TELLING TALES ABOUT OUR SELVES: THE INTEGRATION OF IDENTITY AS A NARRATIVE STRATEGY IN SELECTED EXAMPLES OF WOMEN'S WRITING

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Telling Tales About Our Selves:

The Integration of Identity as a Narrative Strategy

in Selected Examples of Women's Writing

by
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A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature
Memorial University of Newfoundland

August 1994

St. John's Newfoundland

ISBN 0-315-96084-1

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Abstract

The question of women's identity is a critical question in feminist literary theory. Two streams of thought which emerge focus on identity as separations between selves or separations between self and understanding. Careful study shows that both streams have their advantages and disadvantages; both conclude that the influence of patriarchal values on women's roles in society separates and isolates women from themselves and each other. Critical theory also suggests that this patriarchal influence contributes to women's dissatisfaction with the self by making them mad or ill; alternatively, these feelings of illness and madness are also signs that women's sense of self is threatened, that the boundaries protecting the integrity of the self have been breached by impossible expectations and conditions for womanhood. Helene Cixous and her theory of "l'ecriture feminine" and the writing of the body suggest the reclamation of voice, body, desire and feeling is the route to self affirmation and determination. In some women's writing, this process of awareness, rejection and affirmation can be depicted by narrative strategies which emphasize the fragmentation and silencing of women, and which reflect the positive results of giving birth to the self on one's own terms. The books examined in this thesis are **Mrs. Dalloway** (1925), Virginia Woolf's fourth novel, a modernist examination of the intersection of memory, self and identity; **Down Among The Women** (1971), in which Fay Weldon presents a provocative, confrontational view of women's experiences in post-WWII London, rooted from the point of view of early-1970s feminism; and **Cat's Eye** (1988), in which Margaret Atwood invests her writing with an awareness of such contemporary issues as personal growth, self-awareness and the philosophy that the personal is political. In addition to a consideration of the major themes of these novels, an examination of a recent autobiography: Sylvia Fraser's **My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing** (1987) is included. This memoir, which employs novelistic techniques to describe integration of selves, is a companion to the novels above and underscores the concept of "double-voiced" writing found in much writing by women.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply appreciative of the constant support, guidance and patience my supervisor, Phyllis Artiss, offered to me during the preparation of this thesis. The lessons learned in this exercise will not be soon forgotten, and I was blessed to have such an accommodating and wise teacher.

I also want to express my thanks and love to my husband, John Gushue, whose unwavering support and constant affection made it possible for me to keep seeing the light around the multitudinous corners of my work.

I want to thank my friends and colleagues at the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Kay Anonsen, Jennifer Mercer, Linda Williams and Wendy Williams, not only for their encouragement while I worked on this thesis during periods of leave from my job, but also for sharing with me their knowledge and experiences of breaking silence and telling the truth about women's lives.

I am very grateful to Bill Barker, Anne Louise Brookes, Elizabeth Epperly, Keith Louise Fulton, and Diana Relke, who took time from their busy schedules to offer insightful comments and helpful suggestions on my thesis work in its various stages. I also want to acknowledge the assistance, resources and opportunities provided by my graduate studies professors, Ellen Balka, Sandra Clarke, Terry Goldie, Noreen Golfman, Nicholas Watson, and Michael Woods, which enabled me to begin exploring some of the ideas presented in this thesis. I would also like to honour a professor who provided immense inspiration to me years ago in my undergraduate career, the late George Story, whose generosity and warmness fostered an interest in pursuing my passion for literature.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the support and encouragement of my friends and family, whose kind words helped me to continue when I thought I would never see this work completed. I am especially grateful to my parents, Julita Guede Muzychka and Stephan Muzychka, who taught me to believe in myself and to speak with my own voice.

This thesis is the culmination of several years of reading and study and innumerable conversations with friends and colleagues. Any errors are mine alone.

Abbreviations

CE -- Cat's Eye (Margaret Atwood)

DAW -- Down Among the Women (Fay Weldon)

MD -- Mrs. Dalloway (Virginia Woolf)

MFH -- My Father's House (Sylvia Fraser)

Epigraphs

Where are the songs I used to know,
Where are the notes I used to sing?
I have forgotten everything
I used to know so long ago.
Christina Rossetti

Women write their own histories only when they cease to be afraid of the sound of their own voices.
Rebecca Wells Windinwood

I do not want to tell a story to someone's memory.
Helene Cixous

If there is no face in the mirror, marry. If there is no shadow on the ground, have a child. These are the conventions the will consents to. But there is a face. There is a shadow. They are simply unsuitable. I'm a case of mistaken identity.... So are we all?
Jane Rule, **Desert of the Heart**

Feminism has done many things for women writers, but surely the most important has been the permission to say the unsaid, to encourage women to claim their full humanity, which means acknowledging the shadows as well as the lights.
Margaret Atwood, **"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."**

She look like a boy in a dress, my big sister say,
a lyric and feminine correction from a watchful aunt,
don't say that, she look nice and pretty.
Nice and pretty, laid out to splinter you, so that never,
until it is almost so late as not to matter do you grasp
some part, something missing like a wing, some
fragment of your real self.
Dionne Brand, **No Language is Neutral**

1. Introduction

> *Those who have never been able to speak the reality of their perceptions, those for whom the conquest of personal emotional territory has been precluded politically and patriarchally, will grasp that identity is simultaneously a quest for and a conquest of meaning (Brossard, 1988, 67).*

In recent years, the questions prompted by feminist readings and interpretations of literature have grown more complex and detailed than first envisioned by critics such as Kate Millett and Mary Ellmann. These pioneers and many who followed them have been captivated by the search to explain how the social construct we call "woman" in Western society has evolved. Influenced by academic pursuits traditionally not attached to the study of literature, feminist critics have advanced and broadened literary criticism, adding new ideas with which literature, past and present, can be interpreted, understood and enjoyed.

A key concept in feminist literary criticism is identity. In this thesis, I study selected representative authors to see how they show the creation of identity in women through the imposition of social expectations on values and behaviours; how these writers depict women characters challenging the authenticity of identity; and finally, how these authors use their characters' process of creating, reinventing or tracing the boundaries of self as the foundation for their own narrative strategies.

In the following chapters, I will show how a series of representative feminist novels are together endowed with these qualities. Written as they were in different times and cultures, the selected novels feature markedly different approaches to narrative strategy. In my view, however, the three novelists share similar goals; they share an interest in the ideas of loss and reclamation; they share an affirmation of the importance of the integrated self; and they share a concern that the process of reclaiming identity -- demonstrated through their fictional characters -- is at least as important as the result. I have also chosen to examine a personal memoir, written from the same perspective, to explore how the lines between autobiographical fiction and fictionalized autobiography can be blurred in the exercise of (true) life storytelling.

