before* or in front of Allen's life story, *inside* Allen's childhood. But, as the cover suggests, this is an incest autobiography, so readers must shift their location to accommodate the addition of abuse. Incest complicates the genre and, thereby, readers' access to the possible meaning(s) of the text.

Allen may surprise readers with the way she approaches the subject of father-daughter incest: particularly with her consistent focus on her mother. Allen creates a dual-centred world and, at times, joins these centres. In the following passage, Allen thinks of her mother while her father is demanding she fellate him:

> I looked around hearing a voice in my head say, You know you're going to do it. It was the same voice that told me I'd eat the oatmeal my mother put down in front of me most mornings in winter. Lumpy, like congealed library paste. You know you're going to do it, the voice would tell me, and I'd go ahead and eat, gagging; then I'd spend the morning with fierce stomach cramps. I'd do this thing, too, but didn't know why. (93)

Allen's juxtaposition of her father's penis with her mother's oatmeal is startling. Allen shocks but not in the way readers might expect. It is not in the actual details of the incestuous abuse she provides but her approach to description and characterization that is staggering to read.

Readers then must decide how to approach Allen's *graphē*: her dual-centred incest autobiography or experiment. They can take their cues from her characterization and what she emphasizes most. Allen focuses on the relationship with her mother and her need to be nurtured. It would seem then that, in her writing at least, Allen is looking for

unconditional love in a care giver. A reader could approach the text from this position. A number of literary critics have actually suggested a parental reading practice. Miller believes reading is like parenting: "We, as these authors' posterity, take on, in a sense, the role of their parents, since we, too, profit from their artistic gifts without having to deal with their actual suffering" (*Thou Shalt Not Be Aware* 249). In reading Allen's autobiography, however, readers are not simply profiting from her artistic gifts, they are being informed about a crime; they are bearing witness to Allen's suffering and healing. While it is true that because of Allen's articulation of incest, readers do not have to experience incest to know about it, they do still suffer as they hear and relate to Allen's pain. In *Mapping Our Selves*, Buss advances the practice of parent-like reading one step further, suggesting people read as mothers:

> Mothering is the most profoundly radical intersubjectivity. It demands a consciousness that understands it is in intercourse with a subject that is not absent, but not yet formed, that needs the most enabling, nurturing, and delicate of intercourses possible, one that at every moment is open in every way to nuance, feeling, to possibility. (26)

In describing the ideal reader, Buss takes stereotypical mothering characteristics and suggests readers embrace these qualities in order to give the most and receive the most from a text.

It is not necessary to approach Allen's text from a stereotyped gendered reading position, but who and how Allen characterizes can guide readers toward at least an engaged reading. Allen focuses not simply on the characterization of her mother but on

characterization of women in general: women whom she loves and aspires to emulate. This adds another layer of depth to her incest writing. Although it may appear she is distancing herself from the subject of incest, in fact, she is explaining how the aftereffects of incest have affected her relationships, particularly with women. Further, in emphasizing friendship, readers may feel encouraged to relate subjectively to the *autos* rather than objectively: to read themselves into the *bios* as supportive friends rather than read from the position of apathetic outsiders. Such readers are witnesses rather than tourists.

In her writing, Allen chooses to depict herself as vulnerable and in need of aid. There are many moments in *Daddy's Girl* when Allen appeals for help. After her father sexually abused her in his car, she looked at the people on the sidewalk and prayed: "Somebody help me get me out of here please save me help me *please*?" (103). Allen continues to appeal to readers' emotions when she describes her desire to make a connection with a teacher:

> I want someone to save me. Will you? Will you risk your probably quiet and peaceful life by coming to where I live and presenting yourself, properly infuriated on my behalf, to my mother? My mother wouldn't believe a word you had to say and might even get mad and start shouting words you'd probably never say in your entire life. Would you do that for me, Miss Redfield? Would you go to the authorities and defend me, stay with me and then take me to live with you, make me your child and keep me safely away from Daddy so I don't have to do any of those things anymore and I can stop hating myself so hard? (113)

With the repetition of the second person, it requires little imagination to feel as though Allen is appealing to readers as well as Miss Redfield.

Characterization of Women

When Allen describes the relationship she yearned for with these women, she often speaks in parent-child terms. In many ways, it appears Allen is looking for a surrogate care-giver, a quest she refers to in one of her novels as "collecting mothers" (*Another Kind of Magic* 50). She says of her teacher, "Seeing her concerned features, I wanted to climb onto her substantial lap and bury my face against her shoulder; to say, I need someone so badly, Miss Redfield. I *really need* someone" (*Daddy's Girl* 127). She also looked for a mother figure in a nurse: "God! She was so nice, so soft-spoken, so complimentary and kind. She choked the songs right out of my throat, and I wanted to ask her if she had a little girl, did she maybe want one, I'd be very good and help around the house" (72). Allen is in search of a nurturing friend outside of the home, because she rarely received nurturing inside of the home. Her father, of course, corrupted physical relations for her. Her mother was uncomfortable relating to her daughter on a physical level:

> I live for my mother's embraces, and tried to inveigle my way into her rounded arms, up against the softness of her breasts in order to close my eyes and breathe in the scent and familiarity of this woman, my mother; this person who'd surely display love and liking for me if I came back again and again seeking her out. (52)

This desire for her mother's embrace continues into her teenage years, when her father was still sexually abusing her: "At that moment, though, all I really wanted was to throw my arms around her and beg her to save me" (105).

Because it was her mother who Allen looked to for support and nurturing, it is women, in general, Allen yearns to bond with. As a result, her incest autobiography is about her being Daddy's girl, Mommy's girl, and a girl's girl. That is, her interest in describing the relationship with her mother is really part of a broader focus on women. One of the aftereffects of incest, readers may surmise, is that the victim feels more comfortable with the unoffending gender, in Allen's case, females. Allen expresses this comfort as love:

> There are women who reach a completely responsive area in me. They have both strength and vulnerability as well as a kind of awesome depth of femininity that makes me yearn to put my arms around them and hold them for a long, quiet time. They are, to me, mother and sister, daughter and friend; everything good that's female. (72)

Even as a child, Allen fell in love with her first friend:

> I loved her the moment I saw her smile at me from her seat adjacent mine. Red-brown ringlets, creamy skin, a winsome smile with dimples and a hint of wonderful wickedness in her blue eyes. She wore a blue dress, a most impressive party-type dress with ruffles and a sash tied in a big bow. I was almost seven, Marianna was nearly a year older. (39)

Allen introduces Marianna because she, too, as readers later discover, is an incest victim (81), but at this stage in the story, Allen's idealization of Marianna illuminates Allen's need to love and feel loved by women.

Allen shows how desperate she was for maternal affection when she writes, "*Don't call me dear or say I'm pretty it just makes me want to cry because people who don't even know me call me dear and my mother never tells me she loves me never calls me dear*"

(125). Readers will notice that Allen looked for attributes in women that matched her mother's. She consistently describes physical features of the women in her life, a compulsion that may have grown out of her admiration for her mother's beauty. Of her mother's appearance, she says, "With frizzy blond hair, round green eyes, and a smooth, flawless complexion, I thought her far more beautiful than the mothers of my friends. Five-one or so, slim yet rounded...Her good looks drew me endlessly because they misled me into believing that someone so pretty couldn't possibly really be as angry as she often became" (11). Her desire to develop deep bonds with women certainly arose out of her need for a mother figure, even in physical appearance alone, but also may come from her longing to be more like her mother, whom Allen describes as having been very popular: "My mother began to go on at some length about the importance of a girl's being popular and good fun and lively–all of which she'd been" (107). Allen, perhaps, wanted to be a social success as her mother had been and as her mother hoped her daughter would be. Her desire to bond with women, it would seem, was multifaceted: at times she looked for them to be mothers, at times she wanted to be them, at other times she had a highly sexualized image of them.

Part of the confusion of how Allen perceived women comes from her continual focus on their breasts. Despite, as a child, loathing the word–"'Breast', even when spoken of in connection with chickens and white meat, turned me hot with discomfort" (109)–Allen was fixated with this part of the female body. She drew pictures of women with large round breasts (157). In her description of her mother's sister, she says, "She

was a tiny woman, perhaps five feet, with a full rounded bosom and matchstick legs," and admits she liked to look at her aunt's breasts (84). She continues to describe her breasts: "What she had to hide was a pair of breasts unlike any I'd seen before, or have seen since. She had very fine, very white skin and large round breasts that stood firmly out from a narrow cage of ribs upon which they seemed quite incongruous" (85). She describes the visiting school psychologist in much the same way: "I looked at the blinding whiteness of her shirt, at the soft-looking curve of her breasts, at the gold necklace that fell silently over her left breast and wanted to cry" (125). She mentions the breasts of a peer: "Lexie had grown high, round mounds of breast" (185). She also focuses on the breasts of her mentor, Helen: "Sometimes–I felt my eyes grow wide the first time I saw this–she wore the suit jackets without a blouse underneath so that when she leaned forward over her desk, it was possible to see the tops of her breasts swelling above scallops of lace-trimmed silk" (135); "with full breasts" (170); "her upraised outflung arms lifting her breasts from the top of the swimsuit" (171); "She sighed and I watched her breasts lift under the green dress, then quickly raised my eyes to her face" (208); and in a dream, "Her nipples were plainly defined by the shiny fabric" (251); "my eyes on her breasts" (252); "Her hand over her breasts" (252); "placing my hands over her bared breasts" (253); "But I can't breastfeed you" (253); "I could feel the erratic heartbeat beneath her breast" (253); "her breasts full and white, blue-veined with delicate tracings" (254). Because, in today's society, breasts are so often perceived as a sexual organs, readers may assume Allen was sexually attracted to women.

There are other explanations for her focus on breasts, however. Breasts symbolize maternity and nurturing. Allen did, in fact, crave sustenance from her mother and had written about "the softness of her breasts"(52), just as she had written about other women's. A longing for her mother is one reason for her obsession; her own fixation with her child's body is another: "And every morning, I checked my body looking for my breasts to be there, more than halfway convinced that my activities with Daddy would keep me a little girl forever. I'd never grow, never become an adult, never get away from him" (97); "At fifteen, I looked fairly much as I had at eleven: just about five feet tall, and as hairless, breastless and hipless as an infant" (185); "I finally began to grow...And at last I had breasts. Small ones. Which was disappointing in view of the premium placed, by everyone around me at school, on big ones" (194). Breasts, for Allen, represented motherhood, acceptance, and freedom. Because she physically developed late in life, and because her father abused her, she felt she lacked what other women possessed. What she did own, she detested: "I wanted to murder my body so that I might, somehow, be able to continue on in the world with only a brain. It was my body's fault that this was happening to me. Without it, Daddy wouldn't be able to touch me" (120); "I dug my nails into the palms of my hands, despising all the female parts of me because he approved of them" (195). To distract her from her own physicality, she contemplated femininity outside of herself. This contemplation led to idealization. Breasts, then, serve as another form of indirection for Allen. Rather than focusing on phallic symbols, the offending anatomy, Allen focuses on breasts: a nurturing symbol for her.

Allen rarely uses a corporeal language: her focus on breasts is her only consistent reference to the body. In repeating the word "breast" she uses metonymy to reclaim her body and a language for it. Her father had estranged her from both. He not only repeatedly raped her, he made corporeal language ugly to her: "He put names to the parts of me, put shame into me" (55):

> I hated him for compelling me to look at myself that way,
> hated the names he said belong to the all at once horrible parts
> of me. I felt monstrously ugly, seeing myself; his determination
> that I see something that, like one of my cuts or scratches,
> hadn't even properly healed. An old injury: slotted, unpretty,
> meant to be kept hidden–for all kinds of reasons. (55-56)

By re-introducing "breast" into her language, she takes back the right to name her own body and, therein, moves farther way from victimization and closer to survivorship.

In moving beyond victimization, Allen describes looking to women for inspiration. They represented survivorship. She imagined herself living her aunt's life: "If I closed my eyes, I could easily see myself grown up, in high heels and a smart dress, moving from room to room; the place mine" (87-88). About Shirley, one of her teachers, she says, "I was becoming obsessed with a growing need to see her as often as possible; she represented the sort of freedom I hoped to have" (231). She also daydreamed about being her favourite teacher: "I wished I could be dead. Or that I could be Helen. *I love you Helen love you*. If I ever got a chance to grow up, if I didn't die before I was twenty, I might someday have serenity, elegance and a brilliant smile" (137). With this daydream, readers can see that her fantasy life, imagining herself to be other women, quite literally

saved her. Dreaming about a better existence, inspired by the examples of womanhood in her environment, gave her the will to live.

While it is true that Allen's desire for women in many cases seems to stem from a desire to be mothered or a desire to be "othered," in the sense that she wanted to be *other* women, Allen also does, at times, seem to have sexually desired women. Clearly, Allen's conception of love was fraught with confusing feelings about sex. Helen, the woman she fantasized about the most, is actually one of the central characters in the autobiography. Reviewer Eleanor Wachtel notes that "much of the second half of *Daddy's Girl* chronicles a tender love story between Allen and Helen" (14). Allen includes countless details of their relationship, many of which could be interpreted in multiple ways. She describes writing her first name with Helen's last name in her school notebook (158). Such a gesture might mean Allen fantasized about being married to Helen or fantasized about being Helen's child. At one point in her story, Allen did hope people would think she was Helen's daughter (248). At other times, however, Allen thinks of Helen in sexual terms:

> I imagined that man, the one I'd seen in the window; I saw him bend her back, down on that bed in her room, down on the white pillow. Pressing his mouth to hers, he wound himself around her naked body like a snake. Her thighs opened to him. Slowly. I could see his mouth on her throat, breasts, belly, thighs; could see his hands weaving through her hair, passing up and down the length of her body. Then, he pushed himself into her. A cry, sighs, soft sounds, motion. Exquisite lines of arching throat, enclosing arms, flattened breasts, flexing thighs. Muted colors, sibilant whispers. It was Helen's image, but I was the woman inside her. It was me, in her form, being willingly bent open to passion. (176)

Although she imagined Helen having sexual intercourse, she did not admit a longing *for* her but a longing to *be* her. Nonetheless, her fantasy is very sexually detailed. Readers may see her physical fixation on women, Helen in particular, as an aftereffect of incest–she could not unlearn her father's lesson that women's bodies are sexual bodies. Conversely, they may see her interest is women's bodies as a desire to be the safe body, a desire for the comfort of a gendered body that has never betrayed her, or a desire to be sexually intimate with the body.

In fact, in *Daddy's Girl*, Allen mentions editors who thought the latter; she also includes her thoughts on the matter:

> A number of editors who read earlier versions of this book wished to know why I was skirting the lesbian issue, avoiding it. And I reacted each time with surprise and dismay, because what I was and am writing about wasn't a sexual relationship but one based on *love*. And if people see, in the totally innocent relations between a grown woman and a desperate child something covertly sexual, it makes me wonder if love hasn't been lost sight of somewhere in our hot pursuit of sexual freedom.
>
> I *loved* her. I wanted to *be* her. To my mind this was a great compliment: the wish to emulate what is good, wise and mature in an adult. I certainly had no desire, beyond the constant one to embrace her, for her body. The idea of that was abhorrent. (177)

Allen, it turns out, is quite defensive about her sexuality. In suggesting that people may have lost the value of love, she attempts to distance herself from the issue, making readers take responsibility for the sexual confusion instead.

Still, her repeated denial of being sexually confused suggests this issue is unsettled for her. There are a number of times in *Daddy's Girl* when she expresses her fear of being

labeled a lesbian: "I suspected that if I admitted to my feelings for Helen, I'd be labeled queer" (152); "They'd think I was queer. But I wasn't; I just loved her and wanted her to love me" (153);

> During classes, I debated the issue of my possibly being queer, feeling as I did about this woman. I had no craving for her body, the way Daddy did for mine. No, it wasn't anything like that at all. I had no desire to touch her in an sexually explicit way. The idea of that was actually upsetting. There was something else I wanted but didn't have a name for. It went beyond love, beyond my ability to define. (157)

Her defensiveness about her sexual orientation may suggest to readers that she is not as secure with her sexuality as she would like to be. Again and again, she returns to the issue. She says, "I did, however, wonder for years if I didn't perhaps have strong lesbian leanings and was simply refusing to acknowledge them; I liked women, admired them, derived pleasure from the sight and sound of a beautiful, elegantly-turned-out woman" (177). She discloses her brief, sexual encounter with a woman (177-78, 211), then tells readers how to interpret the information: she says the experience convinced her that she was not gay (178). Readers are left to wonder why this is such an ongoing issue for Allen. The issue, has, in fact, been ongoing from the beginning of Allen's writing career. In *Love Life* (1976), her first novel, she looks closely at the sexual tension between the main character, Helen, and her female friend, Fraser. In her second novel, she goes even further, writing about a woman's desire for another woman; although the first character does not know it, the woman she is attracted to is her mother: "She'd never before in her life wanted to touch a woman. But she wanted to touch this woman, to put her hands on

her velvet dress, on Wynne's hair, her face, feel her skin. I'm going gay, she thought giddily" (*Another Kind of Magic* 73). There are puzzling moments like these in her writing when she either purposefully confuses lesbian and maternal love or is unaware of the juxtaposition and, therefore, demonstrates her own confusion. This is an interesting juncture in Allen's autobiography. She writes a *bios* that moves from victimization to survivorship, but her *autos* appears to be farther ahead in the healing journey, more self aware, than Allen is in reality.

Clearly, any issue of sexuality for an incest victim involves conflict and confusion, but Allen's consistent descriptions of attraction to women and constant fear of people believing she sexually desired women point to more general problems. Readers may wonder if she is homophobic. At the same time, because Allen is so honest about facing all of the aftereffects of incest or what she calls the "fallout from the abuse" ("Daddy's Girl" 1) most readers will feel sympathy for her plight and recognize, perhaps even more than Allen does herself, that understanding her sexuality is still a battle she is fighting. While she is in control of the structure of her autobiography and her characterization, she does not seem in control of some of her personal issues.

Characterization of Men

Allen balanced her material–her child perspective with her adult perspective, the characterization of her father with the characterization of her mother–and so it is not

surprising that she also balanced the characterization of the women in her life with the characterization of the men in her life. If she did not balance this aspect, it would point to a weakness in her writing scheme. Not to balance it would also point to another area in her life she did not feel in control of. Therefore, she attempts to maintain control of the relationships in her life and relationships in her writing by describing a proportional sampling of them.

The descriptions of her relationships with men serve a second purpose. Allen is able to explain the impact incest had on her view of men. It is certainly obvious that she does not feel as comfortable or as drawn to men as she does women. She replaces idealized love with stereotypes:

> Some men fit the category, a lot don't. But I've always wondered why the majority of men I've met seem to have so little desire for friendship. It's something most natural with women, yet seems alien to men. It would be nice to have male friends. But somehow, the inclination is rarely mutual. Sooner or later, his or my sexuality becomes an issue and before we can proceed with the friendship or go off in different directions, we've got to settle the sexual matter. (98)
> An alarming number of men seem to think that a woman's thoughts and feelings, all her reactions emanate entirely from the region of her groin; all her talk is simply so much bullshit she'd learned from reading too many books, or from getting hyped by women's libbers. It defeats me to spend a good evening's conversation only to find that the man in question considered the exchange of thoughts a kind of mandatory preamble to be tolerated in order to get laid. It doesn't make any sense. (99)

Her father's respect for her intelligence, combined with his abuse of her child body, seems to have led Allen to believe that all men's treatment of women is as contradictory.

Unfortunately, many of the men she has met confirm her distorted belief that men ultimately view women as sex objects. When she was very young a male stranger assaulted her in a public washroom (43). When she was an adult, she had a series of poor relationships with men. She describes feeling worthless with one man, Rob, in particular: "I spent the majority of my time with him fervently wishing there was some man who really loved and valued me" (131); "He just happened to like my body and the way I dressed and undressed it" (131). Due to her bad experiences with men, she was suspicious of every man she met. She automatically suspected men who drove her home from work of being potential sexual offenders:

> I knew him to be a kind and loving family man, yet I expected, every time, that he'd pull over somewhere and throw himself on me. I expected it of every man with whom I found myself alone, even the husbands of the women I sometimes babysat for. They'd run me home at two or three in the morning on a weekend and I'd sit as close to the door as I could, shivering so hard that I stuttered when spoken to; just waiting for them to stop the car and rip my clothes, expose themselves briefly before yanking apart my thighs and murdering me with their deathly little clubs. Any one of them could have done it, and in perfect safety, because I wouldn't have dared to tell. I believed that men could do just about anything to women and we'd simply bear it. (200)

She believed all men were capable of committing sexual crimes and, therefore, scrutinized every partner until she was convinced each was incapable of harming her daughter (179). In admitting she stereotyped and mistrusted all men, Allen shows how incest has affected her relationships with the opposite sex. By showing the evidence instead of explaining the

aftereffect, she allows her writing to convey the symptom. She does not have to switch from using a literary voice to using a scientific or clinical voice.

She does not only describe men she mistrusts. She includes descriptions of healthy relationships she had with men for two reasons. Firstly, she always balances her characterization. Secondly, she does not want to alienate her male readers. She pays tribute to her Uncle Jake (175), her husband (132-35), a boyfriend who tragically died of cancer (212), and a highschool friend. Concerning the latter, she says:

> I liked him. He didn't make me nervous; I knew he wasn't someone who'd jump on top of me. I enjoyed his relaxed manner, his differentness, his pure babylike skin and wide, innocent eyes with their long lashes. It was somehow reassuring to be with him, perhaps because we both stood out a mile from the rest of the kids. (217)

Although she describes the positive relationships she had with men, she also takes the opportunity to show how, even in these, her incestuous experience interfered. She explains that she felt she had to terminate her highschool friendship after an embarrassing incident in the back of a car:

> Automatically, as I'd done for ten years upon command, I turned and moved down to put my face in his lap, prepared to perform. Then, suddenly, realizing where I was and what I was doing and to whom, I closed my eyes for a moment. Don whispered hoarsely, "Hey! What're you doing?" Sick with shame, I leaped upright, frantically whispering a rambling, incoherent explanation about not being able to see in the dark; I said anything I could think of and went on until it occurred to me to shut up. I was simply making it all worse with my crazed explaining. But God, *God* it was terrible! I felt limp with shame and humiliation. (223-24)

With this description, she delineates how her father not only instilled fear of men in her, he, for a time, destroyed her chances of interacting with men in a healthy, confident, self-aware manner.

Nonetheless, Allen, always careful to end with survivorship rather than victimization, expresses her belief that she has healed in her attitude toward men. She returns to her adult perspective and says she feels she has a better understanding of men and how to relate to them: "It's taken me almost twenty years to learn that my reality is not dependent on any man, but on me. I thought I needed a husband, or a lover, in order to have credibility. It's a relief to know that isn't true. The knowledge allows me to feel more at ease with the men I meet" (100). She celebrates her independence and, therein, her capability of better relating to men.

Reception

In a review, Wachtel says Allen's incest autobiography is troubling, uncomfortable, compelling, but annoying (14). It is annoying, according to Wachtel, because of Allen's tendency toward self-pity. Wachtel sees the writing as being self-serving, repetitive, and tedious, because Allen is obsessively insecure and her hunger for reassurance is insatiable (14). Allen does often revel in self-pity, a state that is, perhaps, less constructive than anger or sorrow: "I tried ceaselessly to please her [my mother], failed, but kept on trying" (4); "It had to mean she didn't really love me" (5); "My every impulse was to prove to her

that I didn't *make* trouble, I simply seemed to find myself in it without any effort" (7); "Maybe she really did love me after all and it was me–the things I sometimes said and did–it was my own fault she didn't love me all the time" (17). She seems to reserve her self-pity for issues related to her mother, not her father. Her self-pity, then, appears to be a bi-product of her childhood search for maternal nurturing. At other times, Allen presents herself as victim or martyr even when she may not be: "It was my fault they were fighting this time, because I'd asked for the doll" (28); "If I didn't do what he wanted, he'd drag me home, infuriated, and create some kind of fight with my mother or Bobby" (93); "If I dared show any resistance to him, either physically or verbally, he retaliated by lashing out even more violently at Bobby and my mother, making all of us miserable, temporarily uniting us in our fear and quiet hostility toward him" (108). This second type of self-pity, the martyrdom, what Showalter disapproved of in incest autobiographies in general,[12] does revolve more around issues with the offender. Allen was trying to understand her family role. What Wachtel sees as self-pity is really a child's confusion about her place and purpose in a family unit, a confusion her father had cultivated by making her feel like a co-offender. Although Wachtel does not seem to recognize or accept it as such, Allen's self-pity is really an integral part of her characterization of herself as an incest victim. Instead of attempting to understand the need for Allen to articulate her self-pity, Wachtel says: "The all-pervasive and fragile egotism becomes increasingly difficult to bear" (14).

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[12]As discussed on pages 24-25.

Although, Wachtel may have a point–no one enjoys reading about a self-pitying protagonist–an incest autobiography should not be easy to bear. It is not, after all, a "text of pleasure."

Wachtel's criticism would be more aptly applied to Allen's fictional writing. Indeed, her more than thirty-five commercial novels have received heavy criticism. Judith Fitzgerald, criticizing Allen's novel *Intimate Friends*, says its "natural enemies" are its wooden dialogue, stock situations, superficiality, and unoriginality (E16). Allen does not make these mistakes in her incest autobiography. With *Matters of the Heart*, Lesley McGrath says Allen does not provide enough background information for the characters, does not make the protagonist sympathetic or likeable, uses shock-value settings, and at times writes in horror movie script (12). In *Daddy's Girl*, Allen has remedied all of these writing problems. She provides ample background information about characters, she makes herself sympathetic and likeable, and, in fact, reduces the shock-value of a shocking subject by focusing on survivorship rather than victimization. Anne Jansen says the writing in *Illusions* is overblown and awkward, the characters remain undeveloped, and the book is shallow (32). Philippa Dowding says Allen's novel, *Dream Train*, is a "Light, unchallenging read" (62). Jean Sheppard says Allen's *Painted Lives* "May be a feminist's labour of love, but the problem is that the labour shows" (61). Sheppard also criticizes Allen for her lack of subtlety, simplistic psychology, unlikely alliances, and manufactured motives (61). Again, these criticisms do not apply to *Daddy's Girl*.

It is apparent that the many years it took to write her incest autobiography have been worth it. Allen describes the labour of love (and survivorship). She admits she attempted to publish her incest autobiography, before it was ready:

> I was married, pregnant, and secure enough to risk prolonged backward glances, so I went ahead and started to write. I wrote the book over and over and over, but couldn't make it work; first, because I was creating a third-person narrative that had no viable ending, telling the tale of a brash little girl who fought her way through–to what? Second, I simply wasn't ready yet to tell it. I hadn't made enough formidable changes in myself to have the perspective I needed...after a year enamored both of the I.B.M. typewriter and of placing one word after another on paper, I set the effort aside and began to write a fictional life story about Helen, who'd been crucially important to me. I wrote the book, sold it in time, and found I'd become a writer. I put *Daddy's Girl* on a shelf and started to produce one book after another. Once or twice a year, I'd drag out the old manuscript and give it another try; each time optimistically sending the newest version to my agent or editor of the moment, convinced this time I finally had it. I didn't. Fourteen rewrites and nearly nine years later, I knew I was going to have to face it, to tell the truth in the first person, as myself, and hope it would finally be right. (*Crybaby!* 91-92)

Allen realized her incest narrative had to be written in first person rather than third person. She also realized she had to write toward survivorship, the viable ending, rather than leave it focused on victimization. Although reviewer Diane Francis says the book was not published in 1971 because it was too controversial (13), according to Allen, the delay was do her inability to fully process her life. In her final thought before her Afterword, Allen writes, "Nine years ago, when I began to write this book, I became angry when a literary

agent suggested I put it away for a while because I really wasn't ready yet to write it. I understand now what he meant" (260).

Allen's incest autobiography is her crowning literary achievement, and yet she remains unpopular. According to Allen, herself, she is hated in Canada (Crosbie 45). Her critics may have a problem not only with her fiction writing but her public persona in general. She rejects the titles of Canadian, political, and feminist writer. Instead she minces words, declaring herself to be a writer who is Canadian, a woman-oriented woman and an issue-oriented writer (Crosbie 45). She attracts even more criticism, from certain groups, when she speaks in support of the FMS Foundation. Because she never forgot her own abuse, she does not believe in the recovered memory movement (Wickens 41). In fact, Allen went on the television program *Jane Hawtin Live* to speak against it (Crosbie 45), and, on her own webpage, she hurls criticism at people she says have found their calling as victims ("Daddy's Girl" 3). She even speaks scathingly about a former friend who has come out as an incest victim:

> She had ludicrous, unbelievable tales to tell of satanic abuse– in the heart of one of Toronto's oldest, wealthiest areas. Right! Somehow I couldn't help thinking the neighbors in the flanking houses (built very close together) would have seen or heard something. And what about her housewife mother? Wouldn't she have noticed that her work-at-home husband up in the attic studio was performing bestial acts upon their youngest adopted daughter? And how come school didn't fit into any of this? Didn't she go?...And there's a happy ending to her ongoing story. At the age of 50-something, she's planning to go back to school to become a therapist, and then she'll be able, at long last, to exercise her new found power. ("Daddy's Girl" 3)

Allen stereotypes victims. Perhaps the added distinction of satanic abuse made her friend's story sound all the more unbelievable to her. According to Allen's comments, to be a genuine child abuse victim, a person could not be upper class, have neighbours, have a stay-at-home mother, or go to school. Allen, herself, does not fit the incest victim profile as she describes it. Allen accuses her former friend of using the identity of victim as a strategic career move. The woman she speaks of is using her experience to become a therapist; Allen Pearson has suggested Allen is using hers to sell books (19). Allen's puzzling endorsement of the FMS Foundation and rejection of the child abuse disclosure of her friend, like her fear of being labeled a lesbian, point to a woman who is still involved in the process of recovering from incest, despite her narrative suggestion that she has completed the journey.

In declaring her support for the FMS Foundation and rejecting recovered memory therapy, Allen has undoubtedly alienated some of her readers and some incest survivors. She supports the FMS Foundation in the Preface of *Daddy's Girl*:

> However, an alarming number of people have been encouraged to claim abuse where none occurred, for reasons only they, and those encouraging them, comprehend. Others have, in the course of divorce actions, taken to accusing their mates of sexually abusing their children. It's a dangerous state of affairs when people use sexual abuse as a means to some devious end. It not only destroys entire families, it also makes it far more difficult for those suffering the long-term and devastating effects of actual abuse to come forward seeking the help and support they need and deserve. And because I was one of the very first to open this particular door, I'm grieved by the abuse of the subject itself and by the idea that *Daddy's Girl* might be used as a handbook on how to *appear* to be a victim. That is *not* what I had in mind when,

> more than twenty years ago, I set out to give incest victims faces and voices. (n.pag)

She concludes her Preface with the telephone number of the FMS Foundation, encouraging those falsely accused of incest to phone. In fact, she provides this number but not a phone number for a crisis center for incest victims. By speaking in support of the FMS Foundation in her Preface, she supports the adults who may or may not have committed a crime before she supports children who are incest victims, herself included. She fears some people will use her incest narrative as a victim handbook, what she says is "the equivalent of that underground 'cookbook' on how to create home-made bombs" ("Daddy's Girl" 4). Had she included her controversial opinions on the incest debate in her Afterword rather than in her Preface, she would have achieved a different effect. Her readers might have formed their opinions about the validity and value of her story and incest narratives in general and then read her critique of the current debate. Instead, she may turn some potential readers into skeptics of incest narratives before they have the chance to collect all of the narrative evidence.

Conclusion

Despite her controversial and perhaps damaging (to incest survivorship in general) affiliations with the FMS Foundation, Allen's contribution to the sub-genre of incest autobiography is indisputable. In being the first Canadian writer to publish an incest autobiography, and the second North American writer,[13] she developed literary strategies to write personally about incest. She separated her trauma narrative from her commercial fiction and prevented it from being "a text of pleasure" by carefully deploying voice, structure, and characterization. Her adult, survivor voice balances the child victim voice. The delay in introducing the father makes the narrative initially more comfortable to read without disappearing the offender. The structure also puts her mother at the center of the narrative, at least for a time: symbolically, this prevents the offender from being in a position of power in the narrative. She subverts the title *Daddy's Girl*. Allen closely observes her mother and father, as well as many women and men in her life. She does not treat incest as a character, nor does she characterize herself as a victim only. Instead of focusing on the actual incest, she delineates the aftereffects, on relationships in particular. As a result, *Daddy's Girl* is neither a horror story nor a tragedy. Allen says she "pried the scab off" (91). Underneath is the well written *bios* of a child victim becoming an adult survivor.

Chapter 3. *My Father's House*

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[13]As discussed on page 21.