The books I have selected are **Mrs. Dalloway** (1925), Virginia Woolf's fourth novel, a modernist examination of the intersection of memory, self and identity; **Down Among The Women** (1971), in which Fay Weldon presents a provocative, confrontational view of women's experiences in post-WWII London, rooted from the point of view of early-1970s feminism; and **Cat's Eye** (1988), in which Margaret Atwood invests her writing with an awareness of such contemporary issues as personal growth, self-awareness and the philosophy that the personal is political. The characters each author has created are very

different, yet their journeys are similar: these fictional women explore memory, and in doing so confront the past, interpret the present, and brave (and sometimes define) the future.

In addition to considering the major themes of these novels, I have included an examination of a recent autobiography: Sylvia Fraser's **My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing** (1987). As readers and critics, we accept the influence personal experience brings to bear on fictional writing; for example, it is common for many of the novels of Margaret Atwood and Virginia Woolf to be interpreted this way. Consequently, I think Fraser's intensely personal account of her childhood and early adulthood deserves close scrutiny by feminist critics as it addresses the issues that have engaged feminist literary criticism for the last twenty-five years. Fraser, an acclaimed author of fiction, uses novelistic techniques to describe her own recovery of memories of childhood sexual abuse and integration with a separate, hitherto unknown identity with the self she knew. **My Father's House** is a suitable companion to the novels I have chosen, and underscores, in a deeply personal sense, the concept of "double-voiced" writing.

1.1 Identity

To appreciate the three selected novels in context, it is important to recognize the evolution of the field of feminist literary criticism. Among critics in this field, there is no consensus on how identity and self-knowledge are defined and developed. Andrea Lebowitz articulates this lack of consensus by asking:

> *[...] what is female identity? how is it created in a particular society? what is the relationship between biology and identity? [...] Is there a single unchanging identity which is being hampered and silenced by a hostile world or is identity always developing and changing in response to context and circumstance? (Lebowitz, 1991, 16-17)*

In posing her questions, Lebowitz suggests there are opposing approaches to the concept of identity: one which is fixed, immovable and complete (which would suggest that one is born female), the other which is fluid, flexible and divided (which suggests that one becomes female). Nancy Walker, for one, advances the view that identity is fluid and can be shaped, and thus is the base upon which contemporary novels by women are structured (Walker, 1990, 75):

> *Contemporary women's narratives reveal a deep awareness of the "self" as fluid rather than fixed, and this awareness leads in turn to the revision of the narrative as a revision of the self: a socially created identity becomes replaced by or juxtaposed to an alternative identity that views the socially created self ironically (Walker, 1990, 75).*

In particular, Walker suggests that we recognize "*the socially constructed self as arbitrary*" and as a challenge which "*demands the revision of values and conventions*" (Walker, 1990, 4). In fact, this approach to identity offers not only a challenge to meaning, but also an opportunity to engage in reflection.

But what of identity as a distinct object which can be lost, or subsumed, like "*a perfect doll hidden inside us beneath layers of seaweed*" (Duncker, 1992, 58)? A number of critics have seized upon the notion of separation in identity, separation between, say, the outer and inner selves, or between the "social" and "true" selves. This presumes that women have multiple identities or selves, which may or may not serve particular functions. In **The Madwoman in the Attic**, critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar propose that women are aware their selves are split "*between what they are and what they are supposed to be*" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 78):

> *For all literary artists, of course, self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative "I am" cannot be uttered if the I knows not what it is. But for the female artist, the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 17).*

This approach seems limiting because it suggests each separate self is isolated and without connection to the other(s). Walker, however, sees that there is a

separation of self and understanding, not a separation of self and self: characters may perceive their selves to be fixed, but they later find they are, in fact, able to revise their internal narrative to accommodate a view of the self which is fluid and evolutionary. Walker also suggests that between self and understanding there is distance, or space, which can be used to reconcile these different perspectives by making the connections between them (Walker, 1990, 78). Walker's position is very similar to that of American critic Roberta Rubenstein, who argues in her recent study, **Boundaries of the Self** (1993), that identity is not a series of parts to be knitted together but a relationship between layers of experience:

> *identity can be understood as a dynamic interplay among the fluid layerings of experience: materiality and the body, intrapsychic and interpersonal processes; and the substructure of ethnic, national or political focus acting upon the individual (Rubenstein, 1993, 7).*

Walker's theory seems more useful in terms of critical analysis of feminist narratives. All of the novels considered in the following chapters, for example, begin with characters in mid-life, forced by circumstance to challenge their sense of self and to engage in a process of introspection, a process which results in a new understanding of who the characters think they are now as opposed to who they thought they were then.

1.2 Deconstructing the Patriarchal Image

Nonetheless, Gilbert and Gubar's perception of a split, or separation of self in terms of fragmentation, has its own appeal, too. As I will show later, fragmentation has a function in demonstrating conflict within the inner narratives of characters. Here, though, we can use this approach of Gilbert and Gubar to consider the different, and sometimes conflicting, roles -- lover, wife, mother -- imposed upon women by social expectations, as fragments which isolate and limit women's contribution and participation in society to a space with very narrow margins. Indeed, both Walker and Rubenstein also identify fragmentation as a feature of women's identity; the difference, as noted earlier, is that Walker and Rubenstein see the construction of identity (or reconstruction, as the case may be) to be a process of relationships between the different parts, or roles, of the whole.

A number of critics have categorized these different parts, or roles for women. Annis Pratt, in her landmark work, **Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction**, equates women who lack an authenticity of self with social outcasts:

> *Our quests for being are thwarted on every side by what we are told to be and to do, which is different from what men are told to be and to do: when we seek identity based on human personhood rather than on gender, we stumble about in a landscape whose signposts indicate retreats from, rather than ways to, adulthood. [...] If*

> *authenticity depends upon totality of self -- the greatest possible exercise of our capacities for significant work, intellectual growth, political action, creativity, emotional development, sexual expressions, etc. -- then women are supposed to be less than total selves (Pratt, 1981, 6).*

Central to Pratt's argument is the concept of gendered prescriptions: women are told what to do and be, and this is very different from what men are told to do or be. In particular, Pratt argues that such prescriptions infantilize women by hampering their complete development. In her book, Pratt classifies 'the institutions which embody or perpetuate these prescriptions on women's behaviour and development as archetypal enclosures. One of these is marriage, in which a wife's needs, interests and desires are subordinated to the husband's. Pratt also identifies as a function of patriarchal marriages, the control of women's sexuality for the guarantee of true biological heirs. Pratt concludes that patriarchy uses the subordination of women in marriage, the enforced legitimacy of heirs, and the restraint of female sexual expression to ensure male control and social stability. Similarly, American critic Molly Hite takes Pratt's image of archetypal enclosures, and goes further to describe this process of patriarchal limitations on women as marginalization, an image which suggests both boundary and isolation:

> *To be marginal to a dominant culture is to have been denominated its other, which means to carry its least prized attributes. To be marginal to a dominant culture is also to have had little or no say in the construction of one's socially acknowledged identity (Hite, 1991, xv).*

To be the other is to be outside the mainstream; Hite concludes that female characters are, in effect, silenced, disempowered and restricted in their relationships to their husbands (or lovers), their children and their bodies because they are different. The paradox which confronts these female characters is that their "difference" has been orchestrated by the imposition of social expectations.

1.3 Illness, Madness and Rebellion: Telling Tales of the Self

This marginalization of women is not without its consequences. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that patriarchal socialization makes women sick, both physically and mentally (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, 37). Other critics have documented how some women writers use images of illness, depression, even madness to signify that something is wrong within the psyche (Lebowitz, 1987; Rigney, 1987; Yalom, 1985). The influential French critic Helene Cixous also sees that the marginalization of women can make women sick or mad, but more importantly, she believes women may ignore these messages because the patriarchal values which limit women have also fostered self-doubt:

> *Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a ... divine composure), hasn't accused herself of being a monster? Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new) hasn't thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness*

> *is that she resists death, that she makes trouble (Cixous, 1976, 309).*

Like Cixous, British literary critic Penny Brown also sees sickness, particularly mental illness, as a positive sign that women are challenging patriarchal roles. However, in her aptly titled book **The Poison at the Source** (1992), Brown also suggests that women who undertake to reject patriarchal authority are at risk of being labelled mad. In this case, the woman risks disbelief by others, and may be hampered, or even silenced, by the threat of social approbation (Brown, 1992, 222). But whether it is liberating or threatening, Nancy Walker advances the idea that madness, like the conflict engendered by the challenge to patriarchal roles, must be an inevitable part of the journey towards the integration of a fragmented self (Walker, 1990, 114). More precisely, Walker suggests women descend into madness as a way of transcending the boundaries which enclose them, and as a way of imagining alternative selves (Walker, 1990, 8). These differing viewpoints do not imply disagreement for as Rubenstein observes:

> *Whether self-created, imposed by others, or dictated by accident, each of the representations of physical or psychic mutilation or incompleteness expresses the characters' inner distress and social or cultural plight (Rubenstein, 1993, 233).*

A central point to Rubenstein's thesis is that illness, either mental or physical, can be both a sign of awareness in women that their identity has been eroded, erased, or subsumed, and a means of triggering that awareness. A question which arises

is how can a female character be shown to assert "herself" and begin the process of integration? An examination of Cixous's work provides some answers.

Cixous recognizes the constraints which bind women -- sexuality, patriarchy, duty, silence and their symbols. Cixous does not rest there; having identified the bonds which trap women, she offers an escape route which she believes will result, ultimately, in the destruction of these bonds:

> *It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech that has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem (Cixous, 1976, 312).*

Cixous's identification of "*writing the body*" as a means to survive, as a means to free the self, is focused on sex; she celebrates female sexuality, until recently a taboo subject in mainstream cultural expression. By writing about women's bodies, figuratively and literally, women write about their sexuality, and in doing so, they are able to free themselves from a male world-view. Cixous argues that men traditionally offer women strict, unappealing choices: the margin or the harem. In either case, women lose their own sense of identity. On the margin they are forgotten or ignored, and in the harem they lose their integrity and exist only as objects of male desire. Prescriptions on women's behaviour perpetuate

this objectification; the holy trinity of marriage, maternity, and virginity/fidelity reinforces particular and limiting roles as possession, womb, and/or sexual object.

Ultimately Cixous believes that women must create their own space in which they can speak (breaking out of the snare of silence) and in which they can act (writing the body). Writing by women is a re-enactment of the struggle between women and men, a universal statement of intent to speak, to write and to read of women and their experiences. At the same time, Cixous believes that women's refusal to write the body is akin to censorship. She says: "*Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time*" (Cixous, 1976, 312). Cixous makes it clear that the act of writing (equivalent to the act of speech) is essential to women's survival. But Cixous is not solely focused on writing the (sexual) body as the only means of liberation; in that, her view of women writing and their purposes, is expandable. Women self-create themselves, or to use Cixous' terminology, they "*inscribe the breath of the whole woman*" (Cixous, 1976, 312). Women without breath, without speech, without self are shadows, false women who keep the "*live ones from breathing*" (Cixous, 1976, 312). For Cixous, the silencing of women is not just a metaphor for patriarchy's hold over women, it is a physical act which suppresses that which is essential to women, a part which is equal in importance to the act of breathing. Without breath, we die. Without

speech, Cixous implies, we may as well be dead, as we are nothing without a means to share our experience and to communicate our thoughts and ideas. Consequently, Cixous sees the "*laugh of the Medusa*" as an opportunity to freeze the patriarchy. Thus are women able to launch themselves into the text and into freedom by abandoning these restrictive patterns and roles:

> *I shall speak about women's writing: about what it will do. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies -- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text -- as into the world and into history -- by her own movement (Cixous, 1976, 309).*

In this way, we can see that when women speak out about what has been hidden, when they recover what has been lost, and when they write about what has been ignored, they are participating, individually and collectively, in a creative act of speech.

Cixous' perspective from the margins, outlining the body, also suggests the establishment of boundaries. Similarly, Patricia Duncker, author of **Sisters and Strangers** (1992), notes that "*our bodies are the territory we occupy as well as the means we have of engaging with the world*" (Duncker, 1992, 85). The concept of territory is an important one, because it suggests very strongly the idea of crossing boundaries, or marking the outer limits of behaviour or personal space. In my

view, boundaries are particularly critical for women because they can establish a measure of control, awareness, and difference otherwise not available to them. Crossing the line, stepping outside the margins and breaking the rules are part of the process for challenging the story or for making it up. Roberta Rubenstein identifies the body and the boundary as appropriate images for women's grasp of self and identity:

> *The body is also the template for figurative expressions of boundary conceived as enclosure (or its opposite in temporal as well as spatial terms. Thus rooms, walls, houses -- including the more emotionally saturated meaning associated with "home" -- are tropes for inner experiences, as are imprisonment, escape, flight, and homelessness (Rubenstein, 1993, 233-34).*

We can extend the metaphors of imprisonment (deprivation of freedom) and homelessness (deprivation of space) with silencing (deprivation of voice). Cixous argues that women's voice, body and space must be used to challenge the patriarchal vision of women.

1.4 Picking up the Pieces

I think it is useful to consider how the act of breaking silence, in all its manifestations, demonstrates tremendous power; in and of itself, it challenges the status quo by demanding the [illegible] By crossing the boundary, by taking up the space denied, by taking time to reflect, by picking up the pieces, a woman can

undertake her own analysis and stake her claim to self-defined reality. "*To say the name is to begin the story,*" (Kramarae and Treichler, 444), and to break the silence and to name the experience is to begin the process of understanding and rebellion. As a narrative strategy, this process of integration can take several forms. Writers may use multiple points of view (including double voices), fragmentation of characters, metaphorical ways of mirroring, and the delineation and the crossing of boundaries.