Unlike Allen, until mid-life, Fraser had amnesia. She was not aware of the incestuous abuse she suffered and the split personality she formed to cope with the trauma. While she was unconsciously coping, she wrote fiction. Her fiction serves a different function than Allen's. Allen wrote her incest autobiography before she wrote her novels. She did not need to use her fiction to express her trauma. In contrast, for many years, Fraser's fiction was her only outlet. Her novels, therefore, are directly connected to her incest autobiography. Fraser says their "sexual violence...offended some and puzzled me" (*My Father's House* 211). Her fiction, with its troubled characters in troubled relationships, often reads like a covert incest narrative. It is a metaphor for her unconscious pain. In her autobiography, she also uses metaphor as well as other forms of mediation. She weaves various stories and various voices into her incest narrative. Love stories and fairytales serve as temporary mediators between herself, her readers, and her incest. Her unconscious voice, analytical voice, healed voice, and intimate voice ("first reader" to "second reader") are reassuring, just as Allen's adult, survivor voice was comforting. In the end, Fraser's careful mediation has shaped *My Father's House* into an intricately structured narrative that celebrates her dexterity as a writer as much as her incest survivorship.

Her Amnesia and Split Personality

According to Fraser, she suffered from Dissociative Identity Disorder, formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder. The disorder caused her to forget her child sexual abuse. When she finally recovered her memories, she also discovered her split personality (*My Father's House* 218). She believes her second personality, whom she calls the shadow (*My Father's House* 66) or the child who knows (*My Father's House* 221), concealed the abuse from her core personality. In her autobiography, she explains, "I acquired another self with memories and experiences separate from mine, whose existence was unknown to me" (14). Fraser asserts that her second self had shielded her from the incest but, at the same time, concealed information that could have potentially alleviated her suffering. This other self, according to Fraser, held the secrets of the incest:

> She was my shadow-self, unknown to me. She knew passion where I knew only inhibition, then grief where I knew guilt, then terror where I knew anger. She monitored my every thought, manipulated my actions, aided my survival and sabotaged my dreams, for she was I and I was she.
> (*My Father's House* 228)

Fraser believes she had split until she was prepared to see her life crisis through to its conclusion. In retrospect, she actually celebrates the creative benefits of having a multiple. She views it as an act of creativity in itself: "At the very least, multiple personality demonstrates the innate capacity of the human mind, when faced with the gravest of dangers, to invent a creative solution" (*Quest for the Fourth Monkey* 138). Allen, too, had a creative solution: she re-named herself. Both incest survivors felt it necessary–in Fraser's case, unconsciously, and in Allen's case, consciously–to create an alter-ego.

Fraser came to understand her fiction as the work of her alter ego. In *My Father's House* she says, "My other self has learned to type. She presses my keys, throwing up masses of defiant memories—stream-of-consciousness stuff without punctuation, semi-sentences and then whole paragraphs scrolling out of my typewriter" (149).

Her Fiction

Fraser, quoting Goethe, unknowingly speaks to the function of her fiction: "Coming events cast their shadow before" (*Berlin Solstice* 10). Fraser's early novels are the distinct shadows of her incest autobiography: the pre-writing or writing toward. In them she unconsciously aired many of the important issues she would raise in her autobiography. In two of her novels, she writes about Dissociative Identity Disorder. Seven years prior to publishing her autobiography that contained the descriptions of her split personality, Fraser developed a character, Cornelia, the Vestal virgin, who had a similar affliction to hers:

> Her anger had passed and with it her guilt. She had simply come to accept herself as two persons—the vestal in white robes who strove to do her duty; and the other person—the shimmering stranger with unbound hair she had first glimpsed in the emperor's mirror but whom she now realized had always been with her... She was the headstrong girl who had shared forbidden embraces with Julia, who had pursued her infatuation with Maximus Marcus, had dropped her handkerchief in the arena, and had given in to the emperor's lust. Because Cornelia's vestal self had been punished so often for this other person, she had become ashamed of her. Now Cornelia realized it wasn't so simple. It was this spontaneous

> self who had loved rather than served Vesta; who comforted instead of scolded the younger vestals when they had failed their tasks; who laughed when her vestal self suffered from the sin of pride.
>
> The two sides of Cornelia were almost reconciled to their mutual fate. In her soul, the vestal still believed she was dying for a crime she didn't commit. In her heart, the girl in the mirror still believed what she had done was not a crime.
> (*The Emperor's Virgin* 353)

And again, in *Berlin Solstice*, the novel published three years before her autobiography, she wrote of a character, an actress, who often dreamed she had a multiple:

> Carmel Khol returns to The Red Fox to find Kara Kohl still performing her old numbers. Terrified, she shouts to Kara from the mirror in which she is trapped, begging her to look, but Kara dances on and on in a frenzy, as unable to stop as Carmel is to free herself from the mirror in which she is suffocating. (38)

Fraser's shadow self wrote about characters with shadow selves; she wrote fictionally about what would later become autobiography.

Fraser's fiction is the shadow text to her autobiography and, therefore, the written account of her unconscious. Her buried trauma colors her fictional narratives (Champagne 97), for, as Fraser says, "whatever is hidden in the psyche will struggle to reveal itself" (*My Father's House* 153). In an interview with Alan Twigg, Fraser admits the main thrust of her fiction is an attempt to make the unconscious conscious ("Female" 122). She must use her fiction to reveal her unconscious, for direct access to it is impossible. Dreams, verbal fragments, jokes, and literature are windows into the unconscious (Mitchell 3). In *Fiction and the Unconscious*, Simon Lesser, drawing from Freud's repression theory, discusses fiction in this way: "Fiction, of course, does more: it displaces our problems onto

others, the characters in the story...More accurately, it attempts to conceal these connections from consciousness" (181). For Fraser, her fiction doubly conceals or displaces: for the characters are not only versions of herself, they are versions of herself she had no memory of because of her amnesia.

In an interview, Fraser commented on the unconscious autobiographic elements in her fourth novel, the historical fiction *The Emperor's Virgin*. She admits, despite the ancient setting, it is indeed a document of female subordination, her own (Cole 9). She was not aware of this at time she wrote the novel, however:

> I hadn't the slightest idea [that it was autobiographical]. It was written before things came together. The emperor was Daddy of course. As far as the vestal virgin who was buried alive for breaking her vow of chastity, at the time I thought that came out of the fifties and that I was making a statement about women in the fifties. But when I think about the guilt the vestal virgin felt because she had enjoyed the emperor's eroticism, and Marcus, the man who was her rescuer, it was obviously a glamorized version of my father and my husband. It was a personalized metaphor, only it was so close that I sealed it up without recognizing it. (Cole 9)

In hindsight, the title alone suggests Fraser was writing from her unconscious fears and sexual trauma. The Emperor and the virgin speak to Fraser's anxiety about relationships between men in positions of power and vulnerable women.

Fraser explains what it felt like to write from her unconscious for her first novel, *Pandora*: "Writing has never come easily to me but now that the words have taken a highly personal turn, my fingers fly" (*My Father's House* 149). The material, she says, "sticks to her shoes" (*My Father's House* 151). She intended *Pandora* to be her

autobiography, but in the end she realized she had not written her life, but simply a part of a childhood (151). Allen, similar to Fraser, had written many pages before she found the autobiographical voice she was looking for. The delays suggest writing personally about trauma requires a great deal of private and literary preparation. Fraser wrote more than two thousand pages and used the first person voice for the first draft of *Pandora* (151). Afterward, she had questions about the material:

> Certain things about the book puzzle me: Why did I give my fictional father a hooked arm? Such an obvious phallic symbol now seems melodramatic. Why did I suggest incest in my father's family? Why did I stud our family history with suicide? Why did I portray my father as threatening the life of my cat, and why does the thought of old Smoky, even today, reduce me to tears? (*My Father's House* 152)

She did not recognize her own life: the "minefield of incestuous codes" (*Quest for the Fourth Monkey* 133).

Three of her five novels, *Pandora* (1972), *The Candy Factory* (1975), and *The Emperor's Virgin* (1980) contain substantial foreshadowing of characters, subject, and language. *A Casual Affair* (1978) also foreshadows her incest autobiography but not in the unconscious way the other three do. She takes the subject of the novel, an adulterous affair, from her own experience, but this is not an episode she repressed. Although she does not unconsciously write about this event in her life, she does first air it fictionally then comes to write it autobiographically. She does much the same thing in her fifth novel, *Berlin Solstice* (1984). At the time she was writing it, she had recovered her memories of incest. In the novel, she wrote fictionally about offenders and victims, but she was doing

so knowing she had personal experience with sexual trauma. *Berlin Solstice* may have been a way for her to consciously practice articulating trauma or develop a *graphē* before she dared to write autobiographically about it.

In her second and fourth novel, *The Candy Factory* and *The Emperor's Virgin*, Fraser unconsciously practiced characterizing offenders. In *The Candy Factory*, Sam Ryan is an offender, a vulgar misogynist. He giggles to himself as he contemplates his virility and the idea of violating women:

> Sam grinned, drunk on his vision. That was the trick with those tight-pussy broads. If you asked them, they had to say no, but if you took the responsibility off their shoulders, they loved you for it. *Ooooh, Sammy, you great big hunk of a man, you*! (93)

In *The Emperor's Virgin*, Domitian, the Roman Emperor, is the primary offender. At the time Fraser developed the characters in the novel, she did not know her father and his sister, Estelle, had had an incestuous relationship (*My Father's House* 224) and, yet, she characterizes Domitian "remembering his sister who invited him into the mysteries of the flesh" (*Emperor's Virgin* 143).

She writes generally about offenders and specifically about the offences of fathers. The characterization of the patriarch in her novels foreshadows the characterization of her father in her incest autobiography. In her novels, even more so than in her autobiography, Fraser consistently characterizes fathers as flawed and dangerous. The difference in degree of villainy between the characters may lie in, as Fraser understands it, the multiple's power to reveal more about extreme emotions–passion, grief, guilt, terror and anger–than

her core self was capable of: "Since an alter is self-created, it will often have more freedom than the birth personality to express emotions and to act out fantasies" (*Quest for the Fourth Monkey* 130).

In her fiction, she varies the levels of abuse, but the male parent always has a brutal side. In *Pandora*, the father smells of "blood and rage" (11). He is a butcher, and his daughter has seen "gouts of flesh" hanging from his nails (53). One of his hands has been replaced with a phallic symbol, and he uses it to assault his daughter: "Pandora dangles at the end of her father's steel hook" (21). Fraser describes another deformed and villainous father in *A Casual Affair*: "Her father, the gimpy-legged coachman, sometimes pinched her cheek and dangled her on his lap and called her his little Princess; but at other times he beat her with his hickory stick till he drew blood" (33). In *Pandora*, the father punishes his daughter by caging her:

> He snatches up Pandora with his good hand. He propels her–*quickly! quickly!*–through the kitchen, into the pantry, down the trapdoor, past the furnace. He opens the winter-storage vault. He throws Pandora inside. He bolts the door: "And don't think you're getting out till I'm good and ready!" (22)

The father also punishes his daughter by sexually humiliating her; at one point, he makes Pandora's sister strip her (134). Fraser echoes this abusive punishment in *Berlin Solstice* when she describes one experience of a holocaust victim: "Though the air was cold jelly, we were told to strip and then stand naked beside our bundle of clothes" (134). The main

character in *A Casual Affair* unsuccessfully tries to repress the memories of a father who physically abused her:

> She saw a bruise on her arm and another on her leg, and remembered—wretchedly and unbidden—those times as a child when she had lain like this in a tub of hot water, her skin blotched and swollen where her drunken father had beaten her, his thumb prints pinched into her arms and legs, the caresses of love turning to hate... the hands of Dr. Jekyll into the claws of Mr. Hyde.
>
> She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, *repressing, repressing, too painful even now*, drowning her body, detaching her head so that it floated on the glassy surface like the head of John the Baptist on a platter. (85-86)

Count Wolfgang von Friedrich, a character in *Berlin Solstice*, remembers his father physically abusing him because he cried over a horse (133).

Fraser unconsciously practices characterizing her mother in her fiction as well. In all of Fraser's writing, the mothers are distant, cold, and sometimes scolding. In *A Casual Affair*, the protagonist says, "My mother never saw anything that was disturbing to her—which turned out to be everything that had to do with him [the father], and then everything that had to do with me" (207). This mother is very similar to Fraser's in that she remains "untouched by everything" (*My Father's House* 57) except her child whom she considers to be bad (*My Father's House* 232). Fraser's fictional mothers, similar to her real mother, are either blind to the corruption within the family or angry with their daughters for their supposed deviance. In *My Father's House*, Fraser essentially copies a reprimand from *Pandora*. In her autobiography, she says:

> I open my legs and–crack! My mother's hand strikes my cheek.

> "Filthy filthy!"..."Don't ever let me catch you doing such a dirty thing again!"...The space between my legs feels soft and warm, not hard and cold like the steel hole in my wet-ums doll. (6-7)

Fifteen years prior, Fraser wrote:

> She opens her legs...*Crack*! Adelaide's palm stings Pandora's cheek. Pandora gapes, her now-guilty hand between her now-guilty legs... *"Don't ever let me catch you do such a filthy thing again*!"...Pandora tucks her hands between her legs. It is warm there, not harsh and cold like the steel hole in her Wet'ums Doll. (*Pandora* 13)

In both books, the mothers ignore or are unaware of the fathers' crimes and displace punishment onto their daughters. The scolding mother reappears in *The Candy Factory* when a woman "admonished herself aloud in the 'cross' voice her mother had used on her when she was small...'What a naughty girl you are! Such wicked thoughts to have in your head!'" (218). Consistently, then, in her fiction and autobiographic writing, Fraser depicts mothers not as protectors or nurturers but as punishers and purveyors of guilt.

Her characterization foreshadows her autobiography as does her subject matter: in her fiction, Fraser interrogates sexual taboo. Interviewers and reviewers have noticed this. Susan Cole writes, "The most mystifying aspect of her work was the sexual content of her fiction. It was violent and shocking" (8), and June Callwood mentions "the tormented sexual encounters that hurled themselves, unbidden and unthought, into her novels" ("Misery" A2). In *Pandora*, the main character is sexually assaulted twice: once in the park when a stranger indecently exposes himself (50) and once by the breadman when he forces her to touch his penis (70-71). This incident reminds Pandora not only of her

friend's father tickling her but of her own father luring her to his pockets to explore for change (70). The abuse Pandora suffers corresponds directly to moments in Fraser's autobiography. Young Fraser suspects her classmate, Magda Lunt, has been sexually assaulted by her father (20), and Fraser writes about a neighbour raping her (33).

In *The Candy Factory* and *The Emperor's Virgin*, Fraser writes even more extensively and graphically about sexual assault. Early in the first there is a rape scene: "He shoved the woman against the back of the wing chair and began rubbing his body against hers, enjoying the gasp and quiver of her mounting terror, still speaking lightly, persuasively, into the incredulous eyes" (48). In the description of the assault, Fraser juxtaposes softness with brutality: "He sniggered, squiggling his fingers inside the silky lining, thinking of the silky little woman who owned it, thinking of her creamy-pink cunt" (15). This is the first time Fraser uses lewd diction. She does not, in fact, use such words in her autobiography, choosing instead to employ a child's vocabulary, as Allen did, with words like "dirty dirty" (14) and "wet-ums" (7).

In *The Emperor's Virgin*, once labeled pornographic (Cole 8), she continues to articulate abuse.

> Instead of making love to her, he would masturbate upon her—between her breasts, in her hair—his mood contemptuous and sadistic, leaving bruises, like rotten spots across her flesh. Sometimes when drunk he would sodomize her with brutality and —by far the worst—once brought her to a fevered pitch, then turned her over to the dwarf. (80)

Here she focuses less on the lexicon of sexual violence and more on the horror of the act itself. She also considers the role of the victim. In suggesting the offender brought the victim to a sexual climax, she addresses the controversial issue of a victim's physical response. It seems as though she blurs the line between victim and willing participant. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons *The Emperor's Virgin* was labeled pornographic. The line would be more defined if she had explained the sexual encounter as Allen had in *Daddy's Girl*. Allen described reaching puberty and involuntarily responding to her father's abuse: "The caresses I'd received so passively for eight years now created sensations, reactions I had to struggle with to conceal. Mindlessly, I'd find myself enjoying the stimulation of his attentions. And then, appalled, my self-hatred assuming newer and bigger proportions" (*Daddy's Girl* 193). Fraser, unlike Allen, did not explain the biological reasons for the physical response. She was writing about a fictional character, so perhaps she did not feel the need to characterize the victim and her actions to the same extent she would feel she had to if she was writing about herself.

In her novels, Fraser includes the subject of incest, albeit covert. In *The Candy Factory*, a male character speaks of his parents in very sexual terms: "My father tried to seduce me with external success. My mother with a loveless love that enslaved. I had no choice but to deny both the material world and the sexual feelings my mother aroused in my body" (148). In *A Casual Affair*, the main character compares her lover's wife to her mother:

> It has been said that all thwarted love becomes primal—a replay

> of a child's Freudian rivalry for daddy (or mommy). The photographer was not unaware—in her galloping dislike for the Candidate's wife—of the Oedipal Connection. The Candidate's wife inevitably came to remind her of her own mother. (235)

Further, in *Berlin Solstice*, a woman compares her partner to both a father and a mother: "It's true he was like a father to me. What people might have more trouble understanding is that he was also a mother. A brood hen with one chick...he nurtured me, swaddled me in love" (159). It is as though, unconsciously, Fraser was preparing to write overtly about her experience with incest when she was writing fictionally and in the third person about covert incest.

She focuses on incest to the greatest degree in *Berlin Solstice*. Now, after recovering memories of her own abuse, she was prepared to write about it but not autobiographically. Fraser gives Kurt, a main character in *Berlin Solstice*, a complicated history with both parents. As he reaches adulthood, he finds himself attracted to a woman who reminds him of his mother: "But what had sealed Kurt's amorous fate was her glorious red hair. As the spotlight teased and tossed it the way firelight had flickered through his own mother's red hair, he involuntarily reached out his hands, a man half in ecstasy and half in despair" (19). Later, Kurt compares his future wife, Ilse, to his mother: she cooled his soup as his mother used to–"a ritual of such intimacy it almost broke his heart" (47). Immediately after Kurt sees a resemblance between Ilse and his mother, they have sex (47-48). Afterward, Kurt thinks, yet again, of his mother:

> He remembered how his mother had emerged from the "master bedroom" created by hanging a faded khaki curtain across one

> end of their cottage, avoiding his accusing eyes, tying and retying her apron, straightening pieces of furniture, disassociating herself from the playful slaps, the laughter and groans that had emanated from behind the curtain, yet humming to herself, her eyes over-bright and catching fire as his father emerged, moments later, to wash himself with the water from the stove, to groom his mustache, re-part his hair. Then Kurt had resented his father, this man who cast his shadow between himself and his mother. (48)

Fraser continues to depict Kurt as a man obsessed with his mother. He mistakes his wife for his mother (74), and he confuses Hitler with his father (74). Kurt's wife's response is to become a mother figure, even physically:

> Ilse could not understand why the act [sex] that gave her such uncomplicated joy frequently left her husband in tears. Sensing his birth in a darker womb, she simply offered her breast–the unthinking answer, in her peasant's world, to fears without a name. (83)
> Bewildered, Ilse comforted her husband with her nipple, the same way she still soothed Bruno [her son], running her hands through his hot hair, feeling herself drawn to climax by the greedy pull of his lips. (261)

Memories of covert incest between Kurt and his mother shape Kurt's relationship with his wife. By switching the genders and minimizing the victimization–Kurt is a lusty man rather than a vulnerable young girl–Fraser is able to explore some of her own torment and ways to articulate it without actually revealing her secret of incest.

Although originally her intention was for *Berlin Solstice* to be purely fictional (Callwood, "An Inkwell" L2), it is, as Fraser explains, heavily autobiographical:

> I understood that I was writing it because my father was German and I had all these dreams about being tortured by Nazis. So I identified with all that sado-masochistic sexuality of the Nazis–the women with shaved heads, stripped naked, and all that leather.

> I recognized that I was writing the book to study my own victimization. (Cole 9)

In another interview, Fraser says, "Being victimized and essentially tortured by my father, I identified with the Jews. In trying to understand how the Germans could have done what they did, I was trying to understand my father–and I was preparing myself for my own truth" (Steed C3). She admits that in writing *Berlin Solstice* she was preparing or practicing to understand, if not to write, her *bios*.

Each of Fraser's novels contribute something in particular to her creative interpretation of sexual trauma, and together they form a kind of index of her psyche. They all share a number of elements: similar characterization of fathers and mothers and descriptions of sex crimes and covert incest. To read Fraser's full articulation of sex crimes and their aftereffects, readers must consider her first five novels together with *My Father's House*. In *Metaphors of Self*, Olney recommends this kind of cross-textual reading:

> When, moreover, a man writes, in addition to his other works, something that is confessedly autobiographical...then we may expect to be able to trace therein that creative impulse that was uniquely his: it will be unavoidably there in manner and style and, since autobiography is precisely an attempt to describe a life work, in matter and content as well. A man's autobiography is thus like a magnifying lens, focusing and intensifying that same peculiar creative vitality that informs all the volumes of his collected works; it is the symptomatic key to all else that he did and, naturally, to all that he was. (3-4)

As Olney suggests, each separate work is a piece of the body of work: each informs one another and makes meaning together. Fraser's novels gather meaning. The sexual abuse

in the second novel emphasizes and clarifies the sexual abuse in the first and so on. Further, in Fraser's case, it is as though each book also serves as a multiple: the narrators articulate the violations her core personality could not. In the end, her autobiography, as Fraser, herself, said, is the Rosetta stone of her novels (Cole 9). They are the stone or key because they are pre-writing for the autobiography. It is in these novels that Fraser taught herself to articulate abuse. Barbara MacKay's summation of Fraser's writing points to this: "In some ways her new book [her autobiography] is the most bald telling of a tale she has been writing in different disguises with different plots and characters for years" (3).

Fraser recognizes the function of her fiction in relation to her autobiographic writing and, in fact, expands that function to help fill in the details of her childhood *bios*. In the Author's Note of *My Father's House*, Fraser says she "adopted fictional names and otherwise disguised persons who appear in the narrative." As it turns out, she adopted many of the names from *Pandora*. The school in both is named Laura Secord Public School (*My Father's House* 3, *Pandora* 29) and the infirmary is St. Cecilia's home for Cripples and Incurables (*My Father's House* 4, *Pandora* 35). Likewise, the Grandmother and Aunt maintain their names: Grannie Cragg (*My Father's House* 4, *Pandora* 9) and Aunt Estelle (*My Father's House* 16, *Pandora* 59). Characters enter Other-grandmother's house from the basement (*My Father's House* 16, *Pandora* 123). Lyle is the name of both fathers (*My Father's House* 17, *Pandora* 19). Fraser keeps the name of her friend, Arlene, and her neighbour, Sydney (*My Father's House* 20, *Pandora* 38-39). Both Fraser and Pandora hate their brown stockings, because they make their legs look like poop (*My*

Father's House 35, *Pandora* 180). Fraser describes the teachers in the same fashion: for example, "Miss LaStrobe wears glasses-on-a-chain" (*My Father's House* 25, *Pandora* 77). Both mothers warn their daughters about being snobs (*My Father's House* 53, *Pandora* 184). Both Fraser and Pandora question God:

> Q. Who created the world?
> A. God created the world.
> Q. Who created God?
> A. Man did, by choosing to believe He exists.
> I did, to back up my "mind games."
> My mother did, as a witness for her virtue.
> My father did, as a role model in tyranny.
> Reverend Thwaite did, so he could perrrsonally
> create the Devil. (*My Father's House* 127)
> Q. Who made the World?
> A.. In the Beginning, God made the World.
> Q. Who made God?
> A. No one made God. He always Was. (*Pandora* 121)

In both the autobiography and the novel, the protagonists discuss sex in church (*My Father's House* 28, *Pandora* 242). And in both books, the main character can identify other children that have been sexually abused (*My Father's House* 20, *Pandora* 212). In mining *Pandora* for many of the disguised particulars in her autobiography, Fraser blurs the line between fiction and autobiography–a line that was already blurred because of the recurring themes and characterization. Her critics would see this practice as unacceptable. Instead of marveling at the amount of autobiography in her fiction, they would chastize her for the amount of fiction in her autobiography.

Remembering

Although Fraser was familiar with writing about abuse, for many years she was not familiar with her own memories of abuse. In 1983, Fraser articulated her incest for the first time. In a crowded restaurant, much to her friends' and her own surprise she uttered the statement: "I think my father raped me" (*My Father's House* 220). As reviewer John Bemrose said, the "dam finally burst" (52h). For the next four years, Fraser's past exploded into her present (Fraser, *My Father's House* 246). She describes feeling as though she was dying when the recovery of her incest memories began. To convey her remembering process, she uses the image of the phoenix swooping down into the fire and wanting to rise but faltering on the upswing (212). This is an image she uses late in her autobiography–after readers have witnessed both the swooping and the upswing. Assured that she does indeed rise out of the ashes, audiences, without fearing for Fraser's life, read about her incest trauma.

Her path of revelation, she explains, was a combination of dreams and physical shock (*My Father's House* 212). She had nightmares about a child's hand covered in slime and blood (212), a child raped by a monster and a giant white larva (212), a child giving birth to Satan's child (213), a black snake-man threatening her and her mother and sister (214), her aunt's and father's houses of secrets and silence (214-15), telling her parents the princess must be killed (216), and her mother's broken eggs and goblets (216). These dreams are metaphors; just as her novels are: both are the unconscious rendering of

her incest experience. She is the bloodied and raped child; Satan's child is the secret of incest; her father, mother, Aunt Estelle, and herself/the princess, maintain, often unknowingly, the secret. These coded night messages together with the trauma of a hysterectomy (212) lead her to the truth: a truth that first came to her as a terrifying physical memory:

> Spasms pass through me, powerful, involuntary–my pelvis contracts leaving my legs limp. My shoulders scrunch up to my ears, my arms press against my sides with the wrists flung out like chicken wings, my head bends back so far I fear my neck will snap, my jaw opens wider than possible and I start to gag and sob, unable to close my mouth–lockjaw in reverse. These spasms do not feel random. They are the convulsions of a child being raped through the mouth. (*My Father's House* 220)

Painful physical symptoms replace the comfortable metaphors. The physical memory transports her into the past:

> I am sobbing, my lips pressed in a downward bow like a child refusing food. I am trying to shriek NO! but without daring to open my mouth for that is the new organ of assault. My father's house is empty so what does it matter if I scream? For all my protests I'm afraid to strike my daddy with my fists. I'm still afraid of my daddy. I'm still afraid daddy daddy daddy won't love me love me love me. My arms are glued to my sides as he forces me back against his bed so that my knees buckle. The edge of the bed cuts into me. My daddy is pressing his belly against me. I can't breathe. My daddy is forcing his wet-ums into my mouth. I gag. I'm smothering. Help me! I scrunch my eyes so I can't see. My daddy is pulling my body over him like mommy pulls a holey sock over a darning egg. Filthy filthy don't ever let me catch you shame shame filthy daddy won't love me love me dirty filthy love him hate him fear don't ever let me catch you catch you dirty dirty love hate guilt shame fear fear *fear fear fear fear fear fear*... . (*My Father's House* 220-21).

In this passage, Fraser discloses her experience with incest, the people she sees as involved in her trauma, both her mother and father, and the overwhelming confusion of emotions of love, hate, shame, guilt, and fear. She makes use of a child's vocabulary. She also writes in fragmented sentences, emphasizing the rush of emotions, the panic in remembering. It is here, at the end of her autobiography, that she most clearly depicts incest victimization. As Allen did, she delays the articulation of the most disturbing aspects of her trauma.

To use a line from one of Fraser's novels, at her autobiography's conclusion, she "open[s] that shocking-pink door to the past" (*Berlin Solstice* 73). Of course, the door had been opened from the first page of her autobiography, but because of her specific narrative decisions, it is not "shocking-pink" until the end. Her autobiography, as a result, becomes more of a "text of bliss" as it progresses. In the Author's Note, Fraser says, "To provide focus and structure, I have used many of the techniques of the novelist." These techniques, although she does not specify them, seem to include her method of characterizing her mother and father and her use of mediating narratives and mediating voices.

Characterization of Her Father

Fraser uses normal and italicized fonts, another example of a technique she borrowed from *Pandora*. As Lorna Irvine explains in her essay about the novel, "Throughout, italicized type alternates with ordinary type, overtly splitting inward and

outward narration. Many of the passages in italics present Pandora's often unacceptable private thoughts, residue of the unconscious, and contrast them with a socially sanctioned outward expression...the intruding unconscious reveals sexual tensions" (121). In *My Father's House*, these fonts serve the same function; more specifically, they represent Fraser's core and shadow personalities. The prose that is in traditional font is not, strictly speaking, her incest prose, because her core personality did not remember the incest. The italicized passages, as a result, constitute the incest narrative. This technique allows readers to witness two *autos* and two *bios*. Further, the technique allows readers to witness two sides of her father's character. It is in the italicized fragments that Fraser reveals her father as the offender; the passages written in normal script present a much less villainous father.

Fraser begins in normal font, so she immediately focuses on the non-offender aspects of his personality. First, Fraser focuses on his profession, appearance, and status: "Though my father worked on shifts at the Steel Company of Canada, he always wore a white shirt, navy suit and tie to his job as a steel inspector–trace-memory of a family that had once been prosperous" (3). Second, she focuses more on their relationship but is not yet writing in italics, so the information, although ominous (perhaps only because of the subtitle of the autobiography, *Memoir of Incest and of Healing*) does not suggest he is abusive: "I sit on my daddy's lap playing ticktacktoe under the glare of a fringed and faded lamp. I have the Xs, he has the Os. I get three across: 'I'm the winner!'" (3). Knowing the subject of the autobiography, readers may find the line "I'm the winner!" foreboding.

Nonetheless, Fraser seems to purposefully provide distracting detail–in this case, the description of the lamp–so readers' attention is less on the father's lap and the game than it is on the scene as a whole. This technique is different from Allen's. Whereas, Allen gradually added on to the descriptions of her father's offences, Fraser detracts from them. Both techniques point to the difficulty of depicting, and, in turn, re-living, the offender's actions.

The third time Fraser writes about her father, she says more about his physical presence: "There's not much room on my daddy's lap because of his big tummy, held up by a black belt" (3). Finally, two pages later, she integrates italicized fragments into her prose in order to first suggest then describe the incest: "I hitch at the pink sunsuit that Granny Cragg made for me, waiting to be invited into his bedroom. My daddy gives me candies. My daddy gives me chocolate-chip cookies. Of all the people in the world, I'm my daddy's favorite. *My daddy and I...*" (5). Five pages into her autobiography, Fraser uses italics to describe the extent of the abuse:

> *My daddy lies beside me in his shorts and undershirt, smelling of talcum. He rubs against me, still hot and wet from his bath. My daddy breathes very loudly, the way he does when he snores, and his belly heaves like a sunfish I saw on the beach at Van Wagners. Something hard pushes up against me, then between my legs and under my belly. It bursts all over me in a sticky stream. I hold my breath, feeling sick like when you spin on a piano stool till the seat falls off. I hear God say: "You've been dirty, go naked!" When I pull my daddy's pillow over my head I get feathers up my nose.* (8)

Fraser uses a child's voice in the italicized description of the abuse. It is her belief that the memory belongs to her multiple, and her multiple was just five when she began to hide these secrets from her core personality. By revealing the abuse in her multiple's voice and a child's voice (as Fraser ages, so does her alter ego), Fraser demonstrates how traumatic child sexual abuse is. She further adds to the horror by affectionately referring to the offender as "My daddy," by believing she is bad, and by including details or asides that most readers could relate to: "like a sunfish I saw on the beach" or "I get feathers up my nose" (8). The elements of horror mixed with common images of childhood, along with the separated italicized passages and a child's guilty voice, combine to form an unsettling scene.

Yet there is more core narrative than italicized passages, so by the autobiography's end, readers know as much about her respectable father as they do about her offender-father. Fraser tells readers he was a lieutenant during the First World War (239), he played for the Hamilton Rough Riders football team and won a national championship in 1912 (239), and he had no hobbies other than stamp collecting and bargain hunting (240). At his funeral, he is described as a tender husband, loving father, gentle Christian, and a fine example to all (*My Father's House* 207). By providing this kind of information, Fraser rounds out her characterization of him so he appears less villainous. In fact, she says, "My father was not a monster" (240); "Mine turns out to be a story without villains" (252). Literary critic Gary Boire has noted this absence: "*My Father's House* carefully refuses to create monsters" (225). Allen, too, had fully characterized her father, but, it

seems, for a different purpose. Whereas, she was showing herself to be a balanced writer and an objective witness, Fraser was explaining why she feels love for her father. The similarities in characterization but differences in purpose prove incest experience is not monolithic, and the writing of it can accommodate many different inscriptions.