One approach to analyzing narrative strategy is to examine how an author focuses on the recovery and the re-integration of characters' identities. Often, writers present this process in terms of a quest and in the context of reflection and revisioning. This process also requires closure; there is an understanding that a new quest has begun with the other's ending (living with the new or reclaimed identity). Adrienne Rich sees this process as having much more than the simple beginning - middle - end paradigm of traditional storytelling:

> *Re-vision -- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering from a new critical direction -- is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival (Rich, 1979, 35).*

For example, through her diaries and her public writing (novels, stories, essays and reviews), Virginia Woolf examined the connections between the construction of knowledge and patriarchal authority, between access to knowledge and the

power of self-determination. In particular, Woolf's approach to a woman's self-concept emphasized both change and continuity (Schulkind, 1976, 13-14). In her diary Woolf wrote:

> *Who am I, what am I, & so on: these questions are always floating about in me; & then I bump against some exact fact -- a letter, a person, & come to them again with a great sense of freshness. And so it goes on. But, on this showing which is true, I think, I do fairly frequently come upon this 'it'; & then feel quite at rest (Woolf, Vol. 3, 63).*

Woolf's narrative strategies can be a model for feminist self-analysis since they acknowledge feeling and intuition as valid and appropriate routes to self-discovery. Without her memories, Woolf could not fully understand what had happened to her; writing gave her the means to access that information, and writing also gave her the means to make sense of it in fiction through the process of rebuilding and re-integrating her fragmented self. Her private writing allowed her to record her daily life, and she analyzed the different elements to identify and to make the connections between them. Woolf wrote and rewrote extensively, shaping her words, reca ting her experiences, and re-defining her goals.

To some critics, such as Roberta Rubenstein and Carol Christ, a woman writer's narrative strategy can also be a challenge to patriarchal privilege; for

example, the idea that a man's home is his castle can be overturned when a woman tells her life story, even though women as home-makers have not had the same opportunity to be home-keepers. Similarly, patriarchally constructed identities serve as prisons for women; there is no space for them to tell their story as men tell it for them. Christ suggests that this silencing of women's stories, through the suppression of their identities, results in a societal deprivation, an erasure of female experience and knowledge:

> *Women's stories have not been told. And without stories there is no articulation of experience. Without stories a woman is lost when she comes to make important decisions of her life. She doesn't learn to value her struggles, to comprehend her pain. Without stories, she cannot understand herself. Without stories she is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and world that have been called spiritual or religious. The expression of women's spiritual quest is integrally related to the telling of women's stories. If women's stories are not told, the depth of women's souls will not be known (Christ, 1).*

The consideration of multiple stories, instead of just one, prompts some interesting ideas about the nature of women's writing; more precisely, some critics suggest that women's texts are "double-voiced," to use Elaine Showalter's terminology (Showalter, 1982, 42). Having been denied traditional access to language, Showalter suggests, women have learned to communicate in other ways. Consequently, words have new meanings and silences have new objectives. Both

Walker and Rubenstein say writers use double voices and multiple characters or narrators to reflect the fragmentation of women's identity by society:

> *One of the most pervasive devices in the contemporary women's novel is the dual narrative voice that represents a duality of consciousness -- the second, usually first person voice interprets, adjusts, revises the initial story. The effect is to reinforce the fact that we invent our stories, trying to find a coherent pattern and such an effort reflects the search for identity [...] (Walker, 1990, 33).*

Walker, in particular, notes that the double or divided self is common in women's writing, especially feminist novels, because like Woolf, these writers see both change and continuity in the process of developing a new identity, even as they abandon the constraints of the socially acceptable one (Walker, 1990, 36). Another way to represent the forging of a new identity is through mirroring, or what Jenijoy La Belle in **Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass** (1988) calls the "*ever shifting process of self-realization*" (La Belle, 1988, 10):

> *[...] for a woman, the mirror is an important tool, not just for beholding her face and form, or for seeing how the world views her as a physical object, but also for analyzing and even creating the self in its self-representation of self (La Belle, 1988, 2).*

This mirroring can be represented in a number of ways. For example, writers can use a combination of the double-voiced text with a variety of characters to show different parts of the central character to herself. Or, writers can use literal and metaphorical mirrors, such as pictures or fairytales, to accomplish the process of

integration, by confronting the central character with visible reminders of her past and present.

In the following chapters, I will present the ways some writers show how social expectations regarding marriage, motherhood and sexuality have functioned to limit women's expression of self; how the these writers reveal their characters' awareness of loss of identity and the need to reclaim, recreate or retrieve it through illness or madness; and finally how the writers use the processes of integration, affirmation and confirmation of experience as basis for the work's narrative structure.

2. Deconstructing the Patriarchal Image

> *Long ago, in the land of small metal curlers, of respectable white cotton garter-belts and panty girdles with rubbery-smelling snap crotches, of stockings with seams, where condoms could not legally be displayed on pharmacy shelves, where we read Kotex ads to learn how to behave at proms and always wore our gloves when we went out, where cars had fins like fish and there was only one brand of tampon, women were told many things.*
>
> *We were told: a happy marriage is the wife's responsibility.*
>
> *We were told: learn to be a good listeners.*
>
> *We were told: don't neck on the first date or the boy will not respect you. Home may be the man's castle but the fluff-balls under the bed are the woman's fault. Real women are bad at math. To be fulfilled you have to have a baby. If you lead them on you'll get what you deserve.*
>
> *We were told: if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all (Atwood, 1990, 15).*

In the above passage from one of her critical essays, Margaret Atwood describes the period of post-war affluence and pre-feminist awareness that marked her own adolescence and early adulthood. Years later though, women are still expected to deny their sexuality, and if they do step outside the boundaries prescribed for them, they risk substantial loss -- children, status, financial support, societal approval.[1] The price exacted for women's silence has

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[1] See Susan Faludi's **Backlash** and Naomi Wolf's **The Beauty Myth** for extensive analyses of the impact these prescriptions have had on women, their efforts to break free of them, and the repercussions which have been imposed or threatened by conservative factions and institutions in the last two decades.

been, for many, the erosion of the self and a cultivated dependency upon others for basic necessities. Women's distrust of the prescriptions of marriage, motherhood, and sexual purity informs the sub-text of the novels considered here. The characters are women who find they must break out of socially-approved roles if they are to survive; the novelists locate the foundations of their narrative strategies precisely on the same emotional fault lines that each character must cross and conquer. The narrative strategy in each book is tied to the journey each character makes.

2.1 Marriage

As a social, economic and legal structure, marriage has had little to recommend itself to many feminist theorists.[2] Through the years, the church has supported male supremacy in marriage while the state has enforced it through financial dependency (Walker, 1987, 147). Woolf, Weldon and Atwood present this lack of power in marriage as a fact of life, but one which can be ultimately subverted or at least managed. In the characters' eyes, these alternatives are not easily seen. Each lead character is not perceived, at first, to have an identity that is separate from that of a man, whether he is her father, lover, husband or son. Each novel is set in a world where women are taught to believe they are

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[2] See Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler's **A Feminist Dictionary** (London: Pandora Press, 1985) for an overview of feminist perspectives on marriage (pp. 252-256).

extensions of men, that they fulfil their own needs by fulfilling the needs of others first. Yet the setting of each novel is also one of struggle: Clarissa, Elaine and Scarlet choose to establish an identity apart from what has been prescribed for them, even though these choices threaten men. Rubenstein argues that the image of marriage in novels of identity reflects the duality of women's lives; it is both a source of comfort (keeping the outside world at bay) and a source of oppression (keeping women prisoners):

> *Marriage begins as a cocoon of exclusivity created by the lovers to shelter their mutual desires in privacy, and gradually hardens into a prison of habit and obligation from which one or both spouses may feel compelled to escape (Rubenstein, 1993, 18).*

In the works considered here, marriage is represented alternately as a positive and a negative force in women's lives: for Clarissa Dalloway, marriage begins as a positive experience but ultimately reveals itself to be both unfulfilling and suffocating. For Elaine in **Cat's Eye** and Scarlet and her friends in **Down Among the Women**, marriage begins as a negative experience imposed by circumstance, convention or coercion. In **Cat's Eye**, Elaine marries mostly because she is pregnant. In **Down Among the Women**, Scarlet marries a man she doesn't love out of fear of losing her child to government authorities; later, she marries a man she truly loves, but only after she proves to herself, and effectively the world, that she can support herself independently. Clarissa, Elaine and Scarlet are characters

who attempt to find more fulfilling partnerships as equals with men, but they ultimately find their own independent strength, and use that knowledge to maintain their integrity within a relationship.