Fraser does, in dis-continuous segments, finally reveal her father as the incest offender who abused her from the time she was an infant to the age of ten and then again from twelve until an unspecified age when she was in highschool (*My Father's House* 228). He ruled the home, treating his family, both his wife and his daughters, as domestic servants (*My Father's House* 13, 77). He ordered young Fraser to perform sexual favors, securing her obedience with threats: everything from taking away her toys, sending her to an orphanage, abusing her physically, to killing her cat (*My Father's House* 11-12). As Fraser describes, He "*rub[ed] up against her with his penis like a poisonous toadstool*" (103),[14] forced her to fellate him (103), and, at least once, attempted penetration (43).

Fraser forgives her father for these offences. This, in itself, makes her autobiography "a text of bliss" because after reading about the horror of incest, readers would not believe Fraser could forgive him. And, yet, the forgiveness is not entirely an unexpected development, because Fraser had been focusing so evenly on her father's good and bad qualities. In fact, Fraser hints at her forgiving, even appreciative, attitude midway through her narrative. When she goes to university, she says, "I am grateful to my parents

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[14]In *This is About Incest*, Randall also used the toadstool to symbolize her grandfather's penis.

for allowing me to escape their lives" (137). Later, she actually uses the word "forgive" in relation to her father three times (236, 241) and declares her love for him (241). Fraser says she has sympathy for him and feels remorse for how she treated him: "I can't even imagine the frustration that caused him to do what he did or the agony that must have resulted" (240); "How much I made him suffer I have no way of knowing" (240). She writes about feeling badly that he had to serve a life sentence for his crime; whereas, she only had to serve forty-seven years (241). Through her characterization, she justifies her loving feelings for him.

Fraser's forgiveness is the most contentious element in her incest autobiography. It is as problematic as Allen's support of the FMS Foundation, and it has left Fraser open to criticism, even from fellow survivors. Danica is particularly against Fraser's attitude toward her offender-father:

> I have problems with the way Sylvia Fraser has written her book. She sees herself and her father as co-victims. I cannot accept that at all. If you consider power imbalances, as you *must* in this issue, there's no such thing as adults and children being co-victims in this scenario. (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 77)

It is clear that in her own incest autobiography, Danica will characterize her father differently. Her problem with Fraser is that she does not seem to have considered the power imbalance which is at the root of the crime of incest. Instead, she has chosen to express her own beliefs without much concern for the message she may be sending to her readers. Allen did the same thing when she expressed her support for the FMS Foundation. At these points in their autobiographies, they were less interested in the

social effects of the sub-genre and more engaged in articulating their opinions, as controversial or as indefensible as they may be.

Characterization of Her Mother

Fraser characterizes her mother without the use of italics, for their relationship did not have a secretive or taboo element. Unlike Allen, she does not, however, provide as much information about her mother as she does her father. Audiences must read outside *My Father's House* to discover Fraser's mother was abused by her grandfather (Fraser, "Freud's Final Seduction" 58). Fraser does, nonetheless, mention that her maternal grandfather and aunt hanged themselves (146, 233). Fraser, perhaps, did not include all the pertinent details of her mother's history in her autobiography because she did not know them at the time. As well, her mother was still alive when she wrote *My Father's House*; whereas, her father was not. She may have excluded details about her, then, to protect her. This was not a concern for Allen, since, through her name change, she had made it nearly impossible for readers to identify her family members. Finally, in Fraser's incest autobiography, her focus had been more on understanding (and forgiving) her father than her mother, so, unlike Allen, she did not create a dual-centred narrative.

Fraser does, however, through the course of the book, fully develop the mother's character. She begins with her most defining characteristic, her domesticity: "My mother planted a victory garden and canned the tomatoes" (3). Fraser continually describes her

mother as a labouring housewife: "My mother sprinkled my father's starched white shirts with water from a vinegar bottle" (7); "now bent over her darning egg, making tiny stitches across the worn, black heel of my father's sock" (9); "sewing a triangle insert under the sleeve of my daddy's white shirt" (13); "making shortbread" (21); "scoring a perfect circle in her pastry" (53). Initially, then, her mother is the summation of her housework, most of which is performed solely for the convenience of her husband. In detailing her belabored life, it appears Fraser has sympathy for her mother.

Nonetheless, Fraser also has problems with her. She resents that her mother favored her oldest daughter, Helen. Her mother would say things to her like "I swear I don't know how you and Helen ever got to be sisters" (53). In part, because of the bond between her mother and sister, Fraser feels alienated: "*I'm afraid to tell my mommy. I know she loves Helen because she is good, but she doesn't like me because I am dirty dirty*" (14). She feels her mother does not like her because, unlike her sister, she is sexually tainted. Fraser does not provide much detail about her sister, and when she does, it is only to further characterize her mother. Allen had written about her brothers in the same way but to shed more light on her father rather than her mother. In the sub-genre of incest autobiography, then, siblings only play a supporting role.

Fraser describes a woman whose countenance is one of disapproval; she focuses most particularly on her mother's mouth: "I know from my mother's corkscrew mouth that she is not pleased" (6), "pursed lips" (96, 116), "lemony mouth" (42). It is as though her mother, like her father, abuses her with a specific part of her body. In fact, it is this

body part, the mouth, that Fraser imagines reprimands her when she is being abused by her father: "*The scroll on my daddy's headboard looks like my mother's lips, scolding*" (10). In focusing on the mouth, Fraser is making use of a gender stereotype. The difficult woman, as, at this stage in her life, she deems her mother to be, is the "mouthy" woman. As discussed below, Fraser comes to better understand her mother and dismantles the stereotype. As a child, however, she is more than willing to displace her anger, confusion and resentment toward her father onto her mother, and she clings to the simplified belief that her mother was her "mouthy" enemy. Allen did the same. In incest autobiography, the mothers first appear to speak their mind and abuse their power but, in the end, they emerge as silent, repressed, and harmless women.

Fraser, similar to Allen, characterizes her mother as unapproachable, especially about sexual matters. She points out her mother's sexual distaste (59). Her mother fears "sexual taint" (43) and anything "smutty" (10) and rather than inform her daughters about the dangers of sexual abuse, she simply ignores the issue with the blanket statement: "MY girls would never..." (43). When young Fraser touches herself between the legs, a sign to other mothers, perhaps, of the necessity to inquire about their daughter's sexual curiosity, her mother reprimands her with a slap (6). In pointing out her mother's inaccessibility, Fraser is blaming her, not for the incest abuse itself, but perhaps for the continuation of it. Fraser characterizes her mother as someone she could not turn to for help: "I picture my mother's unlined face, haloed by braids. How come you stay so untouched by everything since the Garden of Eden? How come you never protect me?" (57). With this character

development, Fraser spreads the blame and guilt for the trauma equally between her father, her mother, and herself.

Nonetheless, her final summation of her mother is tender and sympathetic:

> a forbearing mother who savored romantic novels, escaped to church where she found joy in service, who endured her days in my father's house by keeping busy, busy, busy. Still, you were a mother who was always cheerful, who sang hymns as you hung sheets on the line, who never allowed yourself a day of illness, who shouldered more than your fair share of community responsibility, who delighted in telling Sunday school stories to children. You were then, as you are now, the first to phone a sick friend or take a tray of cookies to a grieving neighbor, the first to volunteer for a difficult or tedious job both inside and outside my father's house. (232)

In eulogy fashion, Fraser chooses to celebrate her mother's difficult life rather than to chastize her for her mishandling of it. In the end, she is not "mouthy" but has suffered her tedious days without complaining. Fraser's praise of her, however, does not include her maternal instincts toward her daughter. In a sense, then, Fraser is still writing about her estrangement from her mother.

There are two potential reasons for Fraser's selective celebration of her mother's life. One, it may be a form of mourning, for it is after her mother's death, a moment Fraser includes in the Postscript, that *My Father's House* is published. Two, Fraser's celebration may be a way of thanking her mother for believing her when she disclosed the incest abuse: "'Well!' My mother is near tears but not crying. I am sobbing. We fall into each other's arms, comforting each other. I feel overwhelmed with gratitude and hence

with love. I am believed!" (237). Her mother then says, "Of course, I believe you. You're my daughter!" (237).[15]

Although Fraser shows understanding, compassion, and gratitude for her mother, just as she shows for her father, she does not fully analyze her position. In fact, it is in other writing that Fraser finally offers a more complete picture of her mother. In an interview, Fraser says, "I don't think my mother was prepared to face her own victimization and how deep that was, not just by my father but by life in general" (Cole 9). Although she may have hinted at her mother's victimization, it is not until here that she fully sees her mother as abused. In the same interview, Fraser admits that she believed her mother also suffered Dissociative Identity Disorder (Cole 9). This diagnosis is one she reserved for herself and her father in *My Father's House* (240). Fraser had spent her life and, therefore, her *bios* attempting to understand the offender-victim relationship, and it was not until after her incest autobiography, that she was free to engage in other analyses. Her conflicted feelings about her mother support this more recent and unresolved approach to her. In one article Fraser mentions her mother's collusion ("Freud's Final Seduction" 58) and in another she describes her as a fine, compassionate and good woman (Cole 9).

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[15]Fraser also had the support of her sister who immediately believed her and corroborated her story (*My Father's House* 222).

The Missing Details

Unlike with Allen's *bios*, Fraser's *bios* can be corroborated. In this respect, truth is not as problematic in *My Father's House* as it is in *Daddy's Girl*. As discussed above, however, there are other aspects that make people suspicious of Fraser's account: her amnesia and her reliance on her fiction for details. Nonetheless, in terms of the corroboration, readers can see what Fraser has left out of her autobiography. Fraser is a well established Canadian journalist and author. She wrote for *Star Weekly* magazine from 1957 until it was discontinued in 1968 (*My Father's House* 145, 49). Although she refers to her journalism career in her autobiography, she mentions it only to further contextualize her married life. For years, she taught creative writing at the Banff Centre (*My Father's House* 201, Callwood "An Inkwell" L2). From 1981 until 1984, however, she lived below the poverty line, making only enough money to live from her readings, teaching, serving as writer-in-residence at the University of Western Ontario, and returning to her journalism career (Callwood, "An Inkwell" L2). In *My Father's House*, she does not detail financial hardship: perhaps she believed this would speak against her survivorship.[16] As the five sections of her book reveal, she clearly wanted to write an incest autobiography that ended with her success: "Remembering," "Rescue," "Retreat," "Revelation," "Resolution."

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[16]This is in sharp contrast to Danica, who dwells on her poverty (as mentioned on page 184).

Mediating Narratives

Reviewer Marc Shaw praises *My Father's House*. He says it is "an excellent, sensitively written book" (12). What makes it excellent and sensitive? Is it excellent because of the details of her life she chose to include, because it ends happily, because of its novelistic qualities? Is it sensitive because of how she handles the difficult subject of incest or because of how she handles her readers? Is it excellent and sensitive, then, because it has relief incorporated into its narrative? It is the mediating elements in her incest autobiography that make it more easily digestible than other incest autobiographies. Danica refers to these elements as "those coloured ribbons to hang on to" (*Beyond Don't* 44). The ribbons are the three love stories and the use of fairytales. With these narrative distractions, Fraser offers readers a reprieve from the incest material.

Her mediation begins with the title of her incest autobiography. She uses her father's house metonymically. The house comes to serve as the mediator between her father and the abuse and between herself and her father. She displaces much of her anger and fear onto the house. The title focuses more on a specific environment than an individual; whereas, titles of other incest autobiographies, Allen's *Daddy's Girl*, Danica's *Don't: A Woman's Word*, and Williamson's *Crybaby!*, focus on victims or survivors. Throughout the autobiography, Fraser characterizes the house as the most formidable force. In fact, she begins the narrative with a description of the family home:

> My father's house was a three-story, frame building on a shady

> street in Hamilton, Ontario. Though our family found it hard to grow grass because of the maple roots, our lawn was always neatly trimmed, our leaves raked and our snow shoveled. No one drank in my father's house, no one smoked and no one took the Lord's name in vain. (3)

Although the too perfect appearance seems to point to a less perfect reality underneath the surface, in beginning with a description of the house, Fraser immediately uses it as a scape goat. It is as though the house is the offender, not the father. She continues with this displacement: "I didn't used to be afraid of the dark but now I know that demons and monsters hide in the cubbyholes by my bed. I'm afraid one will jump out at me, and rub dirty up against me with its wet-ums sticking out" (8-9); "One house with peeling paint limps forward to greet me. I'm a block away, but already I hear it shriek" (137). Fraser also describes her father's childhood home in ominous terms, perhaps to suggest a legacy of abuse:

> Architecturally, it was house of secrets, with its trapdoor leading through the kitchen linoleum into the cellar, an attic reached by a hole in the ceiling, a bedroom hidden behind a curtained closet, a bathroom ventilator from which you could spy on the kitchen, a potbellied parlor stove with black arms stretching upward as if in supplication. (207)

Fraser is conscious of the displacement and early, in her autobiography, describes why she characterizes the house as she does: "Since I didn't know what or whom I truly feared, I feared the house we shared, which by guilty association became the house that knew. In my imagination, monsters prowled its cubbyholes–my monstrous secret, my monstrous other self, turned into something outside me that I could fear" (15-16). Even in her

explanation, however, she avoids implicating her father in the monstrosity. Instead, she brings him close to the environment of abuse but rarely forces him to own it. For example, she does not say she is relieved because of her father's death; she is willing to say, instead, that after his death, she no longer fears the house (204): "Now that my father's house has given up its secrets it has become an old friend, each room a scrapbook of my past" (234).

The Love Stories

If the house is the mediator between Fraser, the abuse, and her father, the love stories are one of the forms of mediation between readers and the abuse. She describes the relationship with her highschool boyfriend, her highschool boyfriend turned husband, and her lover, Paul Lawson. She includes the first love story in the appropriately titled section "Rescue." Fraser writes, "Danny comforts me, his arms cradling me as if I were something fragile and very precious. He holds me, binding the pieces of myself together, allowing me to heal. He strokes my hair. He kisses me. His lips are warm" (109). Her readers have the opportunity to become as enchanted with her new life/love as she is. Because of him, she says, "All of a sudden, life seems generous and full of ease" (110). This is relief from her incest trauma. She goes to university and she and Daniel continue their long distance relationship. Now she is literally separated from her father, and again the incest narrative slips into the shadows.

In part two of the love story, she describes her marriage to Daniel. This, too, is a hiatus from the incest narrative: "I loved my husband. I enjoyed my job. We had a marriage brightly woven out of affection, mutual respect, some material wealth, shared memories, good friends...life was everything I dreamt it could be. I devoured it" (145). Later she writes, "In fifteen years of marriage, I had never considered it [adultery]. The marriage I had was romantic, fun and even glamourous. My mate was my best friend. We were affectionate rather than passionate lovers–a lot of holding, of stroking, of cuddling. Often we were children together" (153). This two-part love story serves as the calm after and before the storm.

The third love story, the adulterous affair, still operates as a mediating narrative–it is a distraction–but because of its taboo quality, it is less comforting. Fraser, herself, says, "Adultery is a large word beginning with a scarlet letter" (*My Father's House* 153). Nonetheless, once again readers are hanging on to the mediating ribbon for, in Fraser's own words, this is "the stuff of my mother's purloined novels" (*My Father's House* 152), not, readers might think, the stuff of an incest autobiography.

Despite the mediating nature of the love stories, Fraser does include storm clouds; that is, she never entirely abandons her incest narrative: the shadow remains. She reminds readers of the incest throughout most of her descriptions of her affair with Paul. In fact, she believes it was an aftereffect of incest that drove her to have the affair:

> When the time came to burst out of my marriage, it wasn't so much passion that tempted me but compulsion that drove her [the alter ego]. Like a sleepwalker. I watched askance while

> someone who looked like me cast aside everything I valued to recreate an infantile world in which no will or desire existed outside of the illicit affair. (*My Father's House* 154)

Henke, in her analysis of Fraser's autobiography, agrees: "In this dangerous game of oedipal entanglement, Sylvia has chosen to reenact the sadomasochistic scenario of her father's emotional exploitation in the hope that this time the traumatic situation might magically come out right" (135).

Nonetheless, even the way Fraser connects the aftereffects of incest with her story of the affair is a form of mediation. In order to emphasize what Fraser saw as the similarities between her adulterous relationship with Paul and her childhood relationship with her father, she braids the two men togethers: "Paul opens it, wearing a white terry bathrobe, his gray hair wet and tufted as if from the shower. *My daddy sits on his bed with his undershirt...*" (171); "*My daddy squeezes my bare legs between his thighs. His flesh is soft and moist and smells of talcum from his bath...*Paul's flesh is moist and smells of talcum from his bath" (171); "*She smashes her left fist into her daddy's belly...*I strike Paul in the satin heart with my left fist, breaking my champagne glass" (195). The ingenious juxtaposition may have readers focusing more on her unique *graphē* rather than the aftereffects of incest. Readers may be left thinking, "How clever?" as opposed to, "How traumatic?"

A number of critics do not approve of Fraser's weaving technique. Their concern is not *how* Fraser wrote about sexual abuse but *what* she wrote about it. They disapprove of the underlying message of her juxtaposition. Bemrose says, "And their insertion [details

of her father's sexual advances] throughout the book creates the impression that Fraser blames all unhappiness and mistakes on her incestuous past" (52h). Showalter, too, is frustrated with what she sees as Fraser's tendency to use incest as an excuse. She is particularly critical of the way Fraser's writes about her adulterous affair: "But she cannot accept responsibility for the affair that destroyed her marriage; she blames the affair on her other self...in order to account for the adulterous affair, Fraser must posit an incestuous relationship with Daddy" (165-66). Showalter's word choice, "posit," for example, proves her ultimate skepticism of Fraser's account.[17] These critics are making assumptions about Fraser's decision making process. Although Fraser has provided information about herself that may make Showalter and others feel equipped to theorize about her motives and state of mind, a less speculative analysis of Fraser's writing would involve looking at her literary approach to incest rather than her psychological state because of incest.

Fairytales

Fraser uses fairytales, as she did love stories, as a form of mediation. They play a significant role in both her fiction and her autobiography. Her most obvious adaptation of what has become children's literature is *Pandora*. In the original, the young heroine opens

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[17]As discussed on page 28.

her forbidden box, with its clear sexual connotation, and releases evil into the world. Fairytales are important in *A Casual Affair*, as well. Its subtitle is *A Modern Fairytale*. Within the narrative of the casual affair, Fraser disperses her own, original fairytales. When it comes to *My Father's House*, Boire is accurate when he notes that fairytales "punctuate Fraser's text from start to finish" (228). In her incest autobiography, when she is about to have sex with her lover, she recalls the image of the curtains in her childhood home, and evokes Rapunzel (172). When, in her teenage years, she is on a date, she says, "I looked at the clock: 10:35. Like Cinderella, I must be home by midnight, *in my father's house*" (84). At the demise of her marriage, she thinks of herself, not as Cinderella, but as one of her evil stepsisters who has given up too much of herself in a desperate attempt to secure the prince: "like Cinderella's ugly sister hacking off toes to get into the glass slipper" (187). She relates to the joy and sadness of Sleeping Beauty's life: "Like Sleeping Beauty I was both cursed and blessed at birth" (252). She uses the queen in *Snow White* to highlight the guilt of her mother: "When I, as a child of five, saw the queen in Snow White turn into the wicked witch, I feared what I was seeing–your other self, the witch in you, the Witch Who Knew" (231).

Fraser's use of fairytales in her autobiography reveals the image she had of herself. She admits using the fairytale princess as her talisman (18). She writes, "I was special in a good way. I was a fairytale princess" (15). When she was a child, doting adults had referred to her as a princess, and she carried this image of herself with her into adulthood

(18, 27, 65, 75, 163, 180, 191, 205, 241, 251, 253). She even relates to the plastic figurine of a trapped princess in her lover's fish tank (160, 171).

The image of herself as princess and of men as potential princes appears to be of comfort to her: this is how she copes with her incest trauma, by imagining a fairytale existence. In this way, fairytales are the coloured ribbons she clings to. Nonetheless, in many respects, she is exchanging one form of victimization for another. Fraser fantasizes about being a helpless female heroine of a fairytale, the "eternally beautiful, inanimate *objet d'art* patriarchal aesthetics want a girl to be" (Gilbert 40), like the "childlike, docile, and submissive" Snow White (Gilbert 39). She sees herself as an attractive and weak victim who needs to be rescued by a prince. Danica, too, admits, at one point, waiting for such a rescue: "I read fairy tales. I learn to hope that someday somebody will save me" (*Don't* 2.12). The tales have taught Fraser and Danica to have dreams, perhaps unrealistic ones. The difference between Fraser's and Danica's fairytale fantasy and their incest reality is that in the fantasy, there is a rescue, and in reality, there is no such promise.

Understandably, Fraser prefers to think of herself as the trapped princess in a fairytale rather than the trapped daughter in an incestuous relationship with her father. She, however, unlike the storybook heroines, breaks her silence. In *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar see Snow White as the silent victim: "But the girl child must learn the arts of silence either as herself a silent image invented and defined by the magic looking glass of the male authored text, or as a silent dancer of her own

woes, a dancer who enacts rather than articulates" (43). This, too, is the predicament of the incest victim, until the incest victim rescues herself and articulates the abuse.

Throughout the autobiography, however, Fraser continues to characterize herself as a fairytale victim. She uses *Karen and the Red Shoes*, in particular, to delineate her troubled teenage years when her alter ego was threatening to reveal itself and the incest. She wears a revealing red dress and the red satin slippers (79), to her highschool formal, the Fall Fling (78). Indeed, at that moment, she remembers the "once-favorite fairytale: Karen and the Red Shoes" (79) and quotes from it:

> Everyone in church looked at Karen's beautiful red shoes, and when she knelt at the altar and the chalice was put to her lips she thought of nothing else but the red shoes. Outside the church, she took a few dance steps. She couldn't help it. Once begun, her feet continued to dance as if the shoes had power over them. She danced around the church. She couldn't stop. (79)

The shoes in the tale seemed to have a will of their own, just as Fraser's alter ego appears to have at this time in her life. Once, like Karen in the tale, she is actually dancing, her other self brings the memory of abuse to the surface. Daniel, her date, puts his hand on her back as they waltz: "*I experience a tremor of sexual assault which I repress, unaware that I am doing so. On instructions from my other self, who considers sex her territory, I replace it with something less dangerous*–ennui" (81-82). During another dance she feels trapped by Daniel's embrace: "Daniel's arms feel like clamps, constricting me. I can barely breathe in the narrow space between my face and his chest, *my father's belly, my father's chest*" (84). As Fraser suggests, physical contact reminds her shadow self of her incest

trauma. The alter ego is too strong and takes over Fraser's more conservative core self: she flirts with another boy, a rebellious and intoxicated student. To explain the significance, the feeling of being overpowered by another force, Fraser again quotes from the fairytale: "*The red shoes would not let Karen do what she liked. When she wanted to go right, they danced left. They spun her around the room, then down the stairs and out the town gate. Away she danced, and away she had to dance, right into the dark of the forest...*" (85). When Daniel has to cut in, she feels guilty: "*Like daddy's naughty girl who's failed to please*" (86).

At the end of the evening, Fraser believes she must pay for her date with Daniel; she, without being aware of it, falls into the bribery pattern her father had established: in return for treats, she must do sexual favors:

> He kisses me. My lips are cold, like plastic. I can't do anything about that. They aren't under my conscious control. We neck a bit more, with Daniel's hand falling across the bosom of my dress. This shouldn't be first-date stuff, but I have been adding up the gasoline and the corsage, my guilt about my withdrawal against his legitimate expectations, and I find something owing which, being an honest tradeswoman, I feel obliged to deliver. I have no discernable sexual feelings. (86)

Her father has taught her to relinquish the rights to her body. Again, she is not in control and again, to express this powerlessness, she relates to the fairytale:

> I bolt up the stairs, tripping over Other Grandmother's red shoes, falling flat on my face outside my father's bedroom. I lie on my stomach, feeling the house spin, hearing my father snore. *So off she danced in the red shoes, and off she had to dance, over fields and meadows, in rain and sunshine, and at night it was fearful.* (87)

Her evening literally ends with the offending patriarch's overwhelming presence. Once again, she is powerless and lying prostrate listening to her father making sounds in the bedroom–an all too familiar scene for Fraser. Further, just as she cannot free herself from her father's control, she cannot free herself from the red shoes: "I try to kick off the red shoes, but they've stuck fast to my swollen feet. Crawling into the bathroom, I seize my father's razor and slit the satin fabric, *watching it bleed*, before passing out once more" (87).

Fraser's clever use of *Karen and the Red Shoes* is as distracting as the description of her adulterous affair. That is, even though she does not stop writing about incest and its aftereffects as she recounts the particular evening, she is so adept at weaving the dramatic events in with the fragments of the fairytale and the details of incest, readers are left mesmerized by Fraser's ability to juggle three narrative ribbons. *My Father's House*, at this stage, proves to be a "text of bliss" not for its incest *bios* but for its dexterous *graphē*. The weaving style also gains in momentum so readers, too, may feel swept away, as if they have slipped into the red shoes. At this point, readers may be simply trying to keep up, and, therefore, may temporarily lose sight of the incest narrative.

There are other moments in *My Father's House*, however, when Fraser's weaving style is in place in order to describe incest and, therefore, is more disturbing. Concerning this matter, Boire says, "In one sense the inclusion is excruciatingly gruesome: the superficial innocence of children's stories grimly offsets the realities of abuse faced by

Fraser as a child" (228). Fraser juxtaposes the horror of incest with the beauty of Rapunzel's hair:

> My daddy plays with my blond hair. "I had curls like that when I was your age." He plays with my belly button and jiggles pennies in his pocket. My daddy squeezes my legs between his knees. I count my pennies, already imagining them to be blackballs and red licorice from the Candy Factory. The breeze through the window smells of lilacs. It blows the curtains inward like Rapunzel's golden hair, giving me goose bumps.
> *My daddy and I share secrets.* (6)

The mention of the fairytale heroine at the end of the incestuous seduction scene also points to Fraser's reference point: she is a child; therefore, she thinks as a child and has childhood images in her head. The idea of her father abusing this youthful heart and mind appears even more horrific because of Fraser's prosodic combination of sexual exploitive details and childhood icons.

Mediating Voices

Fraser manipulates the *autos* to accommodate a number of narrative voices: the unconscious voice, the analytical voice, the healed voice, and the intimate voice. The shifting voice may affect readers in a number of ways. First, Fraser appears in control of her narrative and, therefore, in control of her life. Second, each voice achieves something particular. The unconscious voice adds intrigue to her story: she is not only an incest victim; she has just recovered from amnesia. The analytical voice temporarily distances

herself from her story and the role of victim: she is able to be objective about her experience. As with Allen's adult perspective, the healed voice is of comfort to readers because they know she survived the abuse. Finally, the intimate voice is the voice Fraser uses to directly address the audience. It further engages readers.

In *My Father's House*, Fraser reveals her multiple in italicized passages.[18] In the Author's Note, she says,

> The story I have told is autobiographical. As a result of amnesia, much of it was unknown to me until three years ago. For clarity, I have used italics to indicate thoughts, feelings and experiences pieced together from recently recovered memories, and to indicate dreams. It is important to keep this device in mind while reading this book.

She distinguishes between the personality she sees as being "held together by an umbilical cord of pain" (*My Father's House* 102) and her core personality by inserting italicized prose fragments into her core narrative:

> Through the bathroom door I hear my father splashing in the tub. Holding my breath, I slide under his bed, grabbing for Smoky. Now the bath plug is being pulled. With a gurgle, the scummy water sucks down the drain.
>
> *By the time daddy stomps out of the bathroom, saronged in a towel, my other self is curled on his feather pillow, sucking her thumb and wearing Smoky's dirty pink ribbon...Whose little girl are you?* (27)

In a review of Fraser's book, MacKay notes that these italics "provide a sense of the secrecy of incest" (3). With them, it seems as though Fraser is whispering to her readers.

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[18]As discussed on pages 109-10.

They pique readers' interest because they are privy not only to the incest but to this mysterious voice.

Although Fraser ends almost every chapter in *My Father's House* with a personal memory, she begins each with a detached, didactic voice. The last of "Secrets" reads: "Guilt fear guilt fear fear dirty fear fear fear fear fear fear. *One day I can stand it no longer*" (14). The first of the next chapter, "The Other," reads, "When the conflict caused by my sexual relationship with my father became too acute to bear, I created a secret accomplice for my daddy by splitting my personality in two" (15). The switch in tone is obvious. She continues in the analytical voice for just over a page, and then she returns to "her story." In effect, she is switching from a social science approach to incest back to an autobiographical approach.

Her mixed approach has received mixed reviews. MacKay says, "Her adult analysis is infrequent, most often a paragraph or two at the opening of a chapter, and it doesn't overwhelm the tone of the book" (3); whereas, Jane Hamilton says: "The strength of *My Father's House* lies in its evocation of a past; its weakness lies in the terms the author provides for making sense of the past–in her achieved understanding" (33); "It is the unconvincing application of the terms of analysis to the subject of her sexual identity–along with inaccuracies–that undermines the reader's confidence" (33). Hamilton has problems with the way Fraser uses terms like "amnesia" and "self-induced splitting;" she says her word choice is perplexing and perhaps inaccurate (33). Wente, too, says Fraser is a novelist, not a psychologist (D9). The analytical voice and healed voice do

affect readers. When Fraser uses them, she demands less of an emotional response from her readers than when she uses a child's voice. If one of the incest autobiographer's objectives is to elicit an empathetic response from readers, Fraser, at times, fails to do so. In repeatedly using the phrase, "I know that now" (241) in the final chapter before her Postscript, Fraser presents herself as a fully healed incest survivor who has processed all of the information about the crime and now has a mature and authoritative perspective. Hamilton relates this perspective and tone to the genre of confession itself, which she describes as the art of casting very personal events and feelings in the light of an achieved understanding (33). A number of reviewers have praised *My Father's House* because of its happy resolution. Bev Rolick says, "This book is an honest, intense effort by Fraser to *recover* [italics added] who she is and was" (28). Bemrose also compliments it: "*My Father's House* offers a rare double gift–unmasking a terrible evil and showing how its legacy of pain can be *assuaged* [italics added]" (52h). In presenting herself as fully healed, Fraser, again, comforts the audience. They witness a woman who has experienced trauma in her childhood yet found peace and self-assurance in her adulthood. Readers can cling to the ribbon of survivorship rather than victimization.

Fraser, with all her voices, is asking readers to believe her account: to believe in her *autos*, her *bios*, and her *graphē*. Her healed voice and her analytical voice make her appear authoritative, while her unconscious voice makes her appear as though she is disclosing everything. She is showing her readers they can trust her, and this is nowhere more apparent than in her use of the intimate voice. Near the conclusion of *My Father's*

House, she asks her readers to use their creative powers to put themselves in her position: "Imagine this: imagine you discover that for many years another person intimately shared your life without your knowing it. Oh, you had your suspicions–the indented pillow beside you, the toothpaste with a thumbprint that wasn't yours" (228). At this point, the second person, the reader, becomes the mediating voice. Fraser invites readers into the incest autobiography, making *My Father's House*, temporarily, less about incest and more about readers' imaginative capabilities. Sometimes the invitation is an even more pronounced form of distraction: almost game like. Midway through the book she begins a chapter with the sentence: "I have something to tell you" (109). Knowing the subject of the autobiography, readers may immediately think she is going to share another secret about incest. She asks, "Are you going to believe this?" (109); again readers may feel Fraser is asking them to believe in her confession about child sexual abuse. Instead, however, Fraser is simply speaking light heartedly about love. She is about to confess she is in love, not that she is a victim. At moments such as these, with her "text of bliss," Fraser surprises readers into thinking about something other than incest. She draws readers in differently than Allen did. She makes them think they are either her confidantes or playmates; whereas, Allen made them feel they were her much needed care-givers. *Daddy's Girl* and *My Father's House* show how incest autobiography includes material that speaks quite directly to readers. The sub-genre makes obvious the importance of the relationship between the *autos* and readers.

In the end, Fraser's summation of her life is much different from her *bios*. Near the conclusion of *My Father's House*, she writes:

> Looking at my life from one vantage point, I see nothing but devastation. A blasted childhood, an even worse adolescence, betrayal, divorce, craziness, professional stalemate, financial uncertainty and always, always a secret eating like dry rot at my psyche. That is the dark side, the story I have told in this book. Yet, like the moon, my life has another side, one with luminosity. (251)

Although she thinks she has presented only the dark side, in fact, through her mediating narratives and voices, she has also shown the luminosity. Bemrose acknowledges these lighter moments: "Despite its central focus on incest, *My Father's House* is frequently as entertaining as it is disturbing" (52h).

Conclusion

Fraser has written an incest autobiography of shadows: sometimes the child sexual abuse is highly visible, sometimes it lurks in the background. She controls what once controlled her. When she wants to prove her narrative control and the wider experience of her life, she uses mediating material. The love stories show she is more than an incest victim, while the fairytales speak to a more generalized victimization. Fraser is not a survivor until she sheds all three images of herself: herself as incest victim, herself as lover, and herself as fairytale princess. At the end of her incest autobiography, she is living independently and confidently. She represents herself as rescued and healed by her own

hand. She concludes with a declaration of her love for her mother, her father, and, most importantly, herself. Her various forms of mediation, while at times purposefully distracting, work together with the trauma narrative to form an incest autobiography that reads more easily than her fiction. Whereas, in her fiction she wrote unrelentingly and pessimistically about global and timeless abuse; in her autobiography, she writes personally about abuse, tempers it with more luminous aspects of her life, and ends on an optimistic note. Ironically, it is her reflections on death that are optimistic: the death of her alter, her princess identity, her narrow view of her mother, and the offender. She says she closes the coffin on victimization and releases herself into survivorship: "XXXX OOOOO. Good-bye, good-bye" (*My Father's House* 242).

Chapter 4. *Don't*

Danica's incest autobiography is appropriately named *Don't: A Woman's Word*. The title, unlike Allen's and Fraser's, excludes the patriarch. It is clear, from the beginning, then, that Danica approaches incest autobiographic writing differently than her two predecessors. She still focuses on the father and his offences, perhaps even to a greater degree than the others, but, as the title suggests, she more directly addresses empowerment, feminism, and *graphē*. The first word of the title is a command to stop. With the command, she is stopping the victimization, stopping her father, and finally finding her own voice and control. The word "Woman" suggests two things. First, a female incest survivor wrote the autobiography. Second, Danica is going to deal with more than one form of abuse: she joins patriarchal oppression of women to the subject of incest. Finally, the last element of the title, "Word" indicates that Danica particularly focuses on word choice. The characterization and structure of *Don't* support the three aspects of her title. She expands the *autos* to include society as a whole. She expands the *bios* to include the power structures of Western society. She expands the *graphē* so her writing about violations becomes a textual violation. In her second book, another incest autobiography entitled *Beyond Don't: Dreaming Past the Dark*, she continues the expansion. Danica approaches autobiographic writing as a language and social study of incest trauma and general repression. Because this approach is different from Allen's and Fraser's, Danica continues to populate the sub-genre of incest autobiography with "texts

of bliss." She has found an alternative and discomforting way to write autobiographically about incest.

Characterization of Her Father

The distinct *bios* is part of what makes *Don't* a "text of bliss." Danica's life, as she describes it, is devoid of normalcy. For most readers, there is little they would relate to. This is in contrast to Allen's and Fraser's *bios*. Unlike Allen, Danica did not have friends and favorite teachers; unlike Fraser, she did not go to movies and dances. Her autobiography is, instead, largely about her alienation. She characterizes her father as being the largest contributor to her estrangement from all supportive systems. She describes him as the man who destroyed every opportunity for her. Danica explains that he began to abuse her in their home country, Holland, when she was only four years old. Her immigration status further distinguishes her from Allen and Fraser. Danica remembers him playing doctor with her. She describes him making her lie on the cold floor while he fondled her, despite her protests, and took a photograph of her naked, child's body (3.4-3.6). The two aspects of this first memory of abuse, rape and pornography, mark the way in which her father exploits her in the future. Danica's second memory of abuse is one of her earliest recollections of life in Canada. Now estranged from her childhood home, at a stockcar racing event, her father locked her in the back of an automobile and prostituted

her to countless men (2.8-2.11). Her *bios*–the immigration, the early and extreme level of abuse, pornography, and prostitution–is strikingly different from Allen's and Fraser's.

Further, unlike Allen and Fraser, Danica characterizes her father as wholly monstrous. According to Danica, he always abused his power. His abuse ranged from cutting into a muscle in her leg with a pocket knife (*Don't* 1.15) to threatening to hunt her down and kill her if she exposed him as a rapist (*Don't* 1.18, 6.16). Even when she was a toddler, he wanted her to recognize his power, "to see his victory"(*Don't* 4.3). Danica explains that it was important to him that the family see him winning arguments and young Danica losing them (4.3). In a daily display of abusive power, he made her beg for food at the dinner table (*Don't* 4.7-4.8). When Danica was no longer a minor, age twenty-seven, she says he continued to lord his power over her: he propositioned her to pose nude for his friends. When she declined, he responded, "You always were a stupid bitch" (*Don't* 11.14). Ten years later, Danica explains, the abuse persisted:

> Daddy's greeting to me at thirty-five: get that fucking bitch out of my sight. Daddy's greeting to me at thirty-six when he is drunk: you need a good fuck and daddy's the best man for the job. I always showed you a real good time. You were never grateful. Bitch. Ungrateful bitch. (9.9)

She provides these staggering examples of abuse to demonstrate the kind of extensive and long term power imbalance she endured.[19] And because his abuses alienated her from a

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[19]Allen describes her long term abuse, as well. It lasted for more than fifteen years. When she was twenty-three, her father was still sexually harassing her with phone calls, surprise visits, and letters (*Daddy's Girl* 161, 226, 258).

nurturing environment, she suggests she spent her youth and early adulthood lonely and victimized. In contrast, Allen's and Fraser's fathers initially alleviated their daughters' loneliness by playing games with them and giving them the attention they did not receive from their mothers. Danica relates no such incidents. One reason readers who are familiar with Allen's and Fraser's autobiographies will find *Don't* a "text of bliss" (different and unsettling) is her unrelenting characterization of her father as a monster.

Allen and Fraser expressed confusion about their feelings for their fathers, but Danica does not. In *Daddy's Girl*, Allen wrote, "I hated him, hated his words, his deeds, his promises, his lies, his threats, his money. I loved him, loved it when he was funny, when he'd play word or music games with me, when he proudly took me out to walk and introduced me, with a smile, as his little girl. I wanted him to love me, to be a father" (84). Similarly, in *My Father's House*, Fraser wrote: "My arms stick to my sides, my legs dangle like worms as my daddy forces me back against his bed. I love my daddy. I hate my daddy. Love hate love hate. Daddy won't love me love me hate hate hate" (14). Danica, in contrast, expresses no love for her father. She is also adamantly against forgiving him and, therefore, is opposed to Fraser's approach.[20] She never sees her father as co-victim. Instead, she expresses rage against the benefits of life her father reaps despite his offender status. Unlike her, he is not wounded and alone: "He is free. I carry chains. He killed all that was beautiful in me. He is free" (1.12).

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[20]As discussed on page 114.

Intent on making him the definitive monster of her autobiography, she, more so than Allen and Fraser, describes his offenses. She incites her readers to hate him as much as she does; therefore, she describes the climax of his abuse of her: a pornographic session and gang rape. Three individuals, pillars of the community of Moose Jaw–a judge, a lawyer, and a doctor–joined the patriarch in his pornography studio in the basement of Danica's family home, Danica's localized hell (*Don't* 7.2). In bringing in these other offenders, she makes her life story her community's story.

Danica seems to realize the importance of describing the crimes outweighs the discomfort of finding the words. Fearlessly, she recounts the night that began with her father taking pornographic photos of her in front of the guests (7.8). Afterward, they took turns holding her down and raping her:

> Hand on its right shoulder. Thumb pressing at the base of its throat. Its hands held above the head. The body stretched out. She won't give you any trouble this time your honor. Hand like a vise at the throat. Bring your knees up. Trapped wrists. Can't move. The body tries to move the torso out of the way. He spreads its legs. The man is between the body's legs. He tries to put something into it. It feels his finger nails and it screams. He's hurting me, he's hurting me. The body moves its head from side to side, crying, screaming. No. No. No! Shut up a voice snarls. No. No. No! He slaps its face, hard. The head feels like it will roll away from the body with the force. He slaps it again. Now shut up. No. No. No. It tries to get away. It can't move. The hand at the throat. It chokes. They don't stop. The man in the blue suit crouches near the father. He holds the body's wrists. Puts his other hand over its mouth. The man between its legs breathing funny. Suddenly he stops, he collapses on top of the body. It is over. At last it is over. (7.20)

Readers may sigh with relief that they made it through the most upsetting material, but Danica continues to describe more abuse. She says the other men took their turn as well, including her father (7.23). She describes what happened at the end of the night when her father tried to sell her to the judge (7.27). According to Danica, when the judge did not accept his offer, her father attempted to give her away (7.30). In this one scene, Danica addresses the issue of incest, victimization, patriarchy, pornography, corruption, and capitalism. Allen's and Fraser's autobiographies could not accommodate a number of these issues, patriarchy in the form of the "boys club" and pornography, in particular, because they were not predominant elements of their abuse.

As is clear from Danica's use of the pronouns "He" and "It" in the above passage, as well as the father's futile effort to sell his daughter, Danica sees her father as the powerful owner and herself as the object or commodity. His underground career as a pornographer further emphasizes this destructive dynamic. Danica continues to characterize him as the omnipotent master. He was a man who forced his wife to be hostess to pornography parties in the basement of the family home (*Don't* 5.2-5.3). Danica says she was literally surrounded by pornographic imagery: in the basement, in the bedrooms. When she made her father's bed every morning, one of her many daily duties, she would find pornographic books under his pillow, books he later showed to Danica's pubescent son (*Don't* 5.6, *Beyond Don't* 88).[21]

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[21]Allen also says she was exposed to pornography. Her father had taken photographs of her (*Daddy's Girl* 46) and made her look at pornographic books (*Daddy's Girl* 97).

Social Study I: Pornography

Through the characterization of her father and her descriptions of her abuse, Danica addresses the subject of pornography. Her incest autobiography, then, is about multiple forms of oppression. She says, when she was eight, her father began routinely taking pornographic photos of her (2.4). When she was eleven, he began training her to be a pornographic subject (5.8). In adulthood, reflecting on her father's exploitive and abusive hobby and considering the extent of his trade, Danica writes:

> I know what he is now. A pornographer. Scum of the earth. Pimp and pornographer. He used my mother. He used the wives of some of his "friends." He used young women he enticed with stories of fame and fortune. He liked waitresses. He had them all sign releases, or since one or two of them were too young, he had their parents sign a release. He loved women he said. He loved them all. He used them all. He sold them all. (*Don't* 5.7)

As Danica explains, her father victimized women inside and outside of the home. Her story is their story as well.

The offender abused Danica by including her in his pornographic ring and secured her position of victimization by making pornography all pervasive. Danica explains that he showed her photographs of her mother: "My mother. Naked...The clenched teeth. The eyes of the hunted facing the camera. Caught. Powerless. Smile" (5.13). Concerning the photograph, her father told Danica, "She does whatever I tell her to do" (5.14). Danica's father not only scared her into submission, he made her believe abuse, specifically, pornography, is a fact of life for women and girls. In a section on pornography in

Recollecting Our Lives, Pamela Sleeth and Jan Parsley mention the outcome of such a tactic:

> Instead of being taught to look to adult women for support, these girls were taught that women were there for exploiting by men, that women were powerless and/or complicit in fulfilling men's sexual demands. These men presented images of womanhood which would have reinforced children's sense that there was never any way out. (63)

Immersed, as Danica describes, in pornography, her father denied her examples of a healthy, happy life for girls and women.

Pornography increased Danica's level of victimization because it further subjugated her and bent her to her father's will. In an essay on *Don't*, Linda Warley explains this dynamic of pornography as an issue of power and powerlessness between the spectator and the spectacle: "The spectator of the pornographic representation is male. The image is produced by men and consumed by men. The female body is the 'blank' object onto which men inscribe their desire. The female in the pornographic representation is not the subject, but the object" (73). Danica, already an object, a body to be abused, was even more objectified by the gaze of the male spectators. Warley continues, "The [pornographic] text, the utterance, is not the woman's. She can and must move–wet her lips, lift her dress, spread her legs–but she cannot speak. She cannot take up the position of the speaking subject; rather, she remains forever that which is spoken" (73). The only time Danica could speak is when her father forced her to say she liked the abuse (*Don't* 6.10). The pornographic script is in direct opposition to Danica writing her

autobiography. As the pornographic object, Danica was spoken; as incest autobiographer, Danica speaks.

Characterization of Her Mother

Danica characterizes her mother as utterly dis-empowered and defeated by her pornographer, sex-offender, husband. Williamson once told Danica, "The horror for me is thinking about the absent mother in your story" (Interview, "An Enormous Risk" 79). Danica's mother is not absent because she does not appear in the book; rather, she is absent because she is not in control of her own existence and cannot mother Danica. Her obedience to the patriarch meant she could not support her daughter. As Warley says: "The mother is a reminder of how totally crushing the oppression of woman can be" (78). Danica joins Allen and Fraser in describing the mother as un-nurturing, at times, almost as villainous as the offender, but ultimately victimized.

Danica introduces her with the sentences, "My mother will not meet my eyes. My mother walks away. My mother knows. She knows. She always knows" (1.8). From here, Danica continues to characterize her as the woman who knew but did not/could not take action. Unlike Allen's and Fraser's mother, Danica's mother was aware of the abuse from the beginning. This complicates the matter for Danica and for readers. Danica feels betrayed, and readers struggle to understand the mother who knew but did nothing to stop the abuse. They may feel shocked when they read about the first time Danica's father

abuses her, and her mother does not come to her aid: "He hits me. He hits me again. I cry louder. Mommy calls from the bottom of the stairs. She doesn't come up the stairs. I want her so much" (3.7). Even though her mother knows Danica needs her help, the fear of her husband prevents her from entering his territory, in this case, the top floor. Her mother is so crippled by her obedience to her husband, she even makes Danica apologize to him (4.2). Danica characterizes a woman who is utterly defenceless and who, therefore, cannot defend her daughter. She consistently shows how her mother was dominated by her husband. For example, when Danica found the pornography book under her father's pillow, her mother did not diffuse the situation. She simply said, "The book belongs to your father. Don't touch it" (5.6).

She describes her mother's subservience most persuasively when she depicts her as an accessory in rape. She insists Danica obey her father, despite knowing he intends to sexually assault his daughter: "My mother instructs me before I go to the basement. He wants you to wear the blue sweater and your corduroy skirt. Do what he says. Don't ask any questions. Why? Just do what he says. I am eleven" (5.8). Her mother is present while Danica's father takes pornographic photos of her in front of the townsmen (7.8). When her father demands Danica take her nightie off, her mother does not object. Instead, Danica says, "She has turned to stone. Her eyes are not focused. She will not look at me" (7.9). When he orders Danica to remove her panties, she asks her mother for direction. Her mother responds, as always, with the statement: "Do what he says" (7.11). Finally,

after whispering with her husband, Danica's mother leaves her daughter to be subjected to sexual torture (7.11).

Her mother has betrayed her in the most unimaginable way, but Danica never blames her. She must convince readers, then, to understand her mother in the way that she does, rather than just condemn her for her inaction. She does this by admitting that her mother has pained her. She knows her father controlled her mother's every move, just as he did hers, but this understanding does not bring Danica relief. Although she does not blame her mother, there are things about her behaviour she finds difficult to forgive:

> Either watch them rape your eleven-year-old daughter or make coffee. I can forgive that. I have more trouble forgiving her this: she said he told her I liked it and she said she believed him. She believed still that I was born liking rape. I was born female. I was born a prostitute. Some women were born like that he said. (9.5)

In describing a number of uneasy feelings about her mother, Danica convinces readers that she, perhaps as they do, feels conflicted. After gaining confidence in her, knowing that she is not a saint who can easily forgive her mother, readers may feel more open to understanding how Danica can feel so much compassion for her mother. Danica consistently provides information about her mother that allows readers to see her as a victim. Even in the above example, Danica stresses that it is because of her mother's obedience to her husband, to the extent that she had to accept everything he said, that she has believed the worst about her daughter.

Danica includes details about the current, strained relationship with her mother. In doing so, she establishes the long term effects her father's abuse had on her life and her family's. In an attempt to connect with her mother outside of her father's realm, she includes her in the dedication of *Don't*. Danica has compassion for her because she recognizes she is a co-victim: "She is sixty-two years old. She had lived all her adult life in fear of the man she married. She is still afraid" (*Don't* 4.18). To show the pervasive damage, Danica includes her mother's denial:

> You don't understand him. I used to be afraid of him. I'm not afraid of him anymore. You know he vacuums for me sometimes. He helps with the dishes now. I don't want to be alone. He's all I have. What about your children I say. What about them she says. He hurt you I say. Kids always exaggerate she says. I know he hurt you. I saw him hurt you. He's always been a good husband. I'm not as afraid of him as I used to be. When did you stop being afraid of him? She looks away. Oh, she says, a couple of years ago I guess. (4.16)

Danica provides evidence to the contrary. She tells Williamson that her father keeps her mother prisoner, controls the treatment she gets for her cancer, and may have even caused her cancer because of his insistence that she go on estrogen replacement therapy for twenty years. Danica explains, "She wasn't allowed to age in an appropriate way, because *he* couldn't live with that. My mother's story is another whole chapter in this tyranny" (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 78).

With this "chapter" on her mother, Danica exposes not just incest abuse but tyranny in general. In adulthood, Danica attempted to break the tyrannic hold and educate her mother about women's victimization: "Two years ago I told my mother about the

violence used against women to force them to have sex. Her mouth tightened. Her body tensed. Is that right? she said in a tone which implied she didn't believe a word. A tone which said: this is another one of your troublemaking lies" (*Don't* 9.6). Danica also says she gave her a book about mothers and daughters in abusive situations. In it she wrote: "To my mother. I always loved you, always" and used her mother's maiden name as well as signed "Danica" instead of her given surname.[22] Her mother, however, was afraid to accept the book and was not willing to read it (*Don't* 4.17). Danica's incest autobiography, then, may ultimately be about her survival, but it also is about the remaining victims.

Characterization of Her Sisters

In keeping with the other incest autobiographers' approach to siblings, Danica does not characterize her sisters to the extent she does her parents. She does, however, describe them enough to prove two important points: her father controlled everyone in her life, and she did not have support within her immediate family. As with her mother, Danica also dedicates *Don't* to her sisters. She mentions one sister in particular: "For my sister Laurie (1959-1980)." Within the autobiography, Danica refers to Laurie's death (9.8). It seems that Danica still feels a great deal of guilt when it comes to her. She told

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[22]As discussed on page 173.

Barb Livingstone, a journalist for the *Calgary Herald*, that her one major regret in life was that she was not able to help her sister when she was raped as a payment for one of her father's debts (H2). She expands this story of regret in her interview with Peter Gzowski:

> I was in the house when it happened to the youngest of my sisters. I carry an enormous load of guilt because I should have known, but I was in so much pain at the time that acknowledging her pain would have mean acknowledging my own, and I couldn't do it. I saw myself in this eleven-year-old who was totally shattered. She broke like glass in front of me. It's the most horrific memory. In some ways it's more horrific than my own experience, because I should have been able to help this baby sister, and I couldn't. ("Elly" 126)

Again, Danica addresses the amount of destruction her father has caused herself and others.

In her autobiography, however, she does not write about his abuse of her siblings. In *Don't*, it sounds as if she is the only incest victim. There are number of reasons she may not have discussed her sisters' traumas. First, this is her incest story, not theirs. They deny having been abused, do not support her disclosure, and do not speak badly about their father. To write about them would be to put words in their mouths. Second, the depiction of her alienation would not have been as complete if there were other incest victims. She consistently characterizes herself as the sole incest victim/survivor. To share this position with her sisters would complicate, perhaps even dilute, the *autos* and *bios*.

Danica's decision not to write much about her sisters may also have been influenced by either her feelings of protectiveness, or, more probably, her feelings of resentment. Although, in all likelihood, she does not want them to suffer from her

disclosure, she does clearly have some unresolved feelings about her siblings. Her approach to characterizing them is rather passive-aggressive. While she does not express outright anger and somewhat excuses their behaviour by tracing it back to their monstrous father, she does show her disappointment in them when she repeatedly writes about their unkindness. Danica says she remembers being at the dinner table and their father asking them if they wanted to grow up to be like her. Concerning how this made her feel, Danica writes, "It only bothered me when the little sisters I loved hated me because he told them to. It only bothered me when they whimpered. No daddy, I don't want to be like her. No daddy I won't ever tell lies like she does. I'll always do what you tell me to do daddy" (4.10). Although, unlike Allen, Danica has never been accused of engaging in self-pity, this passage sounds no less overindulgent than Allen's more sentimental passages. Danica consistently characterizes herself as loving her sisters and them as rejecting her, in the same way their mother did.

Danica posits that because their father shaped the girls into Danica's enemies, in adulthood, they spurn her. When, at the age of forty, she told her sisters about the abuse, they refused to believe her (*Don't* 4.6, 4.13-4.15). In *Beyond Don't*, Danica says this about her sisters:

> In the last eight years, my sister Lucy, who lives in Norway, has visited twice and called once, while another sister, who lives in Moose Jaw, has spoken to me a few times when I met her accidentally in public or phoned her, and the other three sisters still have not spoken to me. (85)

What she does receive from them is negative criticism. When Danica chooses to leave her unhealthy marriage (as discussed in the next section), her sisters cruelly judge her:

> My sisters do not understand. How can you leave such a nice man? How can you leave your son? You always were a bitch. Can't love. Never could love anything. You always were a mess. A perfectly good husband and the best marriage you're ever likely to have. No. The only marriage...How can you leave your darling baby? What kind of monster are you? (*Don't* 12.4)

Danica contrasts the family's perception of her as the monster with her depiction of her father as the monster. Her sisters' loyalty remains with their father (*Don't* 4.11), their father continues to make victims of all women, and Danica remains estranged from her family.

Although Danica describes her loneliness, she does so differently than Allen. She does not seem to encourage readers to feel they need to nurture her. Whereas, Allen describes both why she was alone and her search for nurturing friends, Danica mostly describes the former. Instead of focusing on her needs, she focuses on the alienated life her father created for her. She causes readers to feel anger toward her father and the world he represents. The anger toward him superseded the compassion and concern readers may feel for her. As Allen's and Danica's incest autobiographies prove, the individual books in the sub-genre encourage individual responses from readers.

Social Study II: Patriarchy

As is clear from the consistent descriptions of her father as the controlling and abusing force, of his pornography and prostitution ring, and of the corrupt men in the community, Danica's autobiography includes criticism of patriarchy. Danica cites Kate Millet as one of the women writers who influenced and inspired her (*Don't* 12.2), so in all likelihood, she was working from Millett's famous "notes toward a theory of patriarchy" in *Sexual Politics* (24). Millett says there are two principles of patriarchy: "male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger" (25). She suggest these principles are at work in every avenue of power within society. She lists the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, finance, and the police as being patriarchal (25). The family, she says, is patriarchy's chief institution (33).

Danica, understanding avenues of power as being patriarchal, characterizes her marriage as part of the oppressive system. As she describes, when she forms a new family, at the age of eighteen, with the hopes of escaping her abusive father, her life does not improve. Danica characterizes her husband as being verbally and physically abusive:

> Can't you keep this place clean? Can't I have clean shirts and socks? What did I marry you for if you can't even do the basics around here? He said he would help me get away from my father, in return he expected the services of a wife. When I saw what I had done, that I was chained again, I wept. I was lost. (10.5)

A military man (*Beyond Don't* 33), firmly part of a patriarchal institution, he berates her as much as her father did: "Never mind, you're not supposed to be happy, you're my wife, doesn't that make you happy enough?" (*Don't* 10.5); "You're sick and you're useless" (10.7). Further, he follows through on one of her father's threats. Her father said he would commit her to psychiatric care if she misbehaved (6.6); her husband sends her to an abusive therapist, yet another member of the corrupt patriarchal system. Together the husband and therapist insist she be medicated and literally forced to have a baby. The therapist says, "Do whatever you have to do, just make her pregnant. It's all she needs. And make certain she takes her pills" (10.15). Danica says her husband raped her repeatedly in an attempt to impregnate her. She writes from his voice, a voice that sounds chillingly like her father's: "Spread your legs. Do as you're told or I'll hurt you. Don't you want to please me?...the important thing is that you do what you're told. We're trying to help you. Spread your legs" (10.18).

Most readers would be dismayed but not surprised to learn about Danica's husband's abuse of her. Unlike Allen and Fraser, she has only described "bad" men: her father, the men at the stockcar event, the judge, the lawyer, the doctor. Readers, therefore, expect that her husband, too, will abuse her. It is not that Danica does not have "good" men in her life. She refers to one "good" man at the end of *Don't*:

> A man who is my friend helps make it possible. When I drown in dishes, he rescues. When I drown in despair, he rescues. When I drown in bills and shit, he rescues. Non-resident and still loyal. The best kind of help. He brings chilled Chablis and live lobster because he knows I need it. He brings

> comfort and support. He doesn't ask me for anything. I almost trust him. (12.12)

Without this single paragraph about a kind, male friend, her characterization of men would seem extremely skewed. Even the mention of the one friend comes too late to make Danica's account sound balanced. She appears to have been intent on depicting her father as a monster, and in order to do that, she felt she had to situate him within the corrupt patriarchal context. Perhaps she thought if she referred to kind males she had met over the course of her life, it would defeat her purpose or confuse her message. Or perhaps she truly did not meet more than one nice man. The latter is what she leaves her readers to think, even though it seems impossible. For those unwilling to accept that there is an extreme shortage of kind men, Danica is leaving herself open to criticism. She may be sending a clear message that she believes patriarchy is a corrupt ideology that makes victims of women and villains of men, but she does so at the risk of being accused of exaggerating the truth.

Clearly this is a risk she is willing to take. Readers who accuse her of exaggeration would likely seem to be responding to her less brutally than the people of her childhood and young adulthood did. Concerning the latter, she describes being hated because of her decision not to remain a victim of the patriarchal system. As mentioned above, her sisters did not support her decision to save her sanity by leaving her husband and son. She received similar criticism from the community in general for leaving both her husband and child: "You must never ever leave your child. Bad enough to leave your husband, but it

happens. People who know find me dangerous, cold-blooded. How many times I see the walls of their fear go up. You should not have left your son. Monster" (*Don't* 12.7). In including the community's response, the backlash, to her difficult decision to leave her son, Danica addresses the negative social effects of her unconventional sacrifices. In *Don't*, she focuses on the systems (not only incestuous abuse) that oppress people (not only her).

Warley says, "It is tempting to read this book as an outright denial of patriarchy" (70), but she believes, "While it is certainly concerned with inscribing the female subject in ways that do not conform to patriarchal definitions, the main project of *Don't* is to reveal structures in order to expose them for what they are, and for the damage they do" (Warley 71). Danica suggests patriarchy is one of the structures or dominant forces that creates and controls victims. Of course, she also describes particular expressions of patriarchy: prostitution and pornography, in particular. She considers what Henke had referred to as the intertextual codes that society has tried to force women to live by.[23] In writing about these codes and her refusal to accept them in her adult life, she is adding a socio-political dimension to incest autobiographic writing that Allen and Fraser only hinted at.

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[23]As discussed on page 7.

Characterization of Her Community

Danica's characterization of her community accomplishes three things. First, it supports her argument against patriarchal society. Second, it is yet another example of her estrangement in victimization. Third, it makes readers ashamed for their communities and, therefore, more willing to be supportive and accepting of Danica. Together, her family and her community, because of patriarchal abuse of power, have made her feel desperately alone: "I have been an orphan most of my life. An orphan" (*Don't* 9.7). Danica overstates her point, again, in a self-pitying way, to emphasize how it felt to receive such little support from anyone except her grandmother (as discussed in the next section). She blames her community for completing her loneliness. She postulates that although she was brave enough to articulate her abuse, her community was not willing to help her.

She expresses frustration with members of the community, even when particular individuals did not necessarily behave badly. She describes wanting to educate herself on the subject of child abuse, but the local librarian refused her access to adult literature on the topic (2.17). Despite Danica's criticism of the librarian's lack of help, the librarian was, in actuality, behaving responsibly. Danica was nine at the time. It is standard procedure to refuse children admittance to adult literature. Danica's inclusion of this example serves two purposes. It contributes to her argument that no one helped her, but it also alerts readers to a specific problem: there are few resources for child victims.

Danica continues to criticize her community, this time in the form of her extended family, in order to stress her alienation. She appealed to her aunt for help but received a painful response: "You heard me, now shut up with your filth" (2.16). Concerning this rejection, she writes, "There is no one left to talk to. My aunt says the same things as the priest" (2.16).

According to Danica, the church also rejected her. When she asked for help, both the priest and nuns refused aid: the first told her to pray for forgiveness and think about all that she owes her father (2.15) and the second repeated, "He was right in all he did" (2.15). The Church leaders are advocates of the corrupt patriarchy and are "complicit in her abuse" (Givner 10). In an essay on *Don't*, Joan Givner points out that Danica incorporates their complicity into her imagery. Givner cites Danica's basement rape, when both parents were present, as an example: "Even the description in *Don't* of her immolation in the basement is presented as a grotesque inversion of the nativity scene, a parodic grouping of Mary, Joseph, and the Magi" (11).

Danica's characterization of church ecclesiastics is also is in keeping with her subject of incest. Paula K. Lundberg-Love, in her work on the psychology of sexual victimization, has written on the tendency for incest survivors to feel estranged from the church: "Incestuous abuse is often associated with the victim's feeling of abandonment by God or attendant problems in the realm of spirituality" (14). It did not help that Danica's father attended church regularly (*Don't* 8.16). In an interview, Gzowski asked her about her inability to receive help from the Church and Elly responded:

> No, not even the people who ran the church, the nuns and priest, were there for me in a significant way. But I think I must have seen the church as a refuge I could build for myself. This building, when I got it, wasn't a refuge, either. I moved in in January. It was freezing God-awful cold...It was not a refuge. I had to build that refuge around me. ("Elly" 118)

Ironically, Danica ends up finding peace in a place of worship: she makes an abandoned church, what she refers to as "this building" in the above quotation, her home. She transforms the Church that would not help her into her church that feels like "a womb structure" (*Don't* 12.10).[24]

Characterization of Her Grandmother

To balance her view, if not of men, of women, Danica includes her Grandmother. Without her, Danica's alienation would have been complete, patriarchy would reign unchallenged, and readers might find her world too bleak to believe in. According to Danica, her maternal grandmother was the only member of her family, indeed, the only person whom, in her youth, she encountered, who was able to nurture her despite her father. Her inclusion of her grandmother is in keeping with many childhood autobiographies. One reason, Coe says, the Childhood often includes a fond characterization of a grandparent is that he or she appears as a figure of stability (158-59).

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[24]One critic suggests this womb image is Danica's attempt to reclaim her mother (Warley 78).

This is the case with Danica's grandmother. She is the stability, as well as the much needed symbol of hope, young Danica could not find in anyone else.

As with the mother and sisters, Danica begins writing about her grandmother in the dedication of *Don't*: "For my Oma in Holland." It is clear from the dedication, although supportive, her grandmother, because of her place of residence, could not be physically present to care for her: "My grandmother is a continent, an ocean, away" (*Don't* 2.2). Danica explains that the first time she was abused, she told her grandmother. Her father then moved the family to Canada so that her grandmother could not take action, could not protect Danica. The grandmother's absence forces Danica to be creative in her communication with her: "I have talked to my grandmother in the moon" (*Don't* 2.6).[25]

As Danica describes, her brief and only period of joy and support in her childhood came from her grandmother just before the move. She took her to the park, to a greenhouse, and to the beach for a picnic (3.20). Unlike Danica's mother who was under the control of her husband, when Danica tells her grandmother about the abuse, she is able to respond appropriately: "She was very upset. She told me that she would see to it that it never happened again. It would be all right to go home. He'd never do anything to me again" (3.19).

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[25]Danica continues to use the moon and celestial bodies in general as symbols of hope and freedom: her name echoes this (as discussed below on page 173), as does her identification with the Goddess Inanna, and in the Epilogue, Danica sees understanding in a moonbeam (*Don't* 105).

Whereas, Fraser used her father's house as a metaphor for danger and discomfort, Danica uses her grandmother's house as a metaphor for comfort and security:

> Dark wood. Grandma's chair. Her knitting. Grandpa's pipes. The smell of furniture and floor polish. The smell of Grandma's cologne on her dresses. A beautiful formal dining room. Red carpets on the floor and also on the table. Flowers. A home filled with old and very beautiful things. Even the light is golden here. (3.13)

In sharp contrast, Danica describes very little about her father's home. She mentions only a few details about the basement, the setting for most of the abuse she endured, and even then, only to emphasize its cold horror: a bench (5.16), a furnace (7.11), the concrete floor (6.5). Perhaps Fraser and Danica include descriptions of the house, the setting of the abuse, because its physicality makes their trauma more tangible than their memories do. It is as though they use their houses as the physical evidence of their abuse.[26]

Once Danica feels she is a true survivor, she returns to her grandmother. In *Beyond Don't*, she describes visiting her in Holland to show her gratitude, as well as prove her own survivorship by presenting her with a Dutch edition of *Don't* (*Beyond Don't* 71): "I had finally kept the promise I had made to her in 1952, at the airport, just before I boarded the plane for Canada–the promise to tell her if I was ever again assaulted by my father...I had closed the circle for myself by writing it and placing a copy in her hands" (*Beyond Don't* 71). Danica does not use the adult perspective or voice of survivorship to

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[26]Williamson, too, uses her childhood home as a metaphor. As an adult, she witnessed machines demolishing it and likens the destruction to her father's abuse of her (*Crybaby!* 84).

the extent that Allen and Fraser did, so this victorious moment is a much needed moment of relief. It is also an example of women's power: a celebration of cross-generational strength and conviction.