In **Mrs. Dalloway**, the heroine Clarissa leads a conventionalyet constrained life as the respectable wife of a politician; her frustration is manifested in depression and illness. For Clarissa Dalloway, there is a struggle between the public perception of her identity as an MP's wife, and her own private sense of self as a creative and nurturing person. When we first see Clarissa Dalloway on her way to buy flowers for her party, a bystander describes her as having:

> *a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious [...] There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright (MD, 4).*

But Clarissa is a bird in a cage, trapped in a life she did not expect, her desires limited by the boundaries of social mores. It is an apt image, for as her story unfolds we see that her life has been defined as the middle-aged wife of a Member of Parliament and as the mother of their only child, a daughter. Clarissa is indeed at a point in her life where she is "*waiting to cross*"; as her body heals from an illness, her soul experiences a crisis precipitated by seeing her daughter, Elizabeth, on the verge of adulthood, facing the same kinds of choices Clarissa herself faced when she was her daughter's age.

At the beginning of the novel, we see a woman whose options have been limited by the rules of social convention. These rules are such that Clarissa is largely unable to express or even acknowledge how she feels. Yet Woolf portrays Clarissa as a remarkably sociable woman: she decorates and is decorative; she arranges parties and people in the same way that she arranges flowers in a vase, always endeavouring to create safe combinations which will complement the diverse personalities of her guests. Although Clarissa frequently acts as a conduit between people, aware of the needs and concerns of others, she has cut herself off from her own emotions. She lives on the surface, appearing to be driven to a more objective and distanced view of the world by her lack of heart.

In spite of the pleasure Clarissa derives from her parties, she still feels unhappy and unfulfilled to the point that not only does she wish to have lived her life over again, but she also wishes to look differently too (MD, 10). When she probes this thought, she concludes that she has lost her sense of self:

> *She had the oddest sense of being invisible, unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway (MD, 11).*

It is an odd feeling for Clarissa since her life with her husband is one of deliberate separateness. Woolf uses this scene to establish the distinction

between what Clarissa perceives to be her reality and what the outside world perceives to be her reality. Roller argues that *"the loss of name is symbolic of the loss of self that marriage demands of women"* (Roller, 1986, 161). Similarly, Fay Weldon uses the unsuccessful attempts of her character's husband to rename her daughter to show symbolically his societal and patriarchal value systems. But in **Mrs. Dalloway**, the issue of names is more than symbolic; it also represents how far Clarissa has distanced herself from her original intentions in her choice of Richard as husband. On an earlier occasion she reflects that her decision to marry Richard, or more precisely, her refusal to marry Peter Walsh, was a sound one:

> *For in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her and she him. [...] But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into (MD, 8).*

Clarissa resists sharing her innermost secrets, mostly because she does not feel safe. Woolf's language suggests here that Clarissa's relationship with Peter would have been far more invasive than the one she now has with Richard.

However, in spite of Clarissa's surface comfort with the direction in which her marriage has moved, she still feels the need to create a sanctuary in the attic. There she allows herself to feel the jealousy which pierced her when she heard

her husband had been invited to lunch without her (MD, 37), there she realizes her mortality (MD, 31), and there she dares to look in her mirror and see her true self:

> *How many million times she had seen her face, and always with the same imperceptible contraction! She pursed her lips when she looked into the glass. It was to give her face point. That was her self -- pointed; dart-like; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible, and composed for the world only into one centre, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to perhaps [...] (MD, 37).*

In her attic room, Clarissa realizes that she has become fragmented, that she has lost hold of her self, and it is not until much later in the day, towards the end of her party, that she is able to draw together the pieces of herself and become whole. Woolf's description of Clarissa's perception of her self is interesting. Clarissa is pointed, dart-like, definite, all words which suggest sharpness, a piercing quality, But at this time she fears that she has lost Richard, and without him, without even her connection to his identity, she feels she is lost -- "*alone for ever*" (MD, 47). When Richard returns from his luncheon with his present of roses, her favourite flowers, as a sign of his love for her, she realizes without his saying so what he means by his gift. Clarissa is elated with his gesture; when Richard takes his leave to go to the House of Commons, Clarissa observes:

> *And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa, watching him open the door; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, from one's husband, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect -- something after all, priceless (MD, 120).*

That respect for the integrity of self is what carries Clarissa through her party. It is what confirms her feelings of distaste for Sir William Bradshaw, the psychiatrist who comes late to the party because a patient has committed suicide, and it is what defends her from the pain of the suicide of Septimus Smith, a stranger whose desperation leads him to choose death rather than the narrowing parameters for life as represented by the expectations and conventions Bradshaw himself embodies. Woolf parallels this reduction in freedom with the increasing reductions in Clarissa's personal space: she moves to an attic room, and sleeps on a narrow, single bed; she lives like a hermit in her own home. The party setting initially seems elaborate and festive, but Woolf changes the tone of the novel so that it seems routine, dull, even painful. By the novel's end, Woolf changes its tone yet again: Clarissa has reclaimed her sense of self, and has redefined her house to accommodate her new view. Although Clarissa has felt trapped, supplanted, and even invisible as a married woman in what she perceives to be the public response to her role, in private she is able to make her own

choices, to live her life as she wants: independent, respected and cared for by a man she respects in turn.