Social Study III: Feminism

Not surprisingly, considering the word "Woman" in the title of her autobiography, the dedication of the book, her anti-patriarchal commentary, and her reverence for her grandmother, Danica shows a pointed interest in women's rights. In an article for *Western Report*, Paula Simons goes as far as to label *Don't* a feminist tract (42). Danica's book is at once an incest autobiography and a kind of feminist bildungsroman. She writes about her transformation from a defenceless and hopeless girl into an empowered and almost optimistic woman.

Initially, Danica rejects her gender. This is in sharp contrast to Allen's idealization of women and Fraser's embrace of the fairytale princess. Early in *Don't*, Danica uses very claustrophobic imagery to describe what she sees as women's predicament: "The sin of the women to live only in their pain" (1.19). Her "sin" began when she was four and her experience with life told her it was painful to be female. At this time, she told her grandmother she did not want to be a female: "It hurts too much to be a girl" (3.23). At the age of eleven, after her father abused her repeatedly in the pornography studio, she says she thought to herself, "This must be the way the world is for girls" (6.9); "This is

what it means to be a woman" (6.11). In the sentences that follow, Danica offers a bleak description of what she understood as the demands of being a woman: "Drop your panties. Lean over the bench. Take your beating. Don't whimper and snivel. Don't cry" (6.11).

Her father, of course, is responsible for making her believe being a woman is a fate worse than death. This is a man, Danica says, who "pontificates about the stupidity of all women" (*Don't* 6.13). Further, according to Danica, everyone else in her immediate environment shares his misogynist opinion:

> They all say, my father, the nuns, the priest and my mother, that I will be a breeder, sentenced to provide whatever services the man who owns me demands. All I must do is obey. My father trains me to obey. Obey in silence. Who asked for your opinion? Who said you were supposed to like it? Who told you it would be any different? (10.1)

Her life with her husband teaches her the patriarchal lessons yet again: "Daddy was right. All I had to do was obey in silence and my husband was happy" (10.5). Allen came to view marriage in the same way:

> Why hadn't anyone ever told me that marriage was cooking when you didn't feel like it, was doing someone else's laundry and taking out the garbage? Why hadn't I known that being a mother and a wife took so much time and energy. I began to see that I viewed marriage as a series of still photographs–immobilized smiling group portraits–that revealed none of the static and frequent tensions. (*Daddy's Girl* 134)

Danica does not know people shared her feelings on marriage, however. Instead, as she describes, she is surrounded by people who give unsupportive opinions on what she should do now that she is married: "Every woman wants a baby. It's natural. You can't not want

a baby, unless you're sick" (10.11); "All normal women have babies. Even when they don't want to?" (10.16).

These stifling perceptions of femininity only make Danica more negative about her gender: she asks herself, "Then why wasn't I born a man? I want to do the same things he [my husband] does. Why can't I?" (10.8). A number of sentences later, Danica attempts to explain what she means by "I want to do the same things he does." She explains she wants a real life, wants to do something with her life (10.8). Despite the partial clarification, the sentence is not an example of Danica's strongest writing. Surely she does not want to do the same things he does: she does not want to be abusive, nor does she want to be part of the patriarchal system.

Danica rectifies this weaker moment in her writing when she explains her path toward feminism and describes the "real life" she desires. Her journey begins with her pitting herself against her gender: "Why am I always trapped? Because you are a woman. It is not a trap, that's just your silliness or your sickness talking. It is a normal woman's life, there's nothing wrong with that, there's just a lot wrong with you" (10.16). Danica writes through these feeling until she arrives at self-worth and expresses the strength she receives from her womanhood. Her self acceptance and recognition of her feminist grounding is evident in her fantasy life: "My dreams. Dreams of life: free. No father, no husband, no man" (10.2).

Here Danica echoes famed feminist and incest survivor Virginia Woolf. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf wrote: "Intellectual freedom depends on material things...That is

why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own" (116-17). Yearning to be in the position Woolf describes, Danica says:

> Different dreams. Dreams of enough wealth so I can live alone. Dreams of a world without male keepers. Dreams of a world where I can live free. But what does that mean when you are eighteen and terrified? I cannot imagine a world in which I can do what I want. The evidence is against it. All women I know are married or about to be married. I know a few widows, but they are married to the memories of their husbands. I know not a single free woman, not a single woman who lives alone because she chooses to. I am assured they do not exist. (*Don't* 10.6)

Woolf, unlike Danica, was able to cite examples of independent women:

> However, thanks to the toils of those obscure women in the past, of whom I wish we knew more, thanks, curiously enough to two wars, the Crimean which let Florence Nightingale out of her drawing-room, and the European War which opened the doors to the average woman some sixty years later, these evils are in the way to be bettered. (Woolf 117)

Danica, with the exception of her grandmother, does not have examples of women like Nightingale. In this respect, she is different from Allen, who depended on the women in her life to inspire her.

Danica describes turning to books in search of strong women to emulate. This encourages readers to respond differently to Danica's writing than to Allen's. Readers may feel less responsible for Danica's emotional well being because she does not look to them, "real" people; whereas, Allan had. In books, Danica finds the life she has been denied. About her beloved women writers, Danica tells Gzowski, "I came to this building

[the church] and I read for ten years. That's all I did. I curled up in a chair with a blanket around me and just read. I was looking for a story similar to mine, anything so I could find my way into my own story. Any hint" ("Elly" 120). In *Don't*, Danica explains how she finally comes to find a receptive community in women's literature: "Dreams of the box again. The lid nailed down again. Trapped forever. This is the way the world is for women. Fighting it makes me sick. Nobody understands my problem. And then a book understands. Betty Friedan understands" (10.21); "Reading. A new world. Reading women writers: Millett, Greer, Morgan, Lessing, Atwood" (*Don't* 12.2). In an interview with Helen Lenskyj, Danica further articulates how she became and remains an audience to these women:

> The first feminist book I read was Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique*, in August of 1970 when I was two weeks from giving birth to my son. All it did was create this enormous hunger. And then as Germaine Greer came out, as Millett came out, I had to have them. I couldn't wait for the paperback versions. I spent grocery money on them so that I could have them in hardcover right now! Lately I've been reading women novelists from the 1700s and 1800s, and I'm very interested in the relationship between women and patriarchal religions because I think that needs to be addressed. (9)

As she collects these women's books, she begins to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance that she had not previously experienced. In a sense, as she explains to Lenskyj, they become part of her audience:

> My life is basically my books, and I've collected quite a fine library. I'm always seeking out new titles by women. The kind of publishing that has happened in the past 15 years is just wonderful. It's a way to orient yourself in the world so that you

> feel that you're part of the world, instead of being always on the outside, never fitting, never finding people to talk to. (Lenskyj 9)

According to Danica, women's literature gave her a sense of belonging and support; in time, Danica would write her own inspiring story and thereby contribute to the nurturing literary community. The feminist bildungsroman quality of her incest autobiography gives readers a sense of hope: this is the survivor ending so necessary to the sub-genre.

At the same time, Danica almost appears mythic. Is it possible that a woman who was so oppressed, so alone, so desperate, could rise from the ashes, to use Fraser's image, and, in the self-made fashion Danica describes, be reborn as a first rate post-modern feminist writer? Her description of finding a life for herself in women's books is either wholly inspiring or feminist propaganda. The sub-genre of incest autobiography does send the message that anyone, no matter how victimized, can survive and, indeed, thrive. Danica's *Don't* does this. At the same time, Danica's book, overtly more feminist than Allen's and Fraser's incest autobiographies, promotes and, in one sense, may be a product of feminism. It is Danica's prerogative to promote feminism, but if she disguises the promotion as something else, as a bildungsroman or a miracle book, she compromises its power. *Don't* appears to be a miracle book because it seems as though Danica, without any writing experience, without even, as she says, intellectualizing it (Lenskyj 9), was able to, all on her own, create one of the most remarkable, imaginative, celebrated examples of women's literature.

What Danica fails to say in *Don't* is that she had help. She sent manuscript excerpts to Nicole Brossard, who was teaching at a women's writing workshop/retreat, West Word 1 (Williamson, *Sounding Differences* 346-47). Danica was accepted into the workshop. She told Lenskyj,

> The support in Vancouver from Nicole Brossard and from Libby Oughton [the publisher] at West Word was just absolutely wonderful–just being in an environment where there are all these women, and all we have to do is write, and all we have to do is come to terms with our work! It was a wonderful environment for this kind of manuscript. (9)

There is no way to know, of course, how much Brossard helped her with her manuscript. There is, however, evidence that Danica was not the fully developed post-modern, feminist writer she appears to be in *Don't*. In the sequel to *Don't*, her writing is not post-modern. Danica describes *Beyond Don't* as "another autobiographical work fleshing out the spare lines of *Don't*" (Givner 11). The fleshing out has made it, as reviewer Sheree Fitch points out, more linear (E21). Perhaps Danica simply wanted to change her experimental writing style, or perhaps Brossard was no longer guiding her. Further, when Williamson interviewed her, she expressed discomfort with her "questions from a theoretical background" and says she is "not sure she has a base from which to answer [the questions]" ("An Enormous Risk" 85). Perhaps, however, it is not that Danica was unfamiliar with feminist theory but that she thought it unusual that Williamson would approach a personal subject, such as incest abuse, so academically. Nonetheless, in the same interview, Danica also admits to having had no knowledge of post-modern and

feminist fiction at the time she wrote the manuscript ("An Enormous Risk" 82). It is difficult to imagine, however, how someone could write a book such as *Don't* without such knowledge. These things considered, Danica's mythic status, although pleasant to believe in, is as problematic as Allen's support of the FMS Foundation and Fraser's forgiveness of her father.

Influence and Structure

Although Danica does not address the specific influence of Brossard and other women writers, she does admit women have inspired her to write. In fact, before beginning the work on her autobiography, Danica was writing about women: European women in history. When she did begin writing *Don't*, she turned to women writers for literary inspiration. She admits Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "powerful, short book" *The Yellow Wallpaper*" influenced her (Givner 12). Aside from feminist influences, she was also affected by other cultures: she refers twice to the Chinese calendar: "Year of the Rabbit. Running from memory" (1.18) and "The Year of the Hare. The year of light in darkness" (1.21). She juxtaposes the Chinese calendar with the feminist myth most central to her autobiography, the story of Inanna: "Descent again. Follow the March hare. The Goddess Inanna on a meat hook in hell" (1.22).

What Simons refers to as a "Pseudo-biblical form of chapters and numbered verses" (42) is Danica's adaptation of Inanna's descent into hell. This unique structure

distinguishes her incest autobiography from Allen's and Fraser's. Until *Don't*, structure did not play as significant a role in the sub-genre. Danica began the practice of making incest autobiographic writing a "text of bliss" not just because of its subject matter but because of its *graphē*. Many of her chapters correspond to gates of the underworld. She also numbered the paragraphs to sequence her journey into the darkness of her childhood and early adulthood. The carefully ordered autobiography defies the disorder of Danica's youth and the turmoil of emotions she felt recounting her abusive past. The numbering technique also helped Danica maintain a writing momentum. As she explains to Lenskyj:

> I numbered the paragraphs so that I would not have the inner editor saying, "This doesn't work, this doesn't belong here," and I thought that, to keep it flowing from the gut and not have it as an intellectual process, the only concession I would make would be to number the paragraphs as I went through. (9)

Although her unique numbering technique helped her organize her memories and, because they mimicked biblical form, allowed her to grapple with religious issues as she does throughout her autobiography, it is her connection to the figure of Inanna that is most striking.

The story of Inanna is a perfect choice for Danica's personal and structural inspiration, because it, in itself, is a departure from both traditional male-centred life writing and Christian text. Diane Wolkstein, an authority on the goddess Inanna, refers to the Inanna myth as:

> The world's first love story, two thousand years older than the Bible–tender, erotic, shocking, and compassionate–is more than momentary entertainment. It is a sacred story that has the intention of bringing its audience to a new spiritual place. With Inanna, we enter the place of exploration: the place where not all energies have been tamed or ordered. (xix)

It is not canonical in the modern Western sense. In terms of culture, period, and subject, it is alternative. Danica stresses the importance of these qualities in an interview with Williamson. In response to a question about her use of the story of Inanna to structure *Don't*, Danica says: "I'm interested in recovering mythological structures with women at their centre because those myths have either been hidden or retold from a masculine perspective where we're erased or marginalized" (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 84). Danica saw Inanna as being buried and silenced by patriarchy. Inanna's plight, in this way, is similar to both the woman autobiographer and the incest victim.

The goddess Inanna was Sumer's most beloved and revered deity (Kramer xiii). Warley says, "In finding Inanna, Elly makes a connection with a culture that legitimizes and celebrates the female, one which inscribes female power" (76). Danica's connection is quite personal as well. Danica, as Allen did, exchanged the patronymic for a new name. Danica is a Slavic first name meaning "Morning Star" (Givner 11). Inanna is also Morning Star, as well as Evening Star, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, a combination of the Fertility Goddess and the Goddess of Love (Wolkstein ix, x). Givner suggests Danica might also have been attracted to the name Inanna because it echoes her mother's, Anna (12).

There are many more connections between the Inanna myth and Danica's *Don't*. The Cycle of Inanna, including "The *Huluppu*-tree," "Inanna and the god of Wisdom," "The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi," "The Descent of Inanna," and "Seven Hymns to Inanna" (Wolkstein xviii-xix), begins with young Inanna in search of womanhood, moves to her queenship, to the relationship with her lover, her descent into the underworld, and then her acceptance by her people. Danica's *bios* follows much the same pattern but with different emphasis. It begins with Danica's desire not for womanhood but to survive, moves to her objectification rather than her queenship, and details her relationship with the king of the house, her father the incest offender rather than the loving King of Sumer. Danica's life also parallels Inanna's in the next two stages: she, too, descends into hell, is reborn, then celebrated. In *Beyond Don't*, Danica describes her connection to Inanna in this way:

> The Inanna myth I used to structure *Don't* is about coming to terms with the darkness, facing my fears, making the descent into the depths of hell and trusting that it is both necessary and, ultimately, healing. My understanding of the myth is that is it about the process of giving up aspects of myself to profound life-renewing change: the quest for my self and my soul. (41)

In the end, with her deliberate structural paralleling of Inanna, Danica not only found a way to articulate the emotional trauma of an indescribable life; she did it summoning the spirit of the goddess.

Autobiographical Voice and Language

In the middle of writing her feminist historical novel on European women, Danica experienced severe writer's block (Simons 42). It seemed that her own story would not allow itself to be concealed any longer. She says that it had tried to come out even when she was a child.

> I knew I had to write this book when I was about nine years old. That was when I made my first commitment to write it. Then I went through a long period of approach/avoidance. I would think, "It's time to begin writing the book...No, I'm not ready yet," and that lasted through most of my teens and most of my twenties. Every now and then I would rent a typewriter, and then I would sit and type numbers because I was afraid of what the words would tell me about where I had to go next. (Lenskyj 9)

She was afraid of letting words guide her. At the age of forty, however, she conquered her fear and began articulating her life story. She wrote more than two thousand pages of journal entries in preparation for it (Williamson, *Sounding Differences* 346). As with Fraser and Allen, Danica's time consuming struggle to find her autobiographical voice points to the difficulty of articulating incest. Although it took many years for her to find her voice, once she did, she completed the manuscript for *Don't* in only three to six weeks (Williamson, *Sounding Differences* 346; Gzowski, Foreword ix).

She wrote, "I no longer know how to scream. Except inside" (*Don't* 1.7), and "I don't know how to tell" (*Don't* 1.10), but *Don't* is evidence to the contrary. The very writing of the autobiography, Danica admits, felt like a violation of sorts. She said it was

"very, very physical" (Simons 42) and told Lenskyj, "It [the book] sat on my upper abdomen. I felt like I was giving birth–very physically, not as a metaphor. As I worked through the process of writing this text, the pressure eased and I've never had the pain since. It was a very physical book to write" (Lenskyj 9). Danica transcribed her physical pain onto the very pages of *Don't*. In the third paragraph, she writes: "I warned you. You can't afford to feel. Pain will reach out of your belly and grab you by the throat" (1.3).

She immediately problematizes language by emphasizing the word, "Don't." It is not only the title of her autobiography, it is the first word of the book: "Don't. I only know this word" (1.1). Of course, she knows more than this word. The white lie is actually her truth: for a long time, she did feel as though she only knew this word. It also points to the difficulty of finding words which do not simply echo the language which maintains incest as a taboo. She explores her own lie of language and knowledge in the third sentence: "This is the only word I have ever learned" (1.1). It is not that she does not know more words; rather it is that she never learned more. Her learning, as with everything else in her life, had been restricted. From the introductory sentences in *Don't*, it is clear that Danica aims to learn more and use more words: "I cannot write with only this word" (1.1).

To "Don't" she adds "Pain." With her repeated use of these two words she immediately introduces two of the primary subjects of her incest autobiography: rights/power and agony. She also leads into the characterization of her father: for both of these words relate to her relationship with him. In the first seven pages, she has him

creeping into her narrative. She introduces the offender more quickly than Allen and Fraser did. Again, it was important for Danica to establish him as the monster of her book, from the beginning. After the one-word sentence, "Choking," she writes, "His hands around my throat" (1.3). She does not actually identify the man as her father until two paragraphs later when she writes, "Death looks like the man my mother married. His pants down. Kids don't remember. I was a four-year-old adult" (1.15).

She discloses the truth about her father through cacophonic words. They fall like hard and painful shards onto the page. In the first section, she writes one word sentences: "Beating" (1.17) and "Screaming" (1.17). Danica's style makes readers feel disoriented, even violated, if not by reading the crimes committed against her, by the words used to describe the crimes. This is one way Danica encourages readers to be witnesses rather than spectators. In an essay about *Don't*, Angela Roorda Winter says she thinks of the autobiography as emotionally entrapping readers (188). In "Women Speak Out," Ginger Curran explains how readers may come to feel vulnerable: "She introduces us to the horrors of her experience in measured doses, refusing to dress up her revelations with rationalizations designed to protect the reader's sensibilities" (30). Danica was offered no protection; likewise, in *Don't* she offers readers little shelter. Williamson believes "the writing itself violates the reader's boundaries" (*Sounding Differences* 79) and describes Danica's writing as

> an enactment in a language of a woman's pain; this embodied tortured knowledge is unmediated by a comfortable framing narrative that would provide the reader with a safe critical

> distance. Language is at the centre of Danica's remembering. Boundaries of language are exceeded by writerly suffering and the reader's horror. ("I Peel Myself" 139)

As Williamson notes, there is no framing narrative. The absence of plot sets it apart from Allen's and Fraser's autobiographies and highlights the *graphē*. Danica's use of language is as pounding as her father's fists: "He beats me for stupidity. He beats me for resistance. He beats me for stubbornness. He beats me because I don't cooperate. He beats me for insubordination. He beats me because I withhold as much as I can from him. He beats me because he likes hitting me" (6.13).

Danica adds to, as Winter calls it, the textual violation (188-89), by slipping in and out of her father's voice. Concerning this technique, Danica says:

> When I write, the first thing I want to know is: who's speaking? And in my book I wrote both from my father's voice and my own voice; and I find it very wrenching when I read aloud to have to go into his voice and speak from his voice, yet I remember his dialogue very very clearly; so it's not an issue of wondering if I've got it right–it's just having to take that voice into my body is really difficult. (Interview, "Once I Remembered" 93)

Regarding Danica's practice of quoting the suppressive male voice in her autobiography, Brossard says:

> All the time I was preparing that paper [on inner narrative], I thought of Elly Danica's book since after reading her manuscript, it became clear to me how much women's memory is occupied by males through the marks of terror and violence they have left on women's body and soul. The younger you are when men's terrorism destroys your integrity, the longer it takes you to clear your territory. When men introduce themselves in your life through physical or verbal violence, they literally break our inner clock; they stop our life, stealing both time and energy. Narrative is a key

> element to bridge memory and the present. Narrative is a way to put our inner clock back to the present, and that is why a lot of women use it even in their poetic texts. (63)

Although Brossard is suggesting that women use narrative to return to their own consciousness, Danica is subverting the process by returning to her father's in order to trace his abusive control, in order to, in a sense, establish when it was and what it sounded like when he broke her inner clock.

In mixing what Warley says are "The subversive, counter-discursive, 'female' textual elements" with "the repressive discourse spoken by the various figures representing the patriarchal symbolic order" (71), Danica provides shocking examples of a specific kind of narrative: verbal abuse. Her practice of writing the verbal abuse from the father's first person voice makes the violations even more vivid:

> She washes dishes. She's good at washing dishes. What else do we need her for? Why should I feed her? She's useless. I'll get a dishwasher, you plug them in, they don't talk back. She doesn't talk. Talk when I tell you. Smile goddamnit. Smile or I'll fix your face so it will do what I want. (1.6)

Danica spreads the verbal abuse throughout the autobiography, so its impact never fades: "Cooperate or I'll kill you. Do this or I'll hurt you" (1.7); "This is because you're ugly" (1.8); "Stupid cow. Stupid slut. Do what I tell you" (1.8); "Kid's got no guts. Kid's got no brains. Just a stupid cunt...no guts. No brains. Stupid" (1.16); "Say it bitch, or I won't be responsible for how hard I'll hit you" (6.10); "I'll do the bitch a favor he says. I'll get rid of this piece of shit. That's what you are. Shit. Garbage. Useless. Crazy" (9.11). His verbal abuse of her becomes the textual violation for readers.

At the end of her autobiography, she returns to the language she used at the beginning of it. The tone and specific word choice are different, however. In the Epilogue, Danica again uses one word sentences, but this time the shards do not feel like wounds. She uses appealing words: "Light," "Beginning," "Moon," "Woman," "Dreaming," "Free," "Self," and "Blessings" (*Don't* 105). These, as her subtitle suggests, are what she believes to be women's words. She does not end with textual violation: instead, there is sense of textual play. For example, she toys with the word "sentence:" "The sentence has changed. Once I could not remember. Now I cannot forget" (2.15). The word "sentence" could refer to both the line on the page and the processing of life in terms of law: a life sentence. Indeed, both have changed for Danica.

Reading *Don't*

Danica's incest autobiography, because it is a "text of bliss," is challenging and painful to read, not simply due to its subject but because of the textual violation, social commentary, and characterization. The latter two implicate society in general in the abuse. This is a second way Danica encourages readers to witness the abuse. It is as though everyone is victimized by the abuses of specific social structures, but everyone is also guilty of committing offences. Warley speaks to this:

> The world of *Don't* is our world. True, not all women are raped by their fathers or offered for sale like a used car, but I would guess that every reader knows and understands at some level

> what is going on in this book. And feels guilty. We are the father, the mother, the aunt, the sister, the nun/teacher, and all of the other figures in the text who have not actively sought to change a social structure in which the violence against Elly can be accommodated, explained, even normalized. (73)

Unlike Allen's book, which seems to encourage readers to feel nurturing, Danica's book encourages readers to feel afraid and guilty. Readers recognize their role within a society that has kept incest a taboo and, more generally, has kept children victimized. Warley says, "We cannot put the text aside and say, 'what terrible people', because those people are us. We are implicated. Skillfully, and ruthlessly, Danica reveals our complicity" (74).

Although Warley believes Danica has skillfully implicated readers, there are people who may not feel guilty after reading *Don't*, because, as mentioned earlier, her *bios* appears so traumatic. They may resist feeling guilty by dismissing Danica's articulation of trauma and alienation as exaggerated. Could anyone really encounter that many unsupportive people? Nonetheless, those who have written about *Don't*, have believed her and have experienced the uneasy feelings Warley speaks of. Gzowski says, "From two separate corners of my experience, in other words, the *ordinariness* of sexual abuse was made ineluctably clear. The statistics I had known vaguely as a journalist were no longer remote. The netherworld of horror was my world too" (Foreword xi). Danica, then, has attempted and, according to Warley and Gzowski, succeeded in diminishing the space between herself, the reader, and the offender.

Social Study IV: Politics

Danica encourages readers to feel implicated in the abuse, because without this sense of complicity, they would not feel as strong a sense of political urgency. Danica expands on this in her autobiographical sequel, *Beyond Don't*, published eight years after she had become a public figure. She says she decided to write *Beyond Don't* "to see more clearly the road I travelled in that time" (*Beyond Don't* 9). "This book" she writes, "is an effort to find answers, or perhaps, by looking back at the experience of the last several years, to find better questions" (13). Danica uses her *autos* to move past her *bios*: that is, she writes a "political document" (Winter 195) or as Carole Tenbrink calls it, "a manifesto" (41). Danica seems interested in redirecting people's focus from her individual experience with incest to society's experience. *Beyond Don't* is a political document, then, because, as Winter says, it operates as a "speak-out against a society that too often blankets the cries of the abused with complacent silence" (195). Her writing becomes more political when she speaks-out about society more than she speaks-out about her father.

She clarifies her political focus in her second autobiography by writing first about herself and then about community and society: from family to public life and on to public policies and initiatives. In the first chapter, she revisits the experience of committing herself to surviving incest and writing *Don't*, and in the last, she focuses on societal commitment:

> Yes, what we must do is difficult, very difficult, but it is not impossible. Yes, there is help–for working together we can do anything. Yes, it can be done, if we allow ourselves to care enough. Each of us has an important contribution to make. All we have to do is begin. Today. (151)

The subtitle, *Dreaming Past the Dark*, it turns out, applies not only to her own personal journey but to a public journey. As autobiographer, Danica directs readers to expand their perceptions of incest and incest survival. She confers a different meaning on the event or subject (Gusdorf 42). To do so, she makes "the transition from speaking personally to speaking politically" (*Beyond Don't* 95). Danica explains, "I wanted to see beyond my own story, beyond individual victims and perpetrators, to the social and political causes of child sexual abuse" (*Beyond Don't* 95). She is anxious to share the survivor voice with the community so that together they can initiate change. She takes her autobiographic writing in a different direction than Allen and Fraser took theirs. They remained more personal. Together, all three incest autobiographers, however, demonstrate how their books can serve multiple purposes.

Support

Danica was afraid her book would not be received well (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 82). Indeed, other incest writing had received negative feedback. Showalter, among others, Danica included, criticized Fraser's writing. Dorothy Allison's books, American semi-autobiographical incest writing, received bad reviews. Lynda Hart,

sympathetic to how the rejections must have made Allison feel, says, "There is nothing more painful than to have one's testimony go unheard, to lose contact with one's witness, to take a journey into the deepest recesses of one's memories and remember them believing that one is accompanied, and find oneself alone" (21). Hart may touch on one of the many reasons it took the incest autobiographers so long to write their accounts. Along with the pain of having to reflect on their incest trauma, and the difficulty of finding the words to express their abuse, they feared experiencing even more rejection.

More so than not being believed, however, Danica was afraid to publish her book because her father might have been able to profit from it. As a result, she did not do advance publicity, for it would have given her father time to mobilize against her (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 82). Her biggest concern was that the book would be another way for her father to abuse her: "Yes I was mostly concerned because I don't want my father to get his hands on any of this pittance that I'm going to make. I've always been *desperately* poor. Now I want whatever resources come from this book to be mine" (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 82). Just as she suspected, her father did, indeed, consult a lawyer about suing her for a share of the royalties (*Beyond Don't* 84). The other incest autobiographers did not have this fear, for their fathers had died before they wrote their books.

Although Danica's father continued to plot against her, the general public offered her support. Danica told Williamson, who was yet to write her own incest autobiography, that she experienced mostly positive feedback:

> The responses have been wonderfully affirming. The kind of warmth and caring that I get from audiences has been very empowering for me. I always do a question and answer session after the reading, and I hear that these are very empowering for the people and the audience. I think it's a fair exchange. (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 82-83)

Her incest autobiography ushered in a new bond, a fair exchange, a relationship she claims she did not encounter in her childhood.

The original edition of *Don't* sold more than ten thousand copies in Canada (Williamson, *Sounding Differences* 347). Within eighteen months of its publication, there were eight editions in print, and it was translated into German, Dutch, and French. McClelland and Stewart published a mass-market paperback (Danica, *Beyond Don't* 59; Williamson, *Sounding Differences* 347). Danica is, perhaps, the most well known incest autobiographer in Canada and *Don't*, extensively reviewed, received very high acclaim. Curran began her review by simply saying "This is a powerful book" (30). In a glowing review in *Atlantic Provinces Book Review*, Janet Baker wrote, "It transcends gender and speaks eloquently of the scope of the damage done to children by acts which essentially deny them their childhood as well as their sense of identity and worth. Her brave and economical revelations should be read widely" (12). Many other reviewers also consider Danica's writing eloquent, brave and economical. Warley described *Don't* as "a cogent, if depressing, account of how woman is inscribed as lack, as negative, by the phallocentric discourse that informs our culture" (70). As is obvious from both Baker's and Warley's comments, reviewers praise *Don't* for being an accessible feminist and political text.

These labels, however, need not limit Danica's audience, and, according to the reviews, have not. A highschool student from New Brunswick writing for *Canadian Materials*, suggested, despite her own young age, it is for adult readers, at the same time, highly recommending it, saying, "This book haunts you" (Cox 240). Further evidence of the incest autobiography's broad readership comes from a reviewer for the *United Church Observer*. She believes "Every congregation should have a copy of this book" (Pogue 45). With *Don't*, Danica has obviously reached many different people and offered them something they needed, valued, and appreciated.

The Exchange

In finding an autobiographic voice, Danica also found a supportive audience. Danica speaks to this:

> In some ways, making this public is part of the process of healing myself. One of the things that is most exciting to me is the number of copies of the book there are. To me that translates into people who know about this. It's no longer a secret. It's no longer a burden I have to carry forever. I'm no longer haunted. (Gzowski, "Elly" 125)

She no longer bears the burden of the secret. She told, and, unlike Fraser, the general public believes her. This is one of the most promising outcomes of incest autobiographic writing.

Her readers help her carry the burden of incest and, in return, Danica, in the end, lessens their burden by assuring them she is well. In order to leave them with this positive message, she has to first describe herself as unwell: threatened and victimized. In the end, however, she is safe and is a survivor. Her autobiography, then, includes details about her adulthood, as do Allen's and Fraser's. Warley sees Danica as the subject in the making: the oppressed subject changing into the forty-year-old woman (71-72). Danica uses her image in the mirror to show her changing subjectivity. First she says, "Who is it that looks back at me? I don't know who that girl in the mirror is. Where is me? Why don't I see myself in the mirror?" (8.4). By the end of *Don't*, however, she has answers to her questions: "Toward the mirror. Reflection of scars. Multiplied. Each scar holds a book. Reversed. Read it in the mirror. It is done" (105). Unlike in the beginning of her journey, now she has a sense of being. She tells Lenskyj, "The major thing I want to say with this book is, yes, it's difficult, yes, it hurts like hell, but it's worth it, it's really worth it! There is a future where the sun shines!" (9). She repeats this hopeful message to Gzowski:

> One of the things I wanted to do with this book was to say yes, it's survivable. No matter how horrible the hell you are in as a kid, at some point you can deal with it. You can survive. Once you come to terms with it, life is good. It's possible to have joy in your life. That's probably the most important thing I want to say with this book, and with talking about it, as well. ("Elly" 129)

For her readers, the people who supported her and felt her pain and even some guilt as they read her *bios*, she offers a kind of salvation, a message of hope and renewal:

"Woman. Dreaming. The mind. Freedom. Bestowed from within. Self. This night. No longer dark. Star messages. Silver and gold. Blessing. I dream. I love. I am" (105).

Conclusion

Danica asked "What can I say that would make a difference?" (*Don't* 9.10). The second, unstated part of this question, is "And how can I say it?" The answers are in her autobiographic writing. She has written "one of our culture's unspeakable secrets" (Williamson, "I Peel Myself" 133), but so have Allen and Fraser. How she has written it sets her apart and adds another dimension to the sub-genre. She helps readers understand incest and coping with incest on a personal and yet social level. How she has written it, with her unique structure and cacophonic word choice (the textual violation), has made the witnessing of it difficult and challenging. The sub-genre of incest autobiography continues to include "texts of bliss" because Danica has changed the *graphē*. Danica has also changed the relationship between readers and incest autobiography. For the first time, readers may feel implicated in the crime. This, in turn, may encourage them to disentangle themselves by making changes, if not by helping to change oppressive systems, by how they approach incest victimization and abuse disclosure. Writing the incest autobiography has changed Danica's life too. She now feels more extraverted. This was not the case in *Don't*. She says, "My dream does not include anyone else. I have no energy to bring anyone with me. No energy for relationships, not even with a cat or a goldfish. Alone. A

dream to stand alone and tall in sunlight. That is enough" (104). In *Beyond Don't*, however, she writes, "I want to live as part of a community" (154). She has made her incest autobiographies as much about community as her individuality. In doing so, she has added another dimension to the sub-genre and to her life.

Chapter 5. *Crybaby!*

In *Crybaby!*, Williamson challenges the stereotype of the sobbing child figure. She sends the message that it is not inappropriate for incest victims to be "crybabies" or self-pitying. She also challenges many other hollow or one dimensional images of children and women: the safe and healthy child, the professional woman, the maternal woman, and the hysterical woman. As Danica did, she expands the *autos* to include more than just herself. Unlike Danica, however, she does not extend the *autos* to the community but rather extends the community to the *autos*. She forms the *autos* out of her knowledge of herself and women in the past and present. The *autos* of *Crybaby!*, as a result, is a multidimensional figure, not just an incest survivor but a survivor on many levels, and, in fact, not just Williamson, but a composite of many women. She matches the diversity of the *autos* with the diversity of the *graphē*: she uses multiple discourses. She probes language possibilities even more than Danica did. Williamson combines research material with personal material. In doing so, she ruptures the conventions of both academia and autobiography. Williamson also probes the people in her life from a plural perspective. By looking at them from at least two angles, from the spectator's versus the witness's view, she sees society's impact on her life and on taboo. As with her predecessors, she uses an adult perspective. In fact, she relies on it. From the mature gaze, she analyzes traumas: her own, women's, academia's, and society's. She is at once a critic of and a character in her *bios*. Because of her innovative style and her use of critical material,

Williamson is unrelenting–not in her depiction of incest trauma but in her drive to rupture all proprieties. *Crybaby!* is, therefore, a "text of bliss." Unlike a "text of pleasure," it is not linked to a comfortable practice of reading. Instead, Williamson defies many of the conventions of the sub-genre that Allen and Fraser had established and surprises readers with her unusual approach to personal issues.

From Criticism to Autobiography

Williamson's innovative incest autobiographic writing has developed out of her critical writing on the sub-genre. An English professor at the University of Alberta, she was a critic of incest autobiographies before she was a writer of one. In 1992, Williamson read and published her response to Allen's, Fraser's, and Danica's autobiographies, clearly indicating her personal preference for Danica's *graphē*-focused, unforgiving account (*Sounding Differences* 138). In the next six years, Williamson continued to write about other women's writing. Perhaps because of her personal investment in incest narratives, she often focused a portion of her literary criticism on how women wrote about abuse. For example, in *Sounding Differences* (1993), a collection of interviews with Canadian women writers, she not only asked Danica about her method of writing about incest, she raised the issue with Brossard and Di Brandt.

Williamson's writing about other women's trauma writing gradually revealed to herself, her co-workers, and her readers her personal experience with incest. She told

Brandt that "Part of the process of a number of writers who are confronting incest in their histories is understanding that recuperating the memories is part of an integrative healing" (*Sounding Differences* 47). She included herself in the "number of writers" in her interview with Danica: "My own memories suggest the experience occurred before I had any language" (*Sounding Differences* 83-84). At this stage, however, Williamson was uncertain of the identity of the perpetrator: "I think it was a babysitter outside my family who abused me when I was a very young child" (*Sounding Differences* 84). In a later essay, written in 1994, she wrote:

> I am not the woman who cannot speak until she is five having had her tongue hauled out of her as an infant stuck with her father's cock. Or the stuttering girl who still recalls the shape of her mother's hands as they thrust deep inside looking for her mind now lost to her. I am not the woman who can spell out her pain to you. ("Writing Aversion" 223)

Williamson was that woman and girl but was not yet prepared to fully own the pain. The author's credentials at the back of her books are further evidence of her gradual realization of her personal stake in abuse literature. In *Tell Tale Signs* (1991), for example, Williamson is described as working on "a book of innovative non-fiction" (155). Seven years later, the innovative non-fiction became her incest autobiography.

Although in the beginning it was not even apparent to her, Williamson's scholarly work led the way to her personal work. Academia had given her the opportunity to meet other activists and feminist writers and develop her own critical and personal writing. During the first years of her York University education, she volunteered in the Women's

Press "social issues" manuscript group. She was arrested in 1983 for non-violent civil disobedience when she protested with her socialist-feminist action group against nuclear missiles, and in 1991 she co-founded Women's Action for Peace in the Gulf (*Sounding Differences* 369). As the title of her doctoral dissertation indicates, "Citing Resistance: Vision, Space, Authority and Transgression," she cultivated an interest in the literary and political activity of her peers (*Sounding Differences* 369). Williamson also co-edited a number of books: *Up and Doing: Canadian Women and Peace* with Deborah Gorham; *Dangerous Goods: Feminist Visual Art Practices* with Bridget Elliott; and *Women's Writing and the Literary Institution* with Claudine Potvin. All of her political and literary involvement was part of her endeavour to contribute to a women's dialogue that promoted peace and freedom (Williamson, Introduction, *Up and Doing* 12).

As early as 1985, when she took part in the same women's writing retreat as Danica did, West Word 1, Williamson wrote personally about her own experience with abuse. It was here that she began *Tell Tale Signs: Fictions*, a collection of prose, poetry and illustrations (*Sounding Differences* 369-70). Despite *Fictions* being the subtitle of the book, Williamson included four significant autobiographical details. The first is the detail of someone smashing into her fence at 2:30 a.m., March 29th, 1989 (139). The memory of this violation later resonates with her memory of sexual violation in *Crybaby!* (16). The second detail is the discovery that a group of miners were living in the Royal Hotel, the establishment her family managed at that time (*Tell Tale Signs* 144). She emphasized gender relations instead of potential abuse when she described the family arrangement in

Tell Tale Signs: "We wouldn't leave you with men. They wouldn't know what to do with you" (144); "There was one miner especially who missed his family. He really loved you and even babysat. We wouldn't leave you with the other men. They wouldn't have known what to do with you" (*Crybaby!* 20). The third example is a description of her first consensual sexual encounter. In *Tell Tale Signs*, she included more details about her partner and the experience in general:

> The first time she makes love, her body will split apart, her skin flushes with pleasure, while inside a sharp gasp heaves all her air into the living room. Her body, kissed into sudden death, stops breathing. At her side, a frightened boy struggles to make her speak but she wouldn't, couldn't open her eyes to tell him. She wasn't angry, she told herself, just acting stupid about all this breathing she had read about how you do it the first time and then, like swimming, again. Just breath, she told herself, her not listening body naked beneath her, afloat in his panicked arms. The clatter of the back door, his fearful path to the car, red top down, blue roof, chill air between her and the vinyl seat. A cold flesh shock and her mouth sputters to life just in time, she thinks, to avoid public knowledge and certain humiliation. This must be love. (144)

In *Crybaby!*, Williamson ends the passage with the second last sentence (59). Without "This must be love," Williamson no longer emphasizes the myths and ironies of young love and instead focuses on the difficulties of attempting to attain sexual normalcy after a sexual trauma. In *Tell Tale Signs*, Williamson also included a poem about her father's suicide that later appears in her autobiography. The 1991 version, however, is three times as long as the 1998 version, with sixteen additional stanzas. One line that does not appear

in *Crybaby!* reads "ten years precede this writing" (111). It takes nearly ten more for Williamson to publish her incest autobiography.

In "Writing Aversion" (1994), her last publication before *Crybaby!*, Williamson continued to write toward her autobiography, as Fraser wrote toward *My Father's House* with her fiction. Again Williamson reflected on Canadian incest autobiographers. This time she expanded her incest narrative study to include Warland's *The Bat Had Blue Eyes*, Potvin's *White Lies (for my mother)*, Prescott's *Mondays are Yellow, Sundays Are Grey*, and Hyrniuk's *Walking Inside Circles.* Aside from writing critically about incest autobiography, she mixed theory with more creative writing by including personal and poetic lines in the literary essay:

> This writing is difficult to present because it was impossible to write.
> This is not writing.
> I have nothing to present.
> This writing is difficult.
> To be present.
> I have nothing.
> I have nothing to present.
> This is not writing.
> I am present.
> I am difficult.
> This is nothing.
> It was impossible to write.
> I have pictures which are not present.
> A few scraps from the table.
> This is not writing.
> This is not quite what I had in mind.
> What I had in mind while writing: aversion.
> Let me in on the side of the voyeur please. (197)

In *Crybaby!*, she reduces this eighteen line poem to eight lines:

> This book was impossible to write.
> This is not a book.
> I have nothing to present.
> I have nothing.
> A few pictures.
> Scraps from the table.
> Impossible to write.
> This is not quite what I had in mind. (105)

In her autobiography, Williamson still expresses the anxiety of writing the impossible, but she is no longer a voyeur. Her aversions expressed in her critical writing and fiction have become her version of autobiography. Before *Crybaby!*, she was still able to hide behind the guise of literary critic. In an interview with Danica, she admits doing this:

> Maybe I disappear behind theoretical questions in order to hide the tension that *I* feel. When I was writing my paper [on *Don't*], I tried to reread your book. I started it again and again but was unable to continue. As a reader and literary critic, I couldn't get hold of your book. So in this interview, maybe I'm framing my questions in a theoretical way in part to protect myself. (*Sounding Differences* 85)

After more than a decade of writing, a delay similar to Allen's, Fraser's, and Danica's, Williamson is able to frame herself within, rather than in the margin of, incest autobiography.

Combining Academic and Personal Spheres: One Fluid Discourse

Williamson recognizes that in writing an autobiography that includes academic material, a variety of artistic expressions, and personal fragments from women's lives, she

is pushing against the boundaries that have kept the academic sphere and personal arena separate. She believes,"Certain kinds of imaginative thinking don't fit into traditional academy. All of the messy things that are left out of 'proper' intellectual work in an academic setting become problems" (*Sounding Differences* 51). Freyd, another incest survivor working in an academic field, psychology rather than English literature, is all too familiar with the censure Williamson speaks of. It was only after her parents formed the FMS Foundation and circulated a defamatory pamphlet to her colleagues and the media that Freyd felt it necessary to discuss her personal life, the messy things, and even then, she waited two years (Freyd 198). In the Afterword to *Betrayal Trauma*, Freyd explains, "This private meeting of the personal and professional was to play a role in touching off a heated public and political reaction" (197). As with Freyd, Williamson's academic training and position have familiarized her with what she considers to be the rigid structure and painful backlash of the academic institution.

Williamson's transition from critical writing that concealed autobiographical writing to autobiographical writing that includes criticism met with considerable resistance. Even before she published *Crybaby!*, she reflected on what she thought would be the forces against her, "the universe of public academic discourse [that] erases the topic" (Williamson, "Writing Aversion" 199), the forces that had, perhaps, delayed the writing of her incest autobiography. Williamson discusses this threat at length in the introduction to *Sounding Differences*:

> In the process of editing these conversations, some of the writers

> decribed their fear of public censure. Over the years I've been working on this book, my own life has been marked by several painful attacks in response to my feminist work. At the beginning of my teaching career at the University of Alberta, I had my backyard fence ripped down after teaching Erin Moure's lesbian poems. And last year, along with several other members of the university community, I experienced homophobic insults and misogynist death threats in the name of the anti-feminist murderer of the fourteen Montreal women engineering students. The death threats directed at me may have been linked to my activities organizing a women's peace group against the Gulf War–an ironically violent rhetorical response to a call for peace. What is certain, however, is the accumulated effect of these invasive threats. I am in retreat, sometimes too fearful to speak out. Intimidation, for the moment, has been effective. In listening to my own silence, I look back on these interviews and celebrate the power of these women's words. (xvi)

Williamson expresses how she felt silenced by what she deems to be patriarchal backlash against her feminist activities. At the same time, she stresses that she found inspiration in other women who were brave enough to break their silences.

Nonetheless, Williamson felt the backlash only increased when she disclosed her sexual abuse. She provides examples. At a lunch with a group of feminist scholars, she was told "sexual abuse and incest are inappropriate topics of conversation" ("I Peel Myself" 143). At a conference she attended in Bavaria, a woman expressed her obvious discomfort because Williamson dared to join the personal with the academic. The woman asked "How can it be that a professor would tell this story, so personal, so revealing? We never speak of this" (*Crybaby!* 43). Another critic, an interviewer Williamson does not name, "tells her two things are operative in her writing–a critical sense and a psychological sense" (*Crybaby!* 102). He then says her critical sense has been overwhelmed. Despite

her colleagues' resistance, Williamson continues to speak-out. Her story of the struggle to disclose incest is particularly interesting because the other incest autobiographers did not articulate this plight. They focused on their silent childhoods; whereas, Williamson focuses on her out-spoken adulthood. In doing so she expands the dimensions of the *bios* of incest autobiography.

More so than Allen, Fraser, and Danica, she addresses how she felt intimidated by the various forms of resistance. She describes having to convince herself she had the skills to write an incest autobiography. Williamson lists what she sees as her accomplishments: "I am a woman, a teacher, a good friend to some, storyteller to others" (165), establishing herself in the patriarchally closed frame of feminine achievement, but she does not give full credit to her creative power. Her editor, whom she ironically calls "Big Daddy" (166) and describes as "a round, somewhat famous, self-important man with glasses and 'good' books scattered across the room," only reinforces her insecurities about her writing (165). His reaction to her work, she explains, "is remote and unresponsive" (165). In this section of her incest autobiography, Williamson does not focus on the havoc incest trauma wreaked on her self confidence; she focuses instead on the pressure from peers, colleagues, and authority figures that made her question her writing talent, despite her obvious academic achievement (165-66). Perhaps comforted by the knowledge that other incest survivors have shown ways to write autobiographically about incest, Williamson feels more free to describe other traumatizing issues in her contribution to the sub-genre.

She disrupts her own hesitation and the weight of tradition (Butling 192)

by writing about incest but also by openly criticizing the university for its institutional pressures and investments. As with Danica, her definition of patriarchy appears to match Millett's. Williamson says she hesitates to use the analogy of an abusive father to describe the university, one example of patriarchy Millett provides, but it "does in fact embody a history of patriarchy, and the structures are organized in ways which make it very difficult for women to work in women-defined ways around women's issues" (*Sounding Differences* 89). In focusing on the patriarchal structure of the university, Williamson makes its relationship to incest narrative more pertinent. She writes about her belief that both the university and the family home have oppressed women. Williamson says "Feminist critics can be marginalized or alienated in universities, which remain marked too often by misogyny" (*Sounding Differences* xiii). Danica, in conversation with Williamson, agreed that the academy boxes in women (Interview, "Once I Remembered" 87). Despite what Williamson sees as the patriarchal force, "the old empire of fear" (*Crybaby!* 192), she finds a way to step out of the box of subservience.

She is determined to use her academic experience as a critical strategy in her work, but it requires manipulating two binary discourses into one fluid discourse. As Williamson explains:

> That's one of the very sticky problems of a feminist critic– you need to speak out of both sides of your mouth; you have this particular vocabulary which comes from our intellectual work and deals with a certain body of knowledge you work within, and you also have another way of speaking to issues and to texts which derives from a longer history, your own long history as a woman and in connection with women in

> the community and your friends outside your academic disciplining. The question of language is interesting for feminists since we have to develop a fluid discourse, so that we can translate easily from one language sphere to another. (*Sounding Differences* 87)

She recognizes the two spheres, and she wants to be able to translate, even bridge, the discourses. Her first step is to define her institutional training in the way critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak recommends to a group of women at a university conference:

> We cannot forget that all of us are in this room together because we *share* only one possible subject position, provided by the fact that we are in an institution...We are academics or fledgling academics in the most opulent university system in the world. Therefore, before we start describing ourselves as anything, we must acknowledge that something is going on here which produces a certain kind of unease. (209)

Williamson repeatedly expresses her unease, what she sees as her position of certain privilege: "This particular feminist reader/critic is a white woman who has had a fortunate education, a middle-class economy, and a painful memory of child sexual abuse. Is it appropriate to speak of this?" ("I Peel Myself" 143); she refers to herself as "the white feminist" (*Crybaby!* 72), "The White feminist academic with a stable, well-paying job has privilege and authority denied to many other women;" "A White bisexual bourgeois woman" who has both institutional privacy and public voice available to her (*Sounding Differences* xiii).

Expanding the *Bios*

Part of Williamson's fluid discourse entails including personal details in her academic writing and, in turn, including academic details in her personal writing. As a result, for an autobiographic text, *Crybaby!* is unusual because of its amount of critical material. Williamson quotes from an extensive list of sources. Reviewer, Mary Maxwell, refers to her ten page bibliography as "one long tortuous poem" (28). Williamson also integrates writers' lines into her own text: fragments from Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva, John Berger and Walter Benjamin, and many more. Further, she writes pages of critical inquiry on incest studies and literature. For example, she considers the impact of the eighteenth and nineteenth century's obsession with masturbation and the policing of children's sexuality as sexualizing the child rather than protecting the child (186). She raids the Internet for its material on incest (186-87) and looks at the often misleading information on incest on popular television programs and in women's magazines (182-83). Further, she comments on what other scholars, such as Jacqueline Rose, have written about child sexual abuse (188).

Williamson is an academic; her autobiography, therefore, is fittingly academic. Both of her subjects, her self and her incest, are affected by it. First, her autobiography is as much about herself as an incest victim as it is about herself as a cultural and literary analyst. Second, incest is not an isolated issue: it is one of society's many problems which

she interrogates. Because of the research aspect, her treatment of social problems is very different from Danica's more personal treatment of them.

Due to her academic approach, even to very personal subjects, readers may not feel as much like witnesses as they did reading Allen's and Danica's autobiographies. Williamson's research may impact readers in a similar way Fraser's weaving technique did: readers may be more curious with their approach and style than engaged, in an emotional way, with their stories. Although Williamson implicates much of society, readers themselves, likely do not feel implicated. Readers may have felt guilty reading Danica's incest autobiography, because she named specific people: fathers, sisters, aunts, priests, and so on. Many of her readers would be in one or more of these roles. Williamson, in contrast, names institutions and representatives of groups, more so than individuals, so readers can distance themselves by envisioning "it" or "those people" rather than actual individuals. Further, much of *Crybaby!* is about general injustices rather than the specific atrocities against Williamson's child body; therefore, most readers would not feel the sense of desperate urgency to somehow save the abused child. Finally, because Williamson speaks so much about her adult experience rather than her childhood experience, readers may feel she is less in need of their aid than a helpless child victim would be.

To make her autobiography as much about society as it is about herself, she adds other people's stories, women's in particular, to her academic material. She considers the implications of the posthumous publishing of Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*, a novel her father,

William Godwin, conveniently lost, because, critics suspect, of its incest content (122).[27] At the same time, she looks at other voices which have gone unheard: sixteen incest victims, in fact. Unlike Mary Shelley, however, these women are without notoriety: they are peers (39, 77, 79, 80), strangers (41, 71-72), women in her therapy group (191), and her friends, abused by her father (75, 78-79). In weaving these women's stories into her *bios*, just as she wrote Mary Shelley into it, she gives each voice an equal and safe platform for disclosure. She makes their *bios* part of her *bios*, and, in turn, their selfhood almost part of her *autos*. This is a kind of re-invention, although it is quite different from Allen's and Danica's re-naming and Fraser's alter ego.

Expanding the *Autos*

Williamson continues her fascinating re-invention in her section on Dora. She melds her *autos* with Freud's patient. There are obvious reasons why she chose Dora. Her case is considered an "urtext in the history of women" (Kahane 31), and, as Eric Erikson says, "all of us know the material by heart" (47). Critics such as Claire Kahane see the case as a text of "patriarchal assumptions about female desire" that "emerge from the desire of the interpreter" and "still carries cultural authority"(24-25).

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[27]Danica also mentions Mary Shelley in *Don't*: "Monster. Monstrous. Me. Mary, Mary, quite monstrous in my belly Mary Shelley. I know what you mean" (1.4).

Williamson is clearly interested in challenging patriarchal assumptions, authorial desire, and cultural authority, so she first interrogates psychoanalysis, the theory that silenced Dora. With the chapter title, "Fragments of Analysis," Williamson acknowledges the incompleteness and, therefore, destructiveness of Freudian theory while reclaiming women's ability to speak for and heal themselves. Under the subtitles Case I to Case XIII, she discusses the failures and successes of psychoanalysis and proves herself capable of beneficial critical thinking and self analyzing:

> Can't stop reading about the body and memory. Want to write more...about hysteria to blow apart the psychoanalytic mystification of desire and seduction. The equivocation in Freud's seduction theory masks fundamental refusal to validate women's stories of abuse. Memories of the crimes are so eagerly wiped out by both the perpetrator and desperate victims. (180)

Although Williamson probably confused the seduction theory with the theory Freud replaced it with, the infantile sexuality theory, her intentions are admirable. Through validating women's stories of abuse, she sought to mend the damage done by the grandfather of psychoanalysis.

She returns to Freud's patient and allows her to (re)write her story, the thoughts she was not allowed to articulate. Dora's story was scripted not simply by Freud as narrator but by her father, for "It was only her father's authority which induced her to come to me at all" (Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis* 22). Williamson imaginatively allows Dora the space to write about and validate her abuse. Dora, finally, can determine for herself what was normal and abnormal and what was abuse. When Dora told Freud that

Herr K, a friend of her parents, kissed her, Freud denied that it was abusive and labeled her aversion inappropriate behaviour: "This [a forced kiss from a man the age of her father] was surely just the situation to call up a distinct feeling of sexual excitement in a girl of fourteen who had never before been approached" (*Fragment of an Analysis* 28). Dora's father, too, was abusive. There is a question of whether he, himself, abused her sexually, but he certainly allowed his friend, Herr K to abuse her. Dora's father used her as a sexual pawn: he encouraged her to accept Herr K's advances so that he could continue his adulterous affair with his Herr K's wife (Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis* 86). Freud, however, saw Dora as lover and as attracted to her father, rather than as a child victim: "Her affection for her father was a much stronger one than she knew or than she would have cared to admit: in fact, that she was in love with him" (*Fragment of Analysis* 56). Williamson gives Dora the opportunity to address this and other traumatic issues in her life.

Williamson saw aspects of herself in Dora. Both women are amnesic about events in their remote past and inner and mental life (Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis* 23), suffer from aphonia (nervous cough and loss of voice) (*Fragment of an Analysis* 22), are bisexual (*Fragment of an Analysis* 61, 105, 120), and contemplate suicide (*Fragment of an Analysis* 23). Both have issues with their mother (*Fragment of an Analysis* 20, 23) and have adulterous (*Fragment of an Analysis* 32) and suicidal fathers (*Fragment of an Analysis* 33).

In the chapter entitled, "Adorable Dora (What Dora Had In Mind When She Was Writing)," Williamson explores many of these similarities. She transforms Dora's history into herstory. Dora had a debilitating cough:

> But attacks of *tussis nervosa*, which had no doubt been started by a common catarrh, continued to occur over the whole period. When at the age of eighteen, she came to me for treatment, she was again coughing in a characteristic manner. The number of these attacks could not be determined; but they lasted from three to five weeks, and on one occasion for several months. The most troubling symptom during the first half of an attack of this kind, at all events in the last few years, used to be a complete loss of voice. (*Fragment of an Analysis* 22)

Williamson also writes about Dora's coughing. In "her" journal, Dora says she "coughed all day in response to a frightful dream" (159); "Dora coughs and coughs until her head falls off" (160). Earlier in the autobiography, Williamson describes herself coughing in response to an incest memory: "She coughs and coughs 'til her head falls off" (61); "She coughs and she coughs and remembers touching her father's come" (61). By giving Dora the same physical reactions to memories of abuse, Williamson further validates her own trauma and finally validates Dora's. Williamson continues to substantiate Dora's memory of abuse by repeating what she has already written about her aftereffects and making them Dora's. She writes about her own "nocturnal violations" (16) and then about Dora's, in Dora's journal, "Nocturnal visitations fill out a part of me that is real and not quite real to me. I hear my writing repeat over and over this sadness" (163-64). As she repeats her sadness in Dora's writing, she strengthens her belief in her own memory and encourages women to trust in their memories of nocturnal violations/visitations.

She joins her life to Dora's and, therein, women's present situation to women's history, by describing herself and Dora in the same situations and attempting to heal themselves in the same way. Through writing, both women find a sense of peace. Freud denied Dora the opportunity to write, even though he believed she had a natural talent for it (*Fragment of an Analysis* 39). Williamson transforms the hysterical patient into an incest survivor/autobiographer by allowing Dora and herself the freedom to write their stories. She says, "Writing is a very good way to get myself out of the blues. The patter of fingertips while munching on stuffed grape leaves and lemon, chopped. Chunks of citrus membrane exceed despair in their sourness" (69). In the Dora chapter, she revises the writing image only slightly: "Writing will get me out of these low-down blues. The patter of fingertips while munching stuffed grape leaves and lemon, chopped. Chunks of citrus membrane exceed my despairing thoughts in sourness" (170). Williamson also repeats the image of tattooing the body (49-50) to re-emphasize that all women's writing is a writing of the body. In "Adorable Dora," Dora tattoos herself; now Freud is not the only person to write "on" her:

> But now he can't [come to me] and yesterday, I found my sheets bloody with cutting. The kind of stars my mother taught me how to make with the triangle crisscrossing through the centre sparkle, red across my breasts. Medals, I tell myself, medals of my own doing. My own secret battle–wounds and rewards at once. (163)

With her tattoos, Dora owns and expresses her wounds and scars. In saying that it was her mother that showed her how to do it, Williamson makes narratives of women's bodies their own rather than narratives scripted only by men.

She validates women's stories of abuse by freeing Dora to tell her own story. In a footnote, Williamson, in the guise of editor, illustrates how she includes all women in Dora's writing: "Dora explains how to write as an obscure object of bourgeois desire. She can only write in the third person even though she knows it is the first because in owning her history, her terror becomes something to be shared beyond the *I*. *She* does not avoid implicating *me*" (167). Williamson's explanation for using the third person has changed. Earlier in *Crybaby!*, Williamson attributed the use to her being cautious (127). Now, however, the third person is a form of group protest, not an act of timidity. Dora's terror is Williamson's terror, and for that reason, she writes about her experience as though it was Dora's. Their terror is also women's terror. *Crybaby!* begins as an autobiographical narrative, moves to biographical writing, and culminates in the writing of women's experience.

In the Dora section, Williamson was undoubtedly influenced by Cixous's play *Portrait de Dora* in which Dora is her own narrator. As Toril Moi says of Cixous: "she quotes, distorts, and displaces the 'father text' with great formal mastery. This technique enables her to create new interpretations of Dora's symptoms in a playful exposure to Freud's limitations" (182). As with Danica, then, there is a question of influence. Williamson imitates Cixous, and Danica may have had help from Brossard. Rather than

think of the questionable influence as an underhanded writing practice, perhaps it is more useful to think of it more as an empowering, collaborative effort. Both Williamson and Danica were interested in developing a unified feminist voice and supportive women's community, and sharing their voice, or more accurately, their authorship, with other women, is one way of accomplishing these goals. Nonetheless, there are two problematic aspects with such an approach. One, readers of autobiography expect the *autos* to be the writer whose name appears on the cover of the book. Two, Williamson and Danica do not actually give credit to Cixous and Brossard. Williamson does quote Cixous, and Brossard did write the introduction to *Don't*, but these are not declarations of input. If Williamson and Danica had more completely addressed the writing relationship they had with Cixous and Brossard, they would appear less as ghost writers and more as they are: part of the foundation of women's experimental writing.

Expanding the *Graphē* I: A Hybrid

Williamson's approach to *graphē* is as expansive as her approach to her *autos* and *bios*. She enlarges the autobiographic written language, even to a greater degree than Danica did, by using more than words, mixing genres, and playing with physical organization. *Crybaby!* contains story but is not a narrative. It contains letter but is not epistolary. It contains photographs but is not an album. Her mixing of genres won her disapproval. Williamson explains, "Prose publishers tell me it is too experimental–*Why not*

try a poetry publisher? Poetry publishers tell me the manuscript is especially fine, just not poetry" (*Crybaby!* 190). Considering the amount of experimental writing published in Canada, these are surprising rejections. Perhaps it was not just the mixing of genres that made publishers reluctant to accept *Crybaby!*. Perhaps it was the mixing of everything: genres, subjects, selves, lives. *Crybaby!* is an unusual book.

Nonetheless, it seems to be what Williamson imagined all along. Since the publication of *Sounding Differences*, she has expressed an interest in hybrid forms (*Sounding Differences* xii). As with Canadian writer Gail Scott, Williamson believes "the boundaries of genre are only there to step over" (Scott 74). Williamson's experimental writing includes unconventional margins, perhaps to emphasize, as she said of Brandt's writing, the relationship between writing on the margin and her writing's margins (*Sounding Differences* 41). Williamson does not necessarily fill a page, and she does not always use traditional font. Sometimes she enlarges words, sometimes she writes them in bold. At other times, the words are so faded they almost disappear, like an incest victim. She, as she credits Phyllis Webb with doing, uses space on the page to speak the "limits and that inarticulate part of what it is to be human" (*Sounding Differences* 331). As a result, *Crybaby!* has neither a conventional subject nor a conventional form. Further, it even looks different from other incest autobiographies. Williamson's alternate approach to *autos*, *bios*, and *graphē* really speaks to the differences between incest traumas and the articulations of them.

Expanding the *Graphē* II: Photography

"The space pain makes" (*Crybaby!* 33) includes photographs. Other incest autobiographers have also included photographs in their books: Randall in *This is About Incest* and Ashby-Rolls in *Triumph*. Photographer Patti Levey has an entire collection of self-portrait photography on the subject of her incest survival. Levey explains how her family used the camera to evidence their perfect family image:

> Within this system, the camera was a tool for denial, a way to prove to ourselves and the world that nothing was wrong. Every important stage of my life from birth to early adulthood was documented by the camera. I was photographed at every birthday, holiday, vacation and family gathering looking beautiful, happy, and perfect, but feeling angry and depressed. (62)

Now Levey uses the camera to articulate the truth rather than maintain the family lies. Warland, in her incest autobiography, uses photography as well, as a chapter title only, but Williamson had read and, clearly, was inspired by Warland. Allen, Fraser, and Danica did not include photographs in their books, perhaps in an effort to protect their family and friends from undue "exposure." Williamson offered protection, however, by selecting photographs which feature only herself and her dead father.

In the body of her text, Williamson includes seven photographs. She uses one photograph twice but prints it as a negative of the photo the second time. She also includes images of the backs of the photos, with the messages intact, all dated May 23rd/54. Concerning a dated photo, Barthes says, "it makes me lift my head, allows me to

compute life, death, the inexorable extinction of the generations" (*Camera Lucida* 84). Williamson was doing this as she isolated moments in one day of her girlhood. Because the back of the photos have their own page, they appear just as significant as the image itself. It is as though Williamson refuses to marginalize any aspect of memory or life.

The photographs serve five functions. One, they operate the same way Allen's and Fraser's more fond memories did. Williamson capitalizes on the normalcy of collecting memories in the form of photographs, for many people keep family albums. It is one of the few ways she appeals to readers on an emotional level. Two, she uses photographs for the same reasons Danica likes to draw. Concerning Danica's artwork, Williamson says "recovery and healing exceed the ability of verbal language to describe it" ("I Peel Myself"144). Photographs, as with all visual art, are one of the tools incest autobiographers can use to combat the difficulty Coe had spoken of: the problem of finding the words to express childhood in relation to sexuality.[28]

Three, the photographs allow Williamson to use her father's "voice." Whereas, Danica used her father's first person voice, particularly his verbal abuse, Williamson uses her father's writing. He "speaks" through the messages he wrote, perhaps coded, on the backs of the photographs: "She's waiting for the birdie to come out of the camera (14); "Isn't she a doll. Look at the expression on her face. Looking right at me (32); "See me in my new car? She says" (46); "Push me some more Daddy" (56); "My but don't I look

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[28]As discussed on page 8.

healthy" (94); "Peek" (158). The messages on the back of the photographs have a disturbing double entendre, and Williamson says she recognizes their sinister significance (*Crybaby!* 32). Further, readers see the offender's handwriting. The rare glimpse is an eerie form of witnessing.

Four, photographs help to substantiate an account. They, as Barthes explains, point to fact. After describing a photograph of himself as a boy that he does not remember being taken, he says, "I went to the photographer's show as to a police investigation, to learn at last what I no longer knew about myself. No writing can give me this certainty. It is the misfortune (but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure) of language not to be able to authenticate itself" (*Camera Lucida* 85). Photographs authenticate and offer a kind of certainty words cannot. In using photographs, then, Williamson is evidencing the incestuous abuse. At the same time, she believes there is a difference between certainty and truth. Photographs, in her understanding, can offer the first but not the second: "These photographs are not about finding 'the truth' of my childhood. They are a childhood. A possible account. Whether my father molested me will not be established" (*Crybaby!* 26). Williamson directly addresses the singularity of a lens. It has the same fallibility as history, even autobiography. All are simply one story, told from one viewpoint. In mixing the viewpoints, however, Williamson expands autobiographic possibilities, ways of articulating memory and corroborative evidence.