Cat's Eye is a novel about Elaine Risley, an artist who recovers her sense of self while preparing for a retrospective of her work. While physically assembling the key works of her career, Elaine emotionally discovers the key moments of her life: among these are those of her first marriage. Through this process of reclaiming her past, Elaine finds she has no external signposts to give her guidance or to provide support. Nor does she have any skills to develop a relationship based on mutual respect and equality, such as we see with Clarissa Dalloway. Elaine's model of what marriage should be comes from her parents, but it is a model that is rejected, and subsequently replaced, by the values and assumptions of Elaine's school friends. Forced into it because of social taboos against illegitimacy, Elaine finds her marriage is no place for her to flourish and grow. Her husband manipulates her, imposing upon her his own vision of art and meaning, a process which has started long before the two have actually married. It becomes obvious that their relationship can only accommodate one ego/artist:

> *Jon does not like me painting at night. "When else can I do it?" I say. "You tell me." There is only one answer, one that would not involve the loss of his own time: **Don't do it at all.** But he doesn't say this.*

> *He doesn't say what he thinks of my paintings, but I know anyway. He thinks they are irrelevant (CE, 345).*

Elaine ignores the message her husband is sending her, and soon they see the impact this unacknowledged and unresolved conflict has on their marriage: *We have begun to slam doors, and to throw things (CE, 346).* Here, Atwood uses this battle for artistic integrity as a larger extension of the battle for space within the marriage. Just as Clarissa Dalloway changes the way she occupies space in her home and in her life, so does Elaine move through several different living quarters as she grows and develops. Elaine also finds physical release from the confines of marriage in her painting and art; so too does Clarissa connect with people and the world through her parties. Unlike the other characters considered in this thesis, however, Elaine's profession allows her to create a uniquely physical representation of her changing sense of power and identity at each stage of her evolution. Atwood, like Weldon, shows that when women are able to discover their own strengths and set their own terms for living, they are able to form stable relationships in which they can participate as equals, not as vassals to the lord of the manor.

When Elaine does marry again, it is because her second husband makes her happy, not because she needs him:

> *I wasn't even sure I wanted a man in my life again; by that time I'd exhausted the notion that the answer to a man is another man, and I was out of breath (CE, 197-8).*

Elaine has defined herself and established the boundaries of her life as artist, mother and wife. Although she still feels the pinch of someone else's demands, she no longer lets them control her behaviour or her emotions. Elaine Risley's experiences with her first love affair and her first marriage identify key issues of control and empowerment. Although Elaine's childhood experiences contribute to her need to know the rules so she can play the game, Atwood uses Elaine's first marriage to illustrate how men can exercise tremendous power over women's lives. Elaine rejects this disempowering relationship, because she realizes that to endure it means her death, not only in a physical sense but also in an artistic sense. Her second marriage is a union between two equals, each contributing different strengths and talents to the relationship.

For the women in Fay Weldon's novel, **Down Among the Women**, marriage is not a union of two equals at all: it is a trap, engineered and controlled by men. It is also a state women are encouraged, and even directed, to hope for as proof of their femininity and their proper function as women. Nothing positive happens to Weldon's women in marriage; in fact, for most of them, they would be a lot better off emotionally, financially, and psychologically if they didn't marry at all.

The marriages described in **Down Among the Women** reveal women who have been blighted, the very cores of their being infected with rot by their contact with this patriarchal covenant.

The five titular women -- Scarlet, Helen, Audrey, Sylvia, and Jocelyn -- are at the midpoint of a generation, one which began with Wanda, Scarlet's mother, and will end with Byzantia, Scarlet's daughter. Wanda is divorced, a symbol of marital as well as female failure in post-war Britain because she did not want to exist simply to fulfil her husband's needs. This reason alone is not perceived as legitimate because it flouts the perception of marriage as something personally fulfilling for women, unlike the fulfilment achieved with a good education, an exciting career, or personal independence and wealth. Wanda belongs to a group, Divorcees Anonymous; the members look upon their marital forays as failures, and they harbour the hope that the next marriage will be the one which will deliver the promised goods, the one which will prove to society that they are real women:

> *Wanda is irritated by her ladies. She has tried to indicate to them that life without men is possible, even desirable, for women past child-bearing age, and that in fact the sum of human happiness and achievement would be increased by apartheid between the sexes, but still they persist in longing for the company of men; reject lesbianism as a solution to sexual frustration, curl their hair, put on lipstick, and try to look younger than they*

> *are. Why? Because they can only seem to exist in relationship with men (DAW, 104).*

Scarlet's friends harbour hopes similar to those of their mothers' generation, but for different reasons. Jocelyn, for example, actively desires marriage and steals Sylvia's boyfriend:

> *[...] Jocelyn wants to be married. She wants to have a white wedding and a reception with a wedding-cake, local photographers, envious ex-boyfriends, a weeping mother and a hoarse-voiced conscientious father. [...]*
>
> *She wants a wedding collection at the office. She wants everyone to know that she, Jocelyn, is truly female, truly feminine, truly desired, is now to be married and complete (DAW, 92).*

Weldon uses her character to exemplify a belief about the role of marriage as a unifying, completing force; that is, women do not become whole until a relationship with a man is cemented. Furthermore, Weldon here suggests that women who do not marry are perceived to be unnatural, not womanly or feminine, and perhaps most damning, not worthy of being desired or objectified by men. When Jocelyn does marry, it is because she has been fired from her job and has lost her income, and her future husband offers marriage as a means of cementing his own vision of a respectable life.

Scarlet, on the other hand, has no hopes for marriage, not only because she is unable to find the father of her child, but because she has her own fantasy

of what her life will be like as a scarlet woman. Shortly after the birth of her daughter, Scarlet develops her fantasy more fully:

> *Scarlet has a vision of a little flat in South Kensington where she can entertain lovers and bring up Byzantia, in that order. She has decided she will never marry. She intends to be beautiful, romantic, and sought after. [...]*
>
> *Who will pay the rent? A detail, a detail (DAW, 72).*

Weldon emphasizes the contrast between Scarlet's reality and her fantasy. Scarlet's reality is harsh; Scarlet has no money, no prospects, and lives a marginal, impoverished existence. Scarlet's early fantasy of living a life of desire alone is unrealistic, in small part because for some women, their reality rarely includes such attention to one's own sense of pleasure. Her fantasy remains just that, and she worries constantly that she will lose her baby to the State authorities:

> *Like Jocelyn, she wants to be married. But she is moved by desperation, not ambition. She wants security and respectability. She wants to be looked after. She is tired of being pitied. She wants her dignity back. But who would want to marry Scarlet? She is a mess; she knows it now. Over-weight, spotty, untidy, angry; there is only one thing to be said for her, and that is her devotion to Byzantia (DAW, 98-9).*

For Scarlet, as with Atwood's character Elaine, the socially conditioned response to their unplanned pregnancies is to find husbands, because without them, they are lost. Elaine does marry the father of her child, but Scarlet does not. Both women consequently are poorer for the experience, but in different ways.

Atwood's Elaine is the sort of woman who is compelled to feel grateful that her husband has married her and therefore made her child "legitimate"; Elaine is also the sort of woman who feels torn apart by a loveless marriage. Weldon's Scarlet, on the other hand, represents the more visible, physical sense of female poverty: she is an abandoned woman, forced to take desperate measures to protect her child, only because she is afraid. Scarlet marries because she has to, and her choice of husband is her mother's former suitor, Edwin Barker, a school inspector who is manipulative and emotionally abusive. She believes she has to put up with her husband, since the alternative -- living hand to mouth again -- is too threatening to contemplate. To keep from going mad, Scarlet indulges in affairs because

> *Scarlet will love anything, anyone, so long as it's impossible and not actually Edwin, whom she married for what he could give her and now finds that he is nothing (DAW, 134).*

Scarlet's affairs illustrate Rubenstein's argument that novelistic representations of adultery are a means for female characters to "*challenge social boundaries by exposing narrow female roles or prescriptions about the structure of marriage itself*" (Rubenstein, 1993, 234). Scarlet's lack of power within her relationship with Edwin drives her need to seek other opportunities, other kinds of relationships, however fleeting, in which she can assert who she believes herself to be.