Five, the photographs afford her the unique opportunity to change the script. Williamson takes advantage of photographic manipulation. Technology makes it possible

for her to alter an image of herself and establish boundaries that in reality she was denied. Williamson calls this boundary making "Repossess[ing] my own" (*Crybaby!* 33). She explains the liberating process:

> First I scan the image into the machine. In revising the photographs, I can make myself disappear...I take the little girl first, lasso myself right out of my father's photograph. All my edges are fluffy. My torso, indistinct on the left side, blends into the white-frilled border. When the girl/I disappears, the remainder of the photograph tells a story of retribution. She/I takes part of father with her. The girl's arm, now absent, cuts into her father's leg like a sword. (33)

In playing with the photograph, Williamson discovers control. She can control her image, move her own body, and she can punish her father with her bodily presence and absence, unlike when she was child.

Including photographs in her incest autobiography has allowed her to exercise many creative options. She is, in more than one sense, the experimenter Olney wrote about.[29] In the chapter entitled "Snapshots," Williamson experiments with different, photography inspired ways of writing about abuse. She notices, that "moving words from one page to the next reduces the story to snapshots" (17). She begins the chapter with three quotations about photography (13), the back of a photograph (14) and the words, in enlarged font, "Out of the Camera" (15). Out of the camera, like "out of my skin" (16), as she writes on the fourth page of the same chapter, her abuse seeps into focus. Williamson

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[29]As discussed on page 33.

describes the seepage, "the leaking through" (60), as "scraps of prose"(17), as though the memory of her incest and the writing of the memory come together in scrapbook fashion.

She includes three kinds of snapshots in the chapter of the same name: dated memories, like the photographs themselves; undated, written snapshots; and numbered figures/photographic tips. The dated, written snapshots, unlike the childhood photos, are of Williamson in her adulthood: March 29th, 1989, for example. In them she describes confusing days, when she could not distinguish between dream and reality (16) or between fiction and autobiography (21-23). In her undated, written snapshots, Williamson begins with a sentence, in bold, upper case lettering, much like what would be on the back of a photo: "Months later, the second telling comes out of my head" (28); "Who is behind the camera? A loving father?" (26). What follows are very visual descriptions of moments in her life: "Only his back is visible. A man stands in front of a bassinet or changing table, the whiteness of the plastic quilted to embroidered shadow" (18). She refers to the lens of her mind (28) and writes, "Like a photograph, this moment freezes into instant appearances" (18).

Williamson ingeniously explores every nuance of photography by also including actual quotations from photography manuals. She uses statements about photography that, out of context, serve as statements about child abuse: "Always watch your back-grounds. They can make or break your pictures" (20). With the hyphenation of "backgrounds," she makes the statement both poetic and foreboding. She also disperses Figures as though they directly relate to her photographs and text: "**Figure 1 Nowadays,**

the aim of a family photo is to show members as they really are, natural and unposed. In such pictures the camera is ignored as the subjects relax and attempt to be themselves" (25); "**Figure 3** ***Children****: Being like young animals, children are popular as photographic subjects–especially, and understandably enough, among parents who like to keep their offsprings' early looks recorded*" (28). She then adopts this factual, presumably highly credited voice–as she lists in her Works Cited, the voices of photography manual writers such as Thomas H. Miller, Wyatt Brummitt, and Eric de Mare–to describe, not photography, but her un-picturesque past:

> **Figure 4 This photograph is not documentary**
> This photograph is a visual signal of the unsayable. The story of incest may be hidden from him. The handwriting is familiar but these family photographs are not incontrovertible. The certainty of identity marked by visual likeness is unsettling and made ambiguous by his words. (29)

In adopting the style but not the message of the photography manual, Williamson not only satirizes the tone and the way in which the manual writer wrote of children as props but subverts a voice of authority. She uses the serious but exploitive hobby voice to articulate the serious and exploitive crime of incest. Most importantly, Williamson reverses the gaze. The male photographer/exploiter no longer captures the child in his lens. Her various ways of integrating photography into her book give her another kind of language to work with and is proof of her ingenuity; she is indisputably talented and clever: evidence that incest abuse has not destroyed her. Her creative *graphē* is a form of a

distraction as well, and, therefore, operates in the same way Fraser's mediating narratives and voices did.

Expanding the *Graphē* III: Non-Patriarchal Language

Williamson has a keen interest in language for a number of reasons. First, it is a product of one of the systems she sees as oppressive; therefore, she views it as one of the things she must rupture. Second, as an academic, she would be familiar with using a particular kind of language, one not necessarily conventional in an autobiography. She wants to somehow make her voice hers rather than an institution's. She has to heal not only herself but language (Buss, *Mapping Our Selves* 145): recover both. Healing language involves disrupting patriarchal language, moving beyond its rigid frame (Diaz-Diocaretz 132) or the weight of it (Brossard, Interview, *Sounding Differences* 71).

The relationship between language and breaking the silence is, as Williamson explains, complex and, initially, difficult:

> I write I did not experience incest and feel abject, ashamed at my lack of courage. I write nothing, and am saddened by the blank page. I write nonsense and am aggrieved by this play of dissimulation. I write. I find myself dissolved into these letters which you hold in your hands. (*Crybaby!* 42)

Here, Williamson echoes Danica, when she described first only being able to type pages and pages of numbers. In order to resist patriarchal limited language, Williamson, must find a language that does not further silence, repress, or conceal her darkness and the

darkness of incest. In short, she must not use the language she daily sees repressing girls and women.

She recognizes the trap of a gendered language: a language that makes her humiliated, shamed, submissive, and passive (*Crybaby!* 67). Williamson observes how a patriarchal limited language shapes the way people perceive each other: how women look at women and how adults look at children. She cites a girl eating a popsicle as an example: "One girl sucks a popsicle suggestively. Or is she merely sucking? Is this 'merely' in a world where to suck means nipple or cock? The soda jerk smiles into his faucet" (68). Williamson sees the girl through a patriarchal/sexualized language and understands how it twists her sight, her perception of the innocent child.

She further interrogates the effects of language as she looks at the use of the pronoun "she" in one of her poems in which she juxtaposes consensual sex between adults with the incestuous sex in her childhood. The phrase "she takes off her pants" appears three times in the poem (37). Williamson, within the poem, addresses the complications of such a line: "[the figure in the sentence "she takes off her pants" does not escape her]" (37). Her use of "she" is an expression of self possession, even control, perhaps empowerment: the figure takes off her own pants. At the same time, the figure, because she removes her own pants, sounds as though she is a willing participant. Further, despite the "she" in the sentence having some control because she undresses herself, Williamson has temporarily suspended control of the *autos*, as she does quite often throughout

Crybaby!. She distances herself from her "self" in the autobiography by referring to "the figure" in the third person rather than in the first person.

The opening line of the poem stresses the power and control of a patriarchal limited language: "He puts words in her mouth" (37). The irony of such a statement is not lost on Williamson. The man who put his penis in her mouth is responsible for giving her language. Williamson endeavours to distinguish between what words came from the father and the words a woman can independently own. She sees her father repeatedly interrupting woman's language. Even at his funeral, he inhabits her mother's language: "The shadow of my father passes through her words" (111). Since childhood, Williamson has struggled to possess her own words. Despite her efforts, adults denied her the power of articulation: "You talk too much. This little girl won't shut up. You talk over the other students, interrupt the teacher. Can't stop in the middle of a sentence since you've already jumped ahead into another. Talks too much–excellent student, but she talks and talks and talks..." (40). In telling her she "talks too much," patriarchy limited Williamson's language and attempted to shame her into silence. She did, indeed, feel silenced, despite her verbosity, for even though she talked and talked and talked, she was unable to talk about what she needed to, to say that she was an incest victim.

The "Words too big for speech" (*Crybaby!* 107) that Williamson needs to use in *Crybaby!* are those required to rupture phallogocentric speech. She desires a language that "bubble[s] through the glassy sea" (*Crybaby!* 107). The sea is patriarchy–ironically the same body of water that literally drowned her father. So that Williamson does not

drown with him, she must find a language that fits her skin and her story. It must be a language that expresses her womanhood and the aftereffects of her incest.

In a simple exercise of reading between the lines, reading the silence, or seeing what bubbles through, Williamson exposes both her unconscious and the trace of incest in her "free" writing. Inspired by two fragments she scribbled on a page, "jelly babies" and "Daddy's girl," she quickly writes an autobiographical short-story about a shopping trip with her father. Initially, she uses complete sentences to describe what seems to be an innocent excursion: "As we promenaded by the candy counters, women would coo about my good-little-girl looks, pressing gum balls and jelly babies into my sticky palms" (22). After writing the story, Williamson uses psychoanalytic literary theory to gaze at the holes of discourse and discovers, as she says, that "language floats its own secrets" (22). She then engages in deletion and highlighting. The words that float to the top tell this story:

> Father provided his own kind of pleasures...he sent me running
> from him in tears...exceptional moments of pleasure...take me...
> his shoulders...parade through...candy...coo...good-little-girl...
> pressing...balls...jelly...into my sticky palms...hot...warmed...
> embarrassed...wet against my forehead...this memory of father/
> daughter pleasure...an everyday exchange... (23)

In looking at the play of language, Williamson also observes the secrets: the ability for language to hide and disguise, lie and, at the same time, disclose. Williamson uncovers the potential of language, while disclosing the horror of incest. She also addresses particular issues of writing as it relates to memory which Allen, Fraser, and Danica did not touch on in their incest autobiographies.

Williamson engages in a deliberate interrogation of language. Perhaps inspired by Danica who told her she had a dictionary project in mind–"It is clear to me that women are written *out* of the dictionary" (Interview, "Enormous Risk" 84)–Williamson exposes the limitations of language by "rooting in the dictionary" (*Crybaby!* 126). She looks up words and transcribes many definitions from the authoritative *Oxford English Dictionary*. Scattered throughout her autobiography is a kind of glossary: definitions for cry, crybaby (9), collect (11), aversion (41), tattoo (48-51), monstrous (95), depress (101), depression (102-4), ektomy (126), fallible, fallopian (130), and infertile (139).

Williamson attacks the authority of the *Oxford English Dictionary* by tracing over the definitions. In *System and Structure*, Anthony Wilden explains, "Whoever defines the code or the context, has control" (294). Williamson seizes both code and context and, in doing so, breathes life and fluidity into the words that she depends on to represent her. Among dictionary definitions of tattoo, for example, she includes her own definitions:

> tattoo the tattoo is large enough to remove his touch from her skin. she tries exotic animals along her forearm. trunks and tails swing between her breasts. the supple limbs of marsupials and lithe snakes curl at her ankles. along the creases of her toes, fine life-lines of night animals make useful interventions in charcoal. the bracelet of friendship carved in the north winds around her wrist, disguising his grip. none of her menagerie escape. (48-49)

She begins to reclaim her body by articulating the abuse while she reclaims language, not just by using it but by infusing it with her experience. She takes the sparse sentence fragments of a definition and lengthens them into a descriptive, personalized meaning.

Williamson further personalizes words by adding her own form of prefixes: for example: "incest tattoo needle-sharp images under the skin" (48). Further, out of one word, "ektomy," she develops a chapter of the same name, and in it, expands and claims as her own the definition "to cut out" (126). In control of at least this word, she reverses the damage of a patriarchal limited language that made her own body sound foreign: "Explaining in a language she could not understand, surgeons grew eager to empty her body" (131). In rooting, writing, rewriting, redefining, and destabilizing, Williamson develops an empowering language of her own, an idiolect of sorts. Here her focus is not on incest victimization and survivorship but on language victimization and survivorship.

In the process of owning her body through language, Williamson also uses taboo words. Danica had done the same. Allison explains the need for taboo words in the writing of her own incest narrative:

> I started saying those words to get that release, that feeling of letting go, of setting loose both the hatred and the fear. The need to tell my story was terrible and persistent, and I needed to say it bluntly and cruelly, to use all those words, those old awful tearing words. (42)

Williamson works against dis-articulation in the same way: by choosing the words that are blunt and cruel. Unlike her childhood, now she controls the words that once described her abuse: "As soon as he jammed his cock in her mouth, she was upwardly mobile, gaining altitude" (59-60); "She coughs and she coughs and remembers touching her father's come" (61); "His penis is so big it burst her body" (65); "I remember my father pushing his cock into my mouth"(66); "Now I'm less certain of the cock's identity" (70); "He touched

her here and here and put his cock there and there" (121). Ironically, in using the "blunt and cruel words," Williamson turns them into, as she describes, "Clouds of letters [that] hesitate then rise" (*Crybaby!* 173). The very words that had kept her victimized and held her down, she redirects. She says she feels a sense of "altitude" (10, 55, 60, 165, 170).

Expanding the *Graphē* IV: Corporeal Language

At the same time, Williamson keeps her language grounded in the body, more so than the other three incest autobiographers. She describes it as being "lined with flesh" (167). The body that was once silenced by her father is now the body that speaks. She depicts her memory of incest as "Her body's stories revisited" (61). Her body had been frozen (71), but now she uses corporeal language to write life, warmth and sensation, back into it. To emphasize the body-writing, she uses a passage from Marian Engel's *The Tattooed Woman* about a woman who literally writes on the body:

> The blood looked very satisfactory. She took the blade out of her razor and washed it. Neatly and very lightly, she carved a little star. Experience must show, she thought. She carved little stars shaped like A's on her arms, and then she got up the courage to make curves. She did not cut deeply. She was not interested in hurting herself. On her breasts she made lovely arabesques, on her forearms almost unnoticeable cross-stitchings of little houses and trees. They did not show very much, but she knew they were there and was comforted. (49-50)

Engels's character tattoos her body, as does Williamson. The difference is in the medium: Williamson uses paper rather than flesh.

In the material that focuses more specifically on her incestuous abuse, she writes about the shifting ground of her body (*Crybaby!* 18): the movement from her father owning it to her self-possession. Her body had been tattooed before, not by her own hand but by her father's. This marked body was her childhood body. Looking at a photograph of her young self, she says "the mouth looked smaller than I could have imagined" (65). With this realization, she not only addresses the horror of her father forcing her to perform oral sex, but points to the inability of a child to speak out against the violation.

As an adult, Williamson is free to image herself. At a workshop, she is instructed to re-imagine herself in a drawing:

> I give myself a huge single eye/I suspended over a neck the texture of barbed wire, a Victorian collar so painfully tight it keeps the head/writing-I afloat no matter the storm. Torso, slippery green frog skin, a body to slide through the watery places. Spine, molten thread of crimson breath escapes the vaginal lips--furious, speechless fire. The right foot on this body, no more than an amputated stump, imagines itself "pinned down," a child caught writhing. The right foot remembers what is lost. This phantom limb sprouts wings. (*Crybaby!* 71)

As Williamson imagines it, the abused child, symbolized by the right foot, is farthest away from the head, the eye/I that limits remembering. The barbed wire represents both Williamson's effort to carefully filter her memories, and, as is clear from the description of the Victorian collar, society's effort to prevent her from speaking about sex. The torso is

the body that is becoming her own. It is still not her skin but it is changing, and her vagina is ready to speak in its own way, not with words but with furious fire. For Williamson to possess herself, she must repossess her sexual organs. Later in the autobiography, Williamson describes her torso as "a ship sailing through sharp coral-edged corridors, an ample empty vessel to support her thinking head" (140). The image of her torso remains constant: it can transport/transform her. The abused child, as is clear from her drawing, is ready to be recognized and, as the wings indicate, is preparing itself to move forward.[30]

In writing her body, Williamson addresses the multiple traumas in her life. She juxtaposes the trauma of incest with the trauma of infertility. She writes, "A blank spot in the middle"(17) to symbolize both her hysterectomy and the loss of her childhood. As with incest, as Williamson describes it, infertility is also a taboo subject. She analyzes the painful issue by distinguishing between a woman's inability to bear children and society's perception of infertility: "She will not...she can not bear children. She is rendered infertile–*not fertile; unfruitful, unproductive, barren, sterile*" (139). The first is a recognition of what a woman's body is able or unable to do; the second is a judgement, a condemnation of a woman's body.

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[30]Fraser and Danica have also written about their severed bodies: "That is an illusion, because only my head went to college. My severed head" (Fraser, *My Father's House* 120); "Only my head is alive. Only a small part of my head. I have no body. There is nothing alive below my chin" (Danica, *Don't* 6.15).

Initially, Williamson subscribes to society's perception of infertile women. She thinks of herself as "the woman who might have been a mother had her body not betrayed her" (134). She relates her infertility to the legacy of abuse:

> Each time her body fails her, she is about to have a child, the first time, by birth, the second by desire. Perhaps she should read the signs backwards: each time she is about to have a child, her body cracks open as though warning her of what is to be lost or gained. She imagines this vulnerability will be the death of her.
>
> In the end she will remain childless, explaining it is less dangerous this way? (145)

She temporarily accepts defeat and wonders about her role in life now that she is infertile:

> And what of the mother who writes, the writer who thinks and mothers? Or the woman who weeps in the name of the child she never births? *I think Mother. I weep and write.* The death of my child is imaginary. Pregnancy never occurred. Birth escaped me in spite of hot pursuit. I am she with the will to mother–she who mourns her failed desire and watches the children at the playground. There is no consolation for the woman who witnesses despair at a distance. (142)

Williamson slowly realizes, however, that her infertility, like her incest, is not a measure of the distance between herself and her body but between society and her body. "She is rendered infertile" (*Crybaby!* 135) but it is simply a label, as with so many of the other crippling marks of identification in her life, from crybaby to incest victim.

Williamson begins to resist prescribed maternity, just as she resisted prescribed patriarchal language and prescribed academic and autobiographic writing, and just as Danica resisted prescribed femininity. Williamson "arms herself against the male lover's desire for a child" (139). She thinks of the woman who miscarried and looked "for signs

as though the fetus could speak in the lost language of flesh and blood" (139). Unlike this woman, Williamson grows to realize that neither language of flesh and blood nor the possibility for her to become a mother is lost. She heals herself not just by writing about incest and infertility but, as she describes at the end of *Crybaby!*, by adopting a child (194). Adopting a little girl not only proves she is not destroyed by her infertility, it shows she does not believe betrayal will reoccur.

As Williamson writes about the process of healing from incest, she describes her body as gaining strength. She even imagines it as powerful enough to fight her father by purging/birthing: "With her tongue pressing him away from her, she would eat him like the sea. Her throat will spew forth his body, tanned and sometimes beautiful" (63). In the end, her body achieves a kind of fertility, independence, and iridescence that proves its resilience:

> In the pool this body's passage mesmerizes in the glass ceiling's rèflection. I swim through an evening glow of canyons watching her/me from below: arms melt aspen clouds; ample belly, breasts shimmer up and down mountainous ravines. This body she knows, remote and sometimes beautiful, is hers and yet not quite ever hers. Skin gleams through roof, then fades to pale sky light just below the water's surface. (170)

Her body is reborn and empowered. In *Spaces Like Stairs*, Scott asks, "What of writing and the body? Not the body as object, to be observed, described, but the body as pulsion, rhythm, and ...vehicle of memory" (16). Williamson has found a language that reveals both the sensuality and strength Scott describes. She re-writes her once objectified body.

Characterization of Her Lovers

Writing her body and writing about the aftereffects of incest would be incomplete if she did not include information about her intimate relationships. Similar to the way Fraser braided her lovers together with her father, Williamson emphasizes the emotional trauma that lingers from her incestuous abuse by juxtaposing descriptions of her father with descriptions of her lovers, even though, with the exception of her husband (as discussed below), her lovers were not abusive. Following a memory of her father forcing her to fellate him, she writes:

> Afterwards she knows part of the pain is her love for him,
> the feel of his hands all over. Afterwards she remembers she
> hates the smell of rye whiskey. His smell. His uncaring
> abandonment to his own pleasure.
> The waking dream: denial
> I'm making it up. Imagining it. She imagines her lover will
> abandon her. *Why?* He asks. She is a wound, sliced thin
> and bleeding. She is damaged and will not heal. (66)

She could be saying she loves her father or her lover. The "him" is indefinite. As Williamson says, "bodies become interchangeable and singular" (167). "Whiskey," "uncaring," "abandonment," and "pleasure" are all words that relate to her father. And "making it up," as well as "imagining it" are accusations used against incest survivors. Just when it seems clear that she is talking about her father, she mentions her lover. She joins father with lover, however, by carrying the roots of "imagining" and "abandonment" from the sentences about her father to the next two sentences about her lover. She ends

reflecting on the aftereffects of abuse which make her feel vulnerable in her new relationship. By making it difficult to tell if she is referring to her father or to one of her lovers, Williamson implies that she finds it challenging to trust men and relationships in general–a difficulty, she says, that has her needy for male attention (166) and yet makes female lovers "safer prospects" (139).

Her father, although literally dead, still continues to control her body and, therefore, her physical relationship with lovers. When she is engaged in intercourse, he invades her conscious:

> This afternoon, we make love. My lover is intense and passionate and I am remote, inside–not glacial but alluvial. Shifting, flat, not quite substantial. My father is the image on the wallpaper. He is my perimeter and peripheral vision. I am not safe. My fingernails bite hard into memory, the palm of my hand. (99)

Although he cannot physically abuse her body, he still manipulates her physical being. She cannot free herself from his control. And in attempt to excise him from her memory, she inflicts physical pain on herself.

Williamson details the numerous effects of incest on her relationships, but she also describes a successful union. This union is a break from the more traumatic moments of her autobiography, but she does not entirely abandon the subject of trauma. She experiences this happy relationship not in spite of her victimization but because of it. She writes, "One's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another," and then quotes Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience*: "Trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another,

through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wounds" (*Crybaby!* 147). Williamson's lover suffers from the aftereffects of being abandoned twice by his mother. They see the world and each other through their experience of abuse, and they make it beautiful:

> This morning your hands fit like a rough mitt. The curve
> of her stomach shows a T-bone trace of scalpel and kiss. When
> you describe how the navel looks just like the eye of the round
> in the butcher's map, she knows you are made for each other:
> carnivorous and hungry. (151)

"Rough," "scalpel," "butcher," "carnivorous" and "hungry" are hard, formidable words carried over from the lover's knowledge of abuse but combined with "morning," "curve," and "kiss," they take on a new, more mutually tender meaning. Williamson's and her lover's common bond of trauma makes them feel restored and temporality invincible:

> Nothing can stop us now that we've listened to what ails us
> and doesn't, how it is we came to be here on this earth-bound
> edge of spring, within sight of a red planet flashing this message
> that we read to you–this overdue recognition, a remedy called
> love. (148)

The description of the relationship is another, brief narrative moment when Williamson is appealing to readers on an emotional level. This relationship gives both Williamson and her readers hope, and, for that reason, she uses "you" to address her audience directly. The "you," however, could also be the abusers that have tortured both lovers by depriving them of healthy relationships. With the happy message of love and the use of second person, Williamson sends a message of victory.

The relationship, although successful, does not last forever. As Williamson says, "Romance is for always and ever only sublime romance" (152), and her *bios* cannot accommodate such sublimity. Her lover accuses her of "always sexualizing intimacy; she feels as though she is damaged goods, too sexually demanding and excessive, too reductive in her desires" (149). Again, the aftereffects of incest interfere with her relationship. Nonetheless, by including the fragment of happy love in her incest autobiography, she proves joyful and healthy relationships are possible. Williamson writes, "It could be worse: we might have ignored the whole damn story" (152). As with Allen and Fraser, she will not permit her story of incest to overwhelm her story of life.

Characterization of Her Husband

Williamson's *Crybaby!* is not a Childhood: that is, she does not chronologically describe her life from childhood to adulthood. Instead, she uses an adult perspective throughout to describe her present life. There are, as a result, more details about her adult life than her childhood: her academic life and infertility, for example. Nonetheless, the descriptions of her present life are infused with details from her past: the aftereffects of incest. She details the relationship with her husband as she did her relationships with her lovers. She characterizes her husband in the same way Danica did, as an extension of her father. Her husband continues the abuse: "She had married a man just like her father–a

bargain with a past to ensure the future suffering" (131). When they discover she cannot have children, "his love dissipates" (131). He tries to drown her in the bathtub:

> His hands, now powerful weapons, hold her body underwater. Bruised and urgent, she kicks and kicks: her left foot then the right smashes into faucet and handles. As her head pushes to the surface for frantic breath, he catches her frightened look. (132)

He leaves her feeling desperate and victimized, begging him to love her again (133). Williamson does not only write about her victimization, however, for that is against the principles of the sub-genre of incest autobiography. She writes about her escape. She survives by leaving her husband (133), just as she had left her father when she was sixteen: both times she ran from "the proximity of the paternal" (*Crybaby!* 34). Despite saving herself physically, she has not yet surpassed the emotional aftereffects of abuse. Recognizing survivorship is a process, as is her autobiographic writing, she writes toward it.

Characterization of Her Mother

Williamson is most concentrated on the aftereffects of incest when she writes about her lovers and husband. It is these moments in *Crybaby!* when her other ambitions for her autobiography are less pronounced. In her characterization of her mother, she is also very focused–not on the aftereffects of incest but, as with the other incest autobiographers, the impact of family abuse on the mother and the relationship between mother and daughter.

Through the course of writing *Crybaby!*, Williamson seems to grow to understand her mother. Buss says Williamson also grows to understand herself: "What Williamson gives us is not so much her self, her story, but rather she allows us to participate in her process of making sense of herself, her story" ("Balancing Acts" 218). Such is the case with Williamson's approach to her mother: she begins with only "the shadowy traces" (*Crybaby!* 11).

She introduces her as a spectator: she is the woman looking at her husband through a car window, her high heel shoe left beside Williamson's tricycle (11). She approaches her mother from the outside in. First, Williamson establishes her mother's place in relation to the offender: gazing at him. She takes photographs of her husband and child: seeing but not seeing. In one, she shifts the lens so that her husband "takes up his central place" (31). Second, Williamson establishes her as feminine in appearance, a trait she stresses again in the chapter about her, entitled "Pumps."[31] She says her mother's world is one "Of rites and shoes. Of fashion and life terms" (85).

Third, Williamson looks beyond her mother's picture-taking and fashionable appearance to expose a woman whom she says, "drifts with ease into bitter dependence" (88). After the initial, superficial characterization of her, Williamson, as the three other autobiographers did, describes a woman whose life was as traumatic as her own. She had

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[31]It is interesting to note that when Williamson is sick she refers to her body as "her fashion body"(128). At her weakest, Williamson is bonded to her mother.

had an abortion (87), married, gave up her job (88) and gave birth to Williamson when she was twenty-two (85). Her second daughter died shortly after birth (85, 87). Williamson explains, "for decades, my mother mourns her baby's death" (87). She was also "demoralized and too frightened" by her husband's temper (88). In the end, she left her husband because of his adultery and alcoholism. Now, according to Williamson, her mother is full of "mind-numbing despair and anguish" (85).

Her mother is a victim. Her victimization, as with Allen's, Fraser's, and Danica's mothers' victimization, causes her to be estranged from her daughter. Williamson provides examples of this estrangement. She says her mother once told her, "I forgot I loved you so much. We grew so distant" (90). She describes a woman who was often insensitive:

> Mother tells me one of her truths when I am grown up and 38. She says she wishes her daughter had been retarded. She turns to me and says she wishes I had been "retarded." She says she is relieved I am childless and *barren*. It is *easier this way*. She says she believes she–the mother–is an *infection*. She believes a hazardous epidemic will be reproduced through her children and her children's children. *It would be easier if you were retarded. You don't deserve a child.* Already I have too much: a house, a car, a job. *What do you need with a child*? (90)

Williamson addresses many of her mother-daughter issues in this paragraph. She begins by using a derogatory tone: "Mother tells me one of her truths." She does not value her mother's truths. She cannot accept her mother's condemnation of her and her mother's desire for her to have been retarded. Williamson then interprets the desire. From one

perspective, it seems her mother blames herself for spreading the disease of abuse. Had the child been retarded, she would not be as affected by the disease. Although, she believes she allowed the disease to spread, she now wants to prevent further damage. Williamson herself echoes this disturbing philosophy later in the autobiography: "*Childless. Scarred for life*, but it doesn't feel like a scar. More like fate or leaving home, an exit from the suburbs and house-wifely duties. A way out of my mother's sadness, her screaming sleepless nights. What were my chances of winding up hating or cursing or wishing him dead?" (136). From the other perspective, Williamson seems to feel her mother is both begrudging her her successes and condemning her for them. Clearly, Williamson struggles to understand the sometimes hurtful, sometimes irresponsible, sometimes senseless facets of her mother.

Williamson's problems with her mother, as she explains, originated in childhood, when her mother was incapable, because of her own victimization, of protecting her. As her mother descended further and further into depression she became less opposed to her offender/husband. Initially, her mother did offer some resistance. As Williamson explains, when she was a child, her father touched her thirteen-year-old friend's breasts. Williamson told her mother, an early sign of trust and faith in her, and her mother responded by looking upset, leaving the room, and shouting at her husband: "M isn't a woman but a girl" (75). At the same time, Williamson notes, her mother did not "identify the iceberg" (75). She questions her mother's awareness: "Peering through the car window, does she catch a glimpse of 'something funny'?" (26).

Williamson seems to digest the information about her mother as she writes it, so in the last third of the book, she seems much more compassionate, understanding, and accepting of her mother. In writing about her mother, she has come to recognize her as a co-victim. Williamson writes about their budding relationship: one filled with give and take, where they find strength in one another. For example, she says her mother cancels a vacation and visits her daughter in her time of need instead (124). When Williamson identifies her father as the abuser, her mother gasps (65). When Williamson describes the details of the abuse, her mother shares her own victimization with her:

> In response my mother cries out her heart and wails, *Oh my god Jan. He did that to me too. He used to hold my head until I thought I would suffocate all our married life. My body was like meat. Was meat. He never touched me with affection or love. He grabbed my breasts. He grabbed my crotch. I am still humiliated and shamed by my submission, my passivity, my...* (67)

The articulations of their shared abuse bring them closer together: they find strength in one another. Williamson recognizes they were both "yearning to fly" (*Crybaby!* 91).

Characterization of Her Father

Although Williamson's interrogates many issues of subjectivity and institutionalism, *Crybaby!* is still an incest autobiography. Her focus on this particular trauma is evident in the characterization of her lovers, husband, and mother, but it is, of course, no more apparent than in her characterization of her father. Nonetheless,

Williamson still maintains a critical perspective. She does not simply disclose him as the offender; she attempts to perceive him as society would have then to understand him despite public opinion. Her characterization of him serves as a microcosm of society's relationship with taboo. Williamson approaches her father from the outside in: from appearances to his fatal flaws. Through this method of characterization, she changes readers from spectators to insiders: from tourists to witnesses.

She begins much in the same way Allen did, by saying he was charming (27), beautiful (62), and aggressive (27) with a powerful voice (27). He was a stylish, attractive man by society's standards, with his moustache smile (26), tanned body (62, 114) and zoot suit (49), an ambitious entrepreneur, who was "sometimes too-zealous and unethical" (27). He managed the Hudson Bay department store in Ajax, Ontario, but near the end of his life, lost his job (27) and was investigated for his corrupt business deals (107). Despite his corruption, Williamson says he had "wit. Wild energy. Musical joy. Love of parties and celebrations, friends and beautiful places" (124). There were times when he appeared loving to Williamson: singing to her (89, 98), playing the piano for her (98). Sometimes, she says, "he was marvellous" (95). He is not the monster Danica described her father as being. Williamson's brother depicted him as having "aristocratic ideas" about his family (*Crybaby!* 116) and as inheriting "a sense of goodness" from his father (118). Williamson uses this public opinion to characterize her father, including in it, the patriarchal, unquestioning, gaze of her own brother.

Williamson provides information about her father, however, that his peers would not have known or taken notice of. He made racist comments (114). He drank too much, and "his partying could 'get out of hand'" (98). His inappropriate behavior became abusive when he threatened to kill himself (106) and damaged physical property (89). When Williamson was six, he tossed her in the air and broke her arm (89). She describes his "stupid and selfish disregard for others" (119), especially women. When his wife, for example, returned home from the hospital after their three day old baby had died, he asked, "How can you trust anyone who bleeds for a month and then refuses to die[?]" (88).