Consequently, while Woolf, Weldon and Atwood present power and identity as issues fought on an internal battleground, these authors use a variety of images outside of their characters to show these struggles for autonomy and integration. For example, the writers make repeated links between physical mobility and inner freedom. Atwood, for example, uses a children's game of pasting objects from a catalogue to show the constraints of possessions, while Woolf uses both Clarissa's illness and that of her friend to demonstrate their husbands' conscious and unconscious imposition of limitations on their wives' activities and thoughts. In Weldon's novel, we can see clearly how these same kind of limitations, as well as Rubenstein's theory of women's imprisonment of self, are manifested in particular tropes of space and boundaries. A telling example is found in the fact that Scarlet is not permitted to rearrange anything in her husband's house -- everything must be put back exactly where she found it. Not only does Scarlet not have to the power to organize her own life, the legalizing of her relationship through marriage with Edwin gives him permission to assume control of her life. Edwin assumes that once Scarlet is his wife, he has the power to rename Scarlet's daughter Byzantia. In doing so, Edwin endeavours to erase Scarlet's persona as wild and unconventional, and replace it with something more socially acceptable as befits the wife of a school inspector. Edwin begins with a name that is slightly suggestive of his own, Edna, and moves

on to similarly conventional names like Linda, Marjorie, Rosemary and Annabel before concluding with Edwina, a feminized version of his own name.

When Scarlet makes her first break with Edwin, it is because he humiliates her over a sum of money. The final break comes when he accuses her of being a whore simply because she admits to having sexual desires. She leaves him in the middle of the highway, where she is picked up by Alec, a lawyer. Scarlet refuses his offer of assistance: *"No thank you," says Scarlet, with a feeling of discovery. "I can look after myself perfectly well" (DAW, 180).* This discovery changes Scarlet's life, even though to Wanda, Scarlet's mother, her outward behaviour -- embarking on an affair with Alec -- symbolizes prostitution, because Scarlet exchanges sexual favours for economic resources. Susan, the second and much younger wife of Wanda's former husband, challenges Wanda's view; Susan argues she herself must then be a "kept" woman since she is a wife who doesn't contribute financially to the relationship. Wanda observes that there is a difference: *"You're married"* (DAW, 188).

The distinction in Wanda's eyes is a fine one, yet as written by Weldon, the experiences of Scarlet and her friends would suggest that their role in their intimate relationships, whether legally sanctioned or not, is no better than actually

being a prostitute: these women have no power, they are kept women, kept down by lovers and husbands from being who they want to be and from having what they want. This is very similar to Woolf's comparison in **Mrs. Dalloway**; there she equates, in a subtle way, the women of Picadilly Circus with the daringly dressed and made up young women at Clarissa's party because the latter, by their suggestive appearance of sexual adventure, are suspect and in danger of crossing the line between nice girls and bad ones. In fact, Wanda has misunderstood Scarlet's role in her new, common-law relationship with Alec. Scarlet has more power than she ever did before, simply because she now knows she can do it alone if she had to. Her second marriage remains stable only because her husband knows she could and would leave him if things did not go well. This lesson is well taken by Byzantia, who concludes that there is still more to life than marriage, even if things have turned out well, despite the many trials, for her mother and some of her friends: "*'You amaze me,' says Byzantia. 'Fancy seeing success in terms of men. How trivial, with the world in the state it's in*'" (DAW, 233). In Byzantia's self-confident stance, Weldon presents a woman who has determined herself what her identity should truly be, irrespective of societal expectations, and a model for the future.

2.2 Children

Analyzing literary representations of maternal roles and relationships can provide us with some interesting themes to explore since the relationship between women, children and identity is a complicated one. The symbol of the Madonna, in the Judeo-Christian tradition is a particularly potent one, and its concomitant assumptions of women's purity, fidelity and maternal instinct are very influential. The presence or absence of children has its own meanings in women's relationships with her self. There is tremendous responsibility attached to raising children, and there are tremendous expectations imposed on those who become parents, whether it is undertaken freely or involuntarily:

> *Maternity is itself another potent image of boundary. In addition to the obvious physiological changes, the first time mother crosses a dramatic psychological threshold and acquires a new irreversible social role as a mother; the last stage of labour, termed "transition" is suggestive beyond its physiological context (Rubenstein, 1993, 5).*

Rubenstein also argues that because women take on far more responsibility than men do for their children, women's lives are more limited and contained by the resulting obligations (Rubenstein, 1993, 17). As discussed in the introduction, some of these expectations arise from an historic presumption of treating children as property; marriage, as some critics have argued, is the means by which true ownership can be established since women's sexual interactions are controlled (Pratt, 1981, 6; Roller, 1986, 159).

Related to this issue is the function of mothering itself in perpetuating these social expectations of womanhood: both Rubenstein and poet Adrienne Rich argue persuasively that in the role of mother, women act as "cultural transmitters" of patriarchal values to their children (Rich, 1977, 246; Rubenstein, 1993, 235). There are other values transmitted too: Rubenstein also argues that mothers also transmit their own unresolved dilemmas concerning identity, sexuality, reproduction, relationships, and autonomy (Rubenstein, 1993, 235). Consequently, a more interesting avenue to consider is how motherhood influences the way women look at themselves and their children. Rubenstein suggests studying the relationships between mothers and daughters to see how problems with identity, self-image and selfhood are illustrated:

> *These boundary issues in the mother-daughter relationship are manifested as anxieties in connection with ingestion, and/or maternity; fear of drowning or entrapment; the experiences of invasion, violation, and existential panic; and the desire for actual or psychological escape from these threatening experiences (Rubenstein, 1993, 65-6).*

In the works considered here, the representations of mothering and being mothered vary. In **Mrs. Dalloway**, Clarissa has only one child, a nearly-adult daughter, and her experience of motherhood is mostly positive, if limited. Still, Woolf presents Clarissa as a woman struggling to be more than just "a mother." All of Weldon's characters in **Down Among the Women** have children, three of

them outside of marriage; Weldon presents the experience as primarily negative by highlighting Scarlet's struggles against social constraints and expectations as a battle difficult to win. The other characters are shown to have similar problems. Weldon is far from a preacher of the virtues of an old-fashioned nuclear family; rather, her characters suffer because they lack the power to choose and the abilities to manage their lives independently. Atwood's view of having children in **Cat's Eye** is similar, but apparently more informed by the two decades of social change which come between **Down Among The Women** and **Cat's Eye**. Pregnancy forces Elaine and Jon to marry; the burdens of caring for the child and her unhappy marriage almost overwhelm Elaine to the point of attempted suicide. Yet Atwood, like the other writers, does not present the child itself to be the problem: rather, the problem lies in the politics of reproduction, particularly how decisions are made, who makes them, and how others respond.