Williamson writes about his sexual deviance. Again she slowly reveals his offences. When she saw him sunbathing in the nude, he looked at her with intent before laughing at her discomfort (64). Williamson describes a number of scenes from her childhood like this one that felt sexually ominous. For example, going for a drive with him, despite appearances, was not a pleasant family trip:

> Often he drove a convertible, white roof open to the summer sky. The seats always smelled of cigarettes. Sometimes of come. The back seat smokes, sings schmaltzy love songs. His hand smooths the curve of her shoulder, performing a cha cha, or tonight, the samba. Hips swivel on command to the tune of any patio's rye and Coke. (95)

She writes, "He was upon her" (108). She explains that she knows her father abused her at least once and "perhaps again" (66). She has what she calls a waking dream when she remembers him holding her head while he suffocated her by jamming his penis into her

mouth (65-66). The memory of the incest is so strong, she loses control of her bowels (61).

Williamson juxtaposes her "facts" (*Crybaby!* 19) with popular opinion: the witness version versus the tourist version. He "appeared marvellous to others" (96). In a letter, a childhood friend says of Williamson's father, "sexuality exuded from every pore" (96), but she does not see this as a negative attribute:

> I mean, your dad handled the world as if it were flesh, you could see the way he ate, or played the piano, or danced, he was sexuality incarnate. Is it possible he didn't actually do anything purposeful but that as a child you felt this current and were repelled? (96)

Because society often celebrates men's sexuality, men who handle the world as if it were flesh, Williamson's friend is more willing to accept the father's sexual excesses than to substantiate the daughter's fears. Williamson's step-mother is equally unprepared to blame him for anything. At his funeral, she screams: "He's dead. What have they done to you? Oh Vic, what have they done" (*Crybaby!* 112).

His suicide, a type of spectacle, makes it difficult for Williamson to separate the tourist vision of him from the witness vision: "Dead he is made monstrous–that ambiguous two-headed beast of a word meaning *incredible marvel* and what *warns* and *predicts*" (95). She uses the word monster differently than Danica did. Williamson's father drowned himself at the age of forty eight, twenty years before she wrote *Crybaby!* (97). She says, "My father's death complicates my 'new knowledge' of his molestation of me as a child"(98); "In abandoning me by drowning, he leaves me distraught" (110). At times,

dealing with his death takes precedence over dealing with his incestuous abuse of her. In fact, the first time she mentions her father, Williamson alludes to his suicide rather than the sexual molestation: "I see the father I remember, a man who found he could not live long" (11). She says, "This suicide makes his story impossible to tell" (105). His death temporarily forces her to focus on one taboo rather than the other. As a result she "resent[s] his drowning" (111). When Williamson describes the "The shhhhh sound of the ocean" (107) he drowned in, she not only adds to the imagery of his death but suggests a silencing with the whisper sound. Her father took what he knew about his crime with him and postponed Williamson's articulation of it by redirecting her mourning, forcing her to grieve for him before she could grieve for her childhood.

In order to correct the imbalance, to permanently replace the tourist or marvel image of her father with the witness image, Williamson imagines herself killing him a second time: "When I killed him, remembering" (64). In writing her incest autobiography, the witness account, she buries him in the book's pages: "The dead father is buried again" (109). She completes this burial in her father's cottage, for it is here where she edits *Crybaby!* She takes possession of her life while exorcizing him from his space. She fills the cottage with her possessions and plans to raise her own family there. She will teach her daughter to float, to swim in the space her father once owned (193-94). She begins her survivorship journey after, as she describes it, she, herself, narrowly escapes drowning: "After an initial gasp for air, this body turns inside out with surging vomit, as though to empty out the words. Finished, I am purged and enabled" (171). Similar to Fraser's use

of the flight of the phoenix and Danica's description of the journey to and from hell, Williamson uses drowning/surfacing imagery to convey her rebirth.

Conclusion

The title of Williamson's autobiography serves two purposes. She interrogates these purposes in her first chapter, which is also named "Crybaby!" After citing two definitions, one of "cry" and one of "crybaby," she says, "To cry is to address a listener" (9). She makes a sociological and literary point. Concerning the former, Williamson addresses the tragic tendency for adults to ignore children's signs of pain. Concerning the latter, every cry, every story, needs a listener, an audience, or reader, otherwise it remains a story rather than an autobiography.[32] By finding a reader for her autobiography, she secures a listener for herself as crybaby, despite those, who Buss says, "will gain distance by turning the title back on its author with its exclamation mark well aimed to lay blame on the victim" ("Balancing Acts" 218). The "listener" Williamson has found for herself as crybaby is different from the listener most crybabies need, however. The academic quality of her writing does not elicit an emotional response from readers, and it is an emotional response that crybabies require to sooth them. There is, then, a subversive quality about her title. Although it appears she is being a spokesperson for crybabies, and it appears that

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[32]As discussed on page 32.

she is labeling herself a crybaby, she does not write in a way that encourages people to empathize with her.

Near the book's end, Williamson writes:

> The "child" in me is not a child at all, but simply someone who wasn't heard. In our culture, the figure of the child has a lot in common with the woman who speaks into the wind; in spite of experience and accomplishments, the problem of legitimacy persists. The culture's unwillingness to listen to those imagined as less worthy of a voice is not about scale and chronology but a crisis of language, power, and the body. (176)

With her autobiography, Williamson finds a "listener," albeit more so for the woman than the child. She challenges language by exploring the limitation of patriarchal language and expanding autobiographical language. She challenges power by disclosing her abuse and bridging the academic with the personal, despite resistance. She challenges the body by writing her own, and Dora's too, so that women's bodies are no longer written for them.

Crybaby! is an autobiography, but it is in the form of a sociotext. Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz defines a sociotext as "the multiple dimensions of a given discourse in which external hierarchies are dismounted or accepted, and a new dynamic order [is] proposed from the internally contextualized critical attitudes towards those hierarchies" (117). Sociotexts disrupt the world's plots (Meese, Introduction 2). In opposing patriarchal limited language and form and resisting the boundaries of academic and personal writing, Williamson has dismounted numerous external hierarchies and, thereby, resisted plots. She has also resisted plot in the most literal sense. As with Danica's *Don't*, *Crybaby!* has no framing narrative. In fact, it appears impossibly structure-less. In this way and because

of her expansive approach to *autos* and *bios*, Williamson has proposed an alternate way of writing autobiography. Diaz-Diocaretz explains that sociotexts integrate rather than exclude elements that seem incompatible (141). Because *Crybaby!* is a sociotext, Williamson is able to use poetry and prose, definitions and photographs, Freud's text, critical text, and personal narrative. Williamson looked for relations of opposition–mourning her father and accusing her father, for example–and used strategies of resistance, whether in creating a survivor discourse or a personal yet academic text. She unsettled stasis (Diaz-Diocaretz 118), as "texts of bliss" do, so, at least within *Crybaby!*, language can represent women, narrative does include women's abuse, culture does allow survivors to articulate violence, and society responds when it hears someone crying.

Chapter 6. Conclusion: No Small Story

Allen's, Fraser's, Danica's, and Williamson's incest autobiographies have made both a social and literary impact. Socially, they have given incest victims an alternate way, other than on talk shows and in social science books, to publicly articulate their trauma. The similarities in the autobiographers' aftereffects of incest abuse also validate the once silenced victim. In terms of their literary impact, the similarities in their writing form the foundation of a new sub-genre and serve as models for trauma writing. At the same time, their difference in style accommodates the uniqueness of the *autos*, *bios*, and *graphē*, ensuring that neither surviving incest nor writing about trauma appears monolithic. The four Canadian incest autobiographers not only put faces to the once secret crime of incest, they breathed life into their hitherto stolen bodies by writing their own bodies of experience and therein developing a rich poetics of incest autobiography.

Reasons for Writing

Their reasons for disclosing their incest in the form of autobiographic writing are primarily social rather than literary. With the exception of Fraser, all said it was both to heal themselves and others. Allen, at age twenty-nine, received word that her father had sexually abused her niece (*Daddy's Girl* 259). She said, "It brought everything back; I felt as if it were all happening again. I wanted to help but there was nothing I could do. I was

driven to examine my past as I had never done before to see why I was living the way I was, why I felt the way I did, why I was the person I was. I finally faced Daddy" (*Daddy's Girl* 259). She wanted to understand her life, but in the Preface to her autobiography, she also said she wrote about her incestuous abuse in order to help others who were looking for answers and explanations. When Fraser was forty-eight, she remembered her incest, and when she was fifty-two, she published her articulations of these memories (*My Father's House* 220). She said her intention was to heal, integrate, and perhaps write a book (*My Father's House* 245). Danica, too, intended to heal through writing. At the age of forty, she wrote to prove something to herself. She also, however, wanted to reach out: "Survival. Dreaming with a pen in my hand. Writing. Writing. Writing. Who will hear me?" (*Don't* 13.6). Williamson, at the age of forty-seven (*Crybaby!* 57), wanted to "recognize 'the facts'" (*Crybaby!* 19) for herself, as well as for women across time: "This book is also about a collective history longer than my own" (*Crybaby!* 11). As adults, after they had begun to heal from their father-daughter incest, they turned to autobiographical writing for the purposes of personally understanding their trauma and socially educating readers about abuse.

The Social Impact: Strength in Numbers

The similarities in the autobiographers' accounts of incest and the aftereffects of the crime validate incest victims' experiences. Readers bear witness to the aftereffects the

survivors have in common. They see the evidence. Literary evidence of child sexual assault had existed before the publication of the incest autobiographies but not in this personal form. The social science literature on incest began the practice of tracing patterns in child sexual abuse victimization and developing profiles of the victims and offenders. Profiling from the first person versus profiling from the third person has a distinct advantage, however. The four Canadian autobiographers, writing intimately about their own experience rather than objectively about the experience of others, transformed a professional discourse of psychological variables (Haaken 1072) into a subjectified experience. The personal articulation of incest and its aftereffects, as opposed to statistics about incest, makes it difficult for society to ignore the abuse or be apathetic about it.

According to the social science literature on the subject of incest, common post-assault consequences, the aftereffects of incest, include psychological, somatic, behavioral, interpersonal, cognitive, self-perceptive, and sexual problems (Gilmartin 97, 168-70). The four incest autobiographers described their personal experience with these aftereffects. Allen, Fraser, and Danica wrote about their fear of monsters in the dark (*Daddy's Girl* 1, 91, 155; *My Father's House* 8-9, *Don't* 11.2) and their nightmares or what Danica called "devil dreams" (2.19) (*Daddy's Girl* 82-83, *My Father's House* 212, *Don't* 2.19). They wrote about the somatic complaint of gynecological pain. Such pain, according to therapist Martha Utain, was somatized in childhood and manifested itself in physical symptoms in adulthood (xii). They are, incest survivor, Judy Grahn, says, the physical metaphors of pain (111). Allen described feeling like her insides were coming out

(*Daddy's Girl* 129-30). Danica alluded to the massive tumour on her ovary (*Beyond Don't* 24). Fraser and Williamson mentioned their hysterectomies (*My Father's House* 213, *Crybaby!* 138).

The autobiographers continued to document, and thereby validate, their experience with incest. Allen and Danica wrote about their substance abuse, a behavioural change. Allen described living on a diet of Dramamine and Coca-Cola (*Daddy's Girl* 130), and Danica said she made "a career out of taking pills with alcohol chasers" (*Don't* 11.3). The interpersonal and cognitive aftereffects the incest autobiographers experienced are evident in the descriptions of their relationships with their mothers, fathers, and siblings. They wrote about their sexual difficulties with their lovers. They described their altered self perceptions: their split personalities, eating disorders, and suicide attempts. Allen referred to an alter ego (*Daddy's Girl* 94-95, 111, 125, 142, 181, 256); Fraser discussed her split personality at length. She and Danica mentioned their problems with eating disorders (*My Father's House* 101, *Don't* 11.3). All four of the autobiographers wrote about their suicidal tendencies (*Daddy's Girl* 67, 78, 91; *My Father's House* 197; *Don't* 9.12, 11.9; *Crybaby!* 153).

The similarities in their aftereffects, the details of their *bios*, not only validate their own experience but the experience of incest victims who have not been able to articulate and, thereby, share their experience. The public disclosure through the medium of autobiographic writing leads to personal and social empowerment, because the writers

have allowed themselves to write about their secrets and have given readers another resource.

Literary Impact I: The Similarities

The autobiographers used many of the same writing strategies in order to articulate their aftereffects. There is an undeniable coherence between the narratives. All of the autobiographers fully characterized both parents, wrote for the witness not the tourist, and emphasized survivorship as much as victimization.

They struggled to understand their mothers. They first depicted them as co-offenders then came to understand them as co-victims. The characterization of their mothers balanced their narratives so that the offending patriarchs did not control their life stories as they did their lives. It also expanded the *bios* of the autobiographies to include details not only about their individual lives but the lives of other women who did not have a voice. The autobiographers made characterization of the mother important to the sub-genre of incest autobiography.

The incest autobiographers wrote for the compassionate reader, not for the apathetic consumer. To make their stories meaningful to people who have daily exposure to abuse accounts, predominantly in the form of talk shows, they had to break from that culture by offering discomforting material. They had to create "texts of bliss" rather than "texts of pleasure." If they could unsettle readers by giving them material that made them

sensitive to the subject of abuse, angry for the victims, and emotional about the injustice, they would be appealing to the witness in readers rather that than the tourist in them. After encountering these books, readers should not be able to return unchanged to their daily business. They should feel changed by the experience.

To elicit a witness response, the incest autobiographers had to write specifically about the abuses they suffered. At the same time, they wanted to ensure, as Danica has said, that their books would not be "picked up and used in...[a] pornographic sense" (Interview, "An Enormous Risk" 80). The rape scenes, therefore, were written from the victim's perspective rather than the offender's perspective. Opposite to pornographers, the incest autobiographers made it impossible for readers to believe the victims enjoyed the abuse. They were clear about the offences they suffered: "I counted down the minutes on the face of the bedside clock and tried not to hear the noises he made or the things he said, or his mustache scratching my skin, or his mouth and hands and hateful body" (Allen, *Daddy's Girl* 119); "For the first time, penetration is attempted, though it is by no means completed. She feels as if she were being repeatedly punched in the belly, forcing all air from her lungs" (Fraser, *My Father's House* 43); "Before he makes the world go dark again he says: say you like it. I turn my head away from him. He is on top of me. There is no place to go" (Danica, *Don't* 6.10); "A man stands in front of the bassinet or changing table...He is touching the baby somewhere: her genitals?...from vague anxious fears to various corridors of pain" (Williamson, *Crybaby!* 18). They were detailed about their

feelings and surroundings. After reading about fathers raping daughters, readers should feel the sense of helplessness, anguish, and entrapment the victims endured.

To make witnesses of their readers and thereby ensure their books would elicit personal if not social change, they had to make their stories of pain painful to read. Williamson believes Danica has accomplished this: "It's as though the reader symptomatically experiences the pain" (*Sounding Differences*, 79). Danica is the most descriptive about the scenes of abuse. She said her intent was to "present on paper this experience with no space between the text and the reader. No distance" (Interview, "An Enormous Risk" 79). To do this, she made use of the second person pronoun: "Take your beating. Don't whimper and snivel. Don't cry. If you cry he beats you harder and longer" (6.11). Readers feel violated by Danica's textual violation.

Williamson is the least descriptive. She, knowing her predecessors had disclosed incest and had elicited empathetic responses from readers, was more interested in broadening the scope of incest autobiography. In this way, Williamson's autobiographic writing, as Lundgren says of Warland's, builds on preexisting feminist work (243). Williamson focused less on specific incestuous scenes. Readers may still feel her pain, but it is distributed over a variety of issues: incest, her father's suicide, infertility. Further, Williamson reshaped the *autos* in order to write more generally about women's experience with trauma rather than specifically about her incestuous abuse, so readers do not feel as connected to the isolated child victim as they do in the other incest autobiographies:

A curtsey appeared as a depression marked by her skirt. As

> soon as he jammed his cock in her mouth, she was upwardly mobile, gaining altitude. Or at least that's how it feels from here. Looking back from this vantage point, her white dress and socks merged with a ceiling pattern. (*Crybaby!* 59-60)

In using "she" rather than "I," Williamson encouraged readers to witness the abuse of a little girl more so than her own abuse. She emphasized incest as a social rather than an individual problem.

After making readers witness incestuous abuse, the autobiographers then gave them a life line. They always reassured readers that they fought back and won. Their stories, in this respect, are balanced. In the Introduction to *Up and Doing*, Williamson explained how such balance works. Although she was not speaking about incest autobiography, her comments on being a feminist and peace activist echo the potentialities of the sub-genre. Williamson explained that feminism and peace activism are split at the root, meaning they inhabit both oppressive and utopian possibilities (22). To be a feminist and peace activist, as Williamson illustrated, is to have intimate knowledge of injustice, inequities, and danger, of domestic, sexual, class, racial, ecological and rhetorical violence, but it is also to have an inspiring utopian vision, an empowering energy, an optimism that drives toward positive action and a different, better future (22). Likewise, incest autobiographers have lived the injustice, inequities and danger, have first hand and crippling experience with violence, but they also have a utopian vision, have embraced writing in order to move that vision toward reality first on paper and then in society.

The four incest autobiographers described the split root of incest trauma. They began with the first and ended with the last; they moved from despair to hope, "from silent victim to engaged 'survivor'" (Williamson, "I Peel Myself" 133). Danica wrote: "Survival. That's what I want to know about. How do I survive?" (*Don't* 13.1). If this was not the central question/goal for the incest autobiographers, their stories would be too painful to read; their lives too painful to live. Their intent was to disclose and encourage not to shock and discourage, not to be, as Danica has said, "celebrated as a victim" (*Beyond Don't* 54). Allen, focusing mainly on the progress she had made in personal relationships, said, "Last year, I cared about another man for a time. Next year, I may do even better. I'm learning how to feel" (*Daddy's Girl* 213). Throughout *Daddy's Girl*, she also described her relationship with her daughter, emphasizing that she continues to survive and enjoy her daughter. Fraser said she journeyed from darkness to light: "Things do add up. Life does have shape and maybe even purpose. Or so it seems to me" (*My Father's House* 253). Danica expressed not so much her present success, although she is now living independently, safely, and contentedly, but the potential for her to generate happiness: "A future of my own making" (*Don't* 13.1); "Woman. Dreaming. The mind. Free. Freedom. Bestowed from within. Self. This night. No longer dark. Star messages. Silver and gold. Blessings. I dream. I love. I am" (*Don't* 105). Williamson reflected on the positive aspects of her life and, as with Danica, pointed to a brighter future which included raising her adopted daughter. She mentioned her arrival, if not at a joy filled place, at least away from the trauma that characterized her childhood: "A small story

through which I exit an old empire of fear" (*Crybaby!* 192). Indeed, the four incest autobiographers celebrated their exits and invited readers to celebrate with them.

Literary Impact II: The Differences

As is clear from the descriptions of post-traumatic consequences, the continuity in characterization, the appeal to the witness in readers, and the emphasis on survivorship, there is a distinct poetics of incest autobiography; nonetheless, the poetics also accommodates movement or variation; that is, it is not a closed literary sensibility which requires conformity. If it was, it would simply be another form of repression for the incest survivors, and incest autobiographies would not continue to be "texts of bliss." Since they would all be the same, after reading the first, audiences, in all likelihood, would no longer feel discomfort and might soon become apathetic.

The poetics of each autobiography is as unique as the *autos* and *bios* of each writer. Indeed, the power of the sub-genre of incest autobiography, in a large part, comes from its demonstration of the diversity in women's survivorship and their written accounts of it. The sub-genre does not prescribe one method of surviving incest and one way of writing about it. Instead, it accommodates the differences between survivors' recovery processes: healing is as individual as each person who undertakes it (Yapko 210); the possible reactions to and recovery from incest trauma are heterogeneous (Gilmartin 93). Likewise, the writing is heterogeneous.

It is the unique style of the incest autobiographies that gives the collective body its diverse power. Danica and Williamson clearly focused on the *graphē* as much, or even more, than their *bios*. Their books are more experimental. Allen's and Fraser's autobiographies, in contrast, are less about the language of incest disclosure and more about the life of the incest victim. Danica and Williamson played with form, structure, and word choice; whereas, Allen and Fraser questioned less how meaning is constructed and emphasized more the primacy of narrative. The different literary strategies of all four Canadian autobiographers, their methods of making meaning out of their life experience, their various styles, enrich the sub-genre of incest autobiography.

Their approaches to the writing of their lives were shaped and made distinct by their positions in the literary community. Allen and Fraser were established fiction writers before they were autobiographers. As a result, their autobiographies are infused with novelistic qualities. They have a plot, a well defined setting, and a large cast of characters. Danica and Williamson approached autobiographic writing from a different place. Danica, was not a writer but had kept a journal and engaged in other forms of art production: weaving and painting (Williamson, *Sounding Differences* 346, Gzowski xi). Williamson, a scholar and literary critic, while familiar with the writing process had yet another approach to the process of writing an autobiography: she mingled her academic writing and research with her personal writing.

Further, each autobiographer had her own way of assuaging the pain in her otherwise wholly traumatizing incest narrative. It is not that the writers detracted from the

agony of their abuse, but they offered readers something else to consider when the witnessing became too intense. Allen used her adult voice to describe her present contentment. Fraser relied mainly on love stories, an analytical voice, and a clever weaving style, to temporarily relieve readers from the horror story. Danica was, in one respect, unrelenting because of her consistent focus on abuse but, in another, she offered some reprieve in her structure: her number system and allusion to Inanna is intriguing even outside of the context of incest. Finally, Williamson assuaged the pain throughout her incest autobiography by including an extensive amount of research material, photographs, and many details about her life that are not directly related to incest. Her innovation, much more so than Danica's, makes her book the least emotionally taxing of all the incest autobiographies.

The Direction

Incest autobiographic writing has changed quite dramatically since its conception twenty years ago. The first incest autobiographies, *Daddy's Girl* and *My Father's House*, as already mentioned, are structured like novels. They are ground breaking because they are disclosures of incest not because they challenge language conventions. Danica's *Don't*, representative of the next stage in incest autobiography, does not rely on plot. Danica said she had attempted to write more conventionally but it did not work for her: "When I tried to write in what I thought were appropriate ways–how I'd been *taught*

language–the writing was *awful*, almost sentimental, because when you try to put the story into 'normal' narrative structure, the pain is not there" (Interview, "An Enormous Risk" 84). She explored other *graphē* options. She wanted her autobiography to satisfy two kinds of readers: those who read to understand incest victimization and survivorship (Allen's and Fraser's readers) and those who read for literary possibilities. As she explains:

> I had to find a structure that would function on more than one level because I didn't want to eliminate a whole group of readers who weren't interested in experimental writing. I had to make it clear enough for that group, but interesting enough for women who read it on more than one level. (Interview, "An Enormous Risk" 81)

Ten years later and after much consideration of her predecessors, Williamson eliminated the first level and focused solely on the second. The centre or controlling principle of the sub-genre has shifted. Allen and Fraser concentrated on the *bios*; Danica focused on the *graphē*; and Williamson de-centred the *autos*, *bios*, and *graphē*. Because of the changes to the sub-genre, it continues to renew itself so that each incest autobiography is a "text of bliss."

In the past two decades, incest autobiographers have also become more conscious of survivorship as a literary construct. While survivorship is a profile the autobiographers struggled to inhabit and struggled to articulate, it is not a definitive identity. After Allen and Fraser insured that incest was no longer taboo in autobiographic writing, Danica and Williamson were free to consider specific incest autobiographic issues such as

survivorship. In her second book, *Beyond Don't*, Danica examined the difference between survivorship in autobiography and the identity of the autobiographic writer: "The problem was that I was no longer seen as a person separate and apart from the book. The sum total of my identity seemed to be the experience I had described. I began to feel erased by this unbearably narrow view of who I was" (*Beyond Don't* 12).

This is not a problem specific to incest autobiography but to autobiography in general. Paula A. Kottman, a translator and autobiography critic, says, "While the 'narratable self' is not fully distinguishable from his or her life-story, neither is he or she reducible to the *contents* of this story." (xvi). An autobiographer makes literary decisions about what to reveal about the self; an incest autobiographer's decision is to reveal the self's experience with sexual trauma. In an interview with Williamson, Danica said, "There's much more to me that's not in that text. That text is primarily about the wounded self trying to dig her way out of a pit, so that there are whole other parts of my life–and certainly my intellectual life–that absolutely don't show up in that book" ("Once I Remembered" 92). The *contents*, incest survivorship, are not the writer's complete identity, but they are those parts which the writer felt most needed to be articulated. Readers, agonizing and celebrating with the narrator of the incest autobiography, often would not feel compelled to search for a more heterogeneous *autos*.

Danica and Williamson, however, encouraged readers to move past a monolithic identification by characterizing themselves as more than incest survivors. Understanding their identity in the larger sense, nonetheless, even without the added dimension of the

tightly constructed *autos*, is a difficult undertaking. As Bass and Davis have noted, a "committed survivor" finds it difficult to give up the identity (163). Danica and Williamson understood, however, that "After refusing to be a victim, one must also refuse to be (just) a survivor" (Fitch E21). Nora Underwood, writing for *Macleans*, said "Danica considers herself as much more than an adult survivor of child abuse" and then quoted Danica, "There are other things I want to do with my life" (64).

Danica and Williamson encouraged readers to see them as more than survivors of incest, because they had different goals for their autobiographies. Whereas, Allen had wanted to inspire others to be survivors, Danica wanted people to help themselves then help each other: move survivorship from the personal to the social and political arena. Williamson wanted readers to interrogate and rupture the systems which have repressed women. If Danica and Williamson had suppressed their range of subjectivities (Gilmore 32), they would have also suppressed the potential of their books to inspire people to take political action. Incest autobiography, then, has changed over the years: it no longer relies on a fixed subject: instead it embodies subjectivities in order to fulfill a broader social and political role.

The Importance

Incest autobiography has given women a self-generated medium from which to articulate their silences, their histories, and their bodies. It has given women the freedom

to experiment with language and thereby rupture the many dominating forms that had kept them alienated and silenced. By focusing on the language of violence and pain, the incest autobiographers have proven that the words used to articulate sexual victimization are critical (Gilmartin 301). They have, through language, refused to be scripted. The sub-genre has challenged the taboo against writing personal trauma, a taboo that no longer exists largely because books like incest autobiography have made room for other literatures of its kind. It has given women, victims, survivors, and all other people with a vested interest, a supportive community of books, writers, and readers. As Danica has said, "The people want to hold my hand and tell me their stories! How many other writers with a fiction or a non-fiction experience this?" (Interview, "Once I Remembered" 91). The very existence of the sub-genre removes incest victimization from an individualized and estranged space and provides it with a political energy and social context.

The Future

Although already immensely valuable in terms of its social and literary significance, the sub-genre still has room to grow. As is clear from Allen's, Fraser's, Danica's and Williamson's positioning, incest autobiography, in its present state, is dominated by white, female, middle-class survivors. There are only slight cultural and economic differences between the four Canadian women. Fraser's and Williamson's families were Canadian born and, by most standards, economically secure. Allen's father,

however, was a Jewish Russian immigrant who arrived in Canada when he was five (*Daddy's Girl* 21). Their family felt the pressures of post-war, one family income (*Daddy's Girl* 6-7, 13, 197). Danica's family immigrated to Canada from Holland. As a child, Danica wondered if she was abused because she was not Canadian:

> Maybe those [the children I read about] were Canadian kids, maybe when I am a real Canadian I will be able to live like that. But I am not a Canadian kid. I know that Canadian kids would never have to live with a father like mine. My father is the way he is because he comes from a stupid foreign country. (*Don't* 2.14)

Danica also has a different economic situation than the other incest autobiographers. Although her father could support the family with his photography shop and the profits from his underground pornography studio, Danica chose independence and unemployment and, with them, poverty.

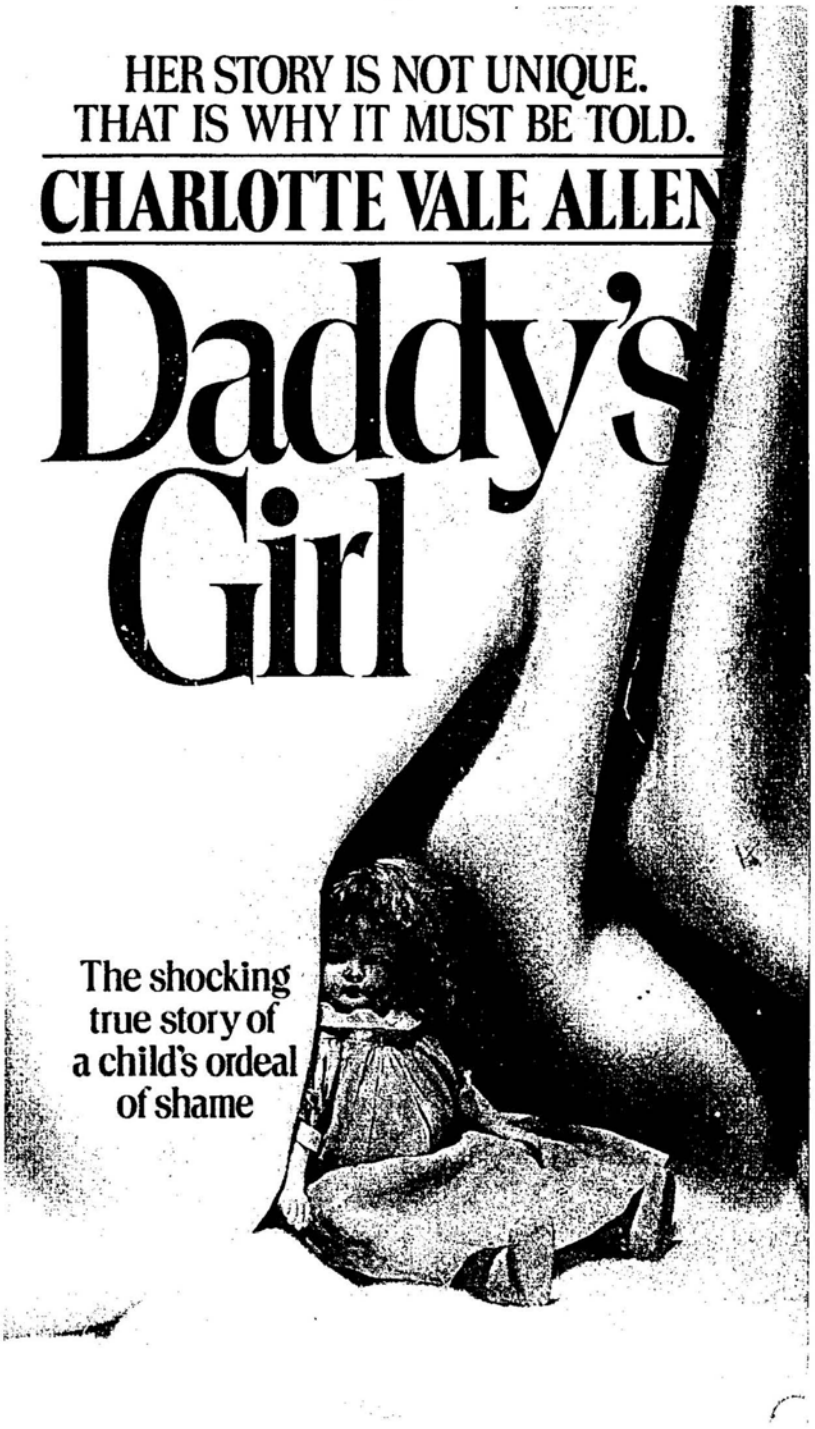
In order for incest autobiography to truly reflect the effects of child sexual abuse, other voices must be published. Statistics show African-American women and Caucasian women have similar rates of victimization and while rates are lower for Asian women, they are slightly higher for Hispanic women (Lundberg-Love 5). Now there are books on the market which reveal the cross-cultural nature of the issue. *Stolen Life* by Native American writer Johnson, *There Were Times I Thought I Was Crazy* by West Indian writer Alleyne, and *Songs of My Heart* by Chinese writer Wong, challenge what has become the standard in the sub-genre. Men, too, are beginning to articulate their experience with incest, thereby correcting the gender slant. Canadian Will Aitken's *A Visit Home* is a fictionalized

account of his incestuous experience as a child. Clearly, the sub-genre is growing, and, as it does, it will speak even more to the plural experience of incest survivorship.

Conclusion

Continuity is the glue of genres. The undeniable similarities between the four incest autobiographies join them together to form the foundation of incest autobiography in Canada. Nonetheless, the sub-genre does not render women's life experience with incest trauma monolithic. The similarities between the incest autobiographies concretize the traumatic experience of child sexual abuse, but the differences legitimize women's varied and unique articulations of violence against their individual child bodies. The individuality of the autobiographies proves the life experiences are varied and uniquely significant. As well, each autobiography builds from the last, making it possible for readers to trace a literary development of incest as the subject of autobiography. These stories of victimization and survivorship, the narratives that are as much about the pain of life as they are about the possibilities of discourse, the autobiographies that break literary and social boundaries by joining the freedom of articulation with the empowering act of sharing one's own secrets, are not, in any respect, small stories.

Appendix



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