In **Mrs. Dalloway**, Woolf presents Clarissa's role as mother as typical of most upper-middle-class women of her time; she is distant, but not entirely absent from her daughter's life. Clarissa has been free to play another role, that of the perfect hostess, a role which has not been hampered by the burdens and duties of mothering. Yet Woolf shows the tensions between these different roles: Clarissa is concerned that she is losing her daughter to her governess, Miss

Kilman, an embittered spinster who takes refuge in extreme religiosity. To highlight the difference between mother and daughter, Woolf selects physical objects to represent where tensions lie:

> *Gloves and shoes; she had a passion for gloves; but her own daughter, her Elizabeth, cared not a straw for either of them.*
>
> *Not a straw, she thought, going up Bond Street to a shop where they kept flowers for her when she gave a party. Elizabeth really cared for her dog most of all. (MD, 11).*

Clarissa cares about the niceties of life, the little touches that make the difference between presentable and elegant. Clarissa embodies the continuance of traditions which dictate that women should make things nice; her daughter does not.

Woolf also challenges the idea that children make women complete. Clarissa finds more fulfilment in her parties than in mothering. Her satisfaction in her work, however, is dulled by the fact that other people around her, such as her husband, her former suitor, and her daughter's governess, feel her parties are unimportant (MD, 121). Miss Kilman, for example, feels that Clarissa and other women of her class ought to be shop assistants or factory workers (MD, 124). But Clarissa's work as a mother is not honoured either. Woolf repeatedly shows how Clarissa refers to, and even introduces Elizabeth as **her Elizabeth**, emphasizing the possessive, almost proprietary relationship between the two women. In this way, Clarissa can assert part of her identity as Elizabeth's mother.

But Elizabeth does not like this, and her discomfort does not go unnoticed by others, such as her mother's former suitor, Peter Walsh (MD, 49). To underscore the fragility of Clarissa's role as mother, Woolf draws attention to the arrival at the party of Sally Seton, who announces, "*I have five enormous boys,*" (MD, 171). The statement has some bearing on Clarissa's view of herself; her maternal contribution immediately appears to be somehow less than Sally's, because Clarissa has only one child, and female at that.

Woolf creates Elizabeth to have more than a supporting role. She is a symbol of a new era of womanhood, at least as Woolf, perhaps, viewed the modernist optimism of some of the youth of her time. When other children are mentioned, they serve as reminders of eras and values past. By seeming to reject her mother's way of life, Elizabeth is trying to establish her own identity, one separate from her mother's. In this way, Woolf uses Elizabeth to enjoy the kind of opportunities she wished she had, and she also uses Clarissa, Miss Kilman and Sally Seton as extreme opposites to illustrate a point about thwarted desires. Miss Kilman had hoped to pursue a career in education but was forced to consider other options when she refused to renounce her German connections during the Great War. Sally Seton, on the other hand, lives well but not as she had planned. She arrives at Clarissa's party as Lady Rosseter, the wife of a coal

king and the mother of five sons, the latter a fact she repeats and emphasizes in her conversation with Peter Walsh. Sally, who mocked convention and even dismissed Hugh Whitbread as nothing but a coal merchant's son, is now the model of wifeliness and motherhood, defending her husband and boasting about her sons. Sally had great plans to be a writer, to be an artist, to be something different, but she now must assert her identity as the mother of five boys because she has left behind or supplanted her identity as a radical personality. Although Clarissa has much more to her self than she realizes, she still invests her hopes in Elizabeth, and it appears likely that Elizabeth will accomplish what she sets out to do. Her governess has said that "*every profession is open to the women of your generation*" (MD, 136) and Elizabeth ponders careers in medicine, agriculture and politics. Elizabeth is able to consider these choices, not only because she is a young woman in a new age, but also because she is a single child. She has no brothers with whom to compete for her parents' affections or resources. Clarissa, on the other hand, is described as having both a brother and sister, although it was Clarissa's brother who received the education as well as the family house at Bourton. Clarissa has to rely on her social skills to support her husband's political work. She is afraid of Miss Kilman and what she represents; Clarissa is afraid that in giving her daughter what she herself wanted -- life, excitement, passion and learning -- Elizabeth will end up like Miss Kilman: bitter, unwanted

and unfulfilled. In reality, the two characters are more alike than unlike: both Clarissa and Elizabeth want to make others happy -- to serve them either by making pleasant spaces for them as Clarissa does, or by wanting to cure their ills as Elizabeth plans.

In **Mrs. Dalloway**, Woolf uses the presence of children, or lack thereof, to make a number of points. For instance, Woolf dissects the belief that women should have children in order to make their lives and marital relations complete. The relationship between Clarissa and Elizabeth, however, is not so easily defined. While they appear to be distant to one another -- Elizabeth only appears in several brief scenes and a single extended one -- the character of the daughter here serves two important functions. First, she is proof that Clarissa has fulfilled social expectations by reproducing. Second, she is a mirror to her mother, as well as a screen upon which Clarissa can project the same hopes and dreams she had years before, as a girl at Bourton. In **Down Among the Women**, Weldon uses similar techniques while creating the three-tiered relationship between Wanda, Scarlet and Byzantia. To express Weldon's views on how lives can be manipulated and transformed by the social expectations attached to motherhood, the three women represent the past, the present and the future. Wanda left her husband to raise her daughter Scarlet alone; Scarlet is an unmarried mother who does not

even know where the father of her child is; and Byzantia, Scarlet's daughter and Wanda's grandchild, has no interest in either husbands or children (DAW, 92).

Wanda is bitter about her experience, and comments about her own mother: *She gave me dreams I couldn't hope to keep up with in later life. She gave me lessons in how not to be* (DAW, 22). Wanda is an instrument of bitterness with which Weldon shows the lack of power and opportunity in women's lives, at least from the point of view of 1960s England; in Scarlet, Weldon embodies the shame attached to unmarried motherhood and parallels Wanda's own experience as a divorced woman and sole support mother. Scarlet's pregnancy and motherhood are presented as acts, not of love and creating life, but of taking revenge against her mother. Weldon expresses her frustrations with the slow pace of social change by showing how Scarlet's generation has fared little better than Wanda's in finding social acceptance of independent women. Weldon shows these frustrations in scenes featuring heated conversations between Scarlet and her mother, such as this one, in which Scarlet blames Wanda for her pregnancy while also insisting that the wrongs of the past will not be repeated:

> *"You didn't give me a proper home," says Scarlet smugly.*
>
> *"And what are you going to give that?" asks Wanda, pointing.*

> *"Everything," says Scarlet, with unexpected vehemence. "I'm going to give it all the love it needs. I'm going to give it everything I never had."*
>
> *"I gave you what I could," says Wanda, seeming quite impressed by this outburst. "You can only give what's in you" (DAW, 27).*

Yet Weldon contrasts the generational experiences to reinforce similarities, not differences. Although Scarlet is presented as having no future (DAW, 26), and her stepmother Susan as having one, both women are trapped by their children, although in different ways:

> *[Simeon] likes his meals at precise intervals, and his sleeping times to be regular, and that is the sum of his present desire. If his routine is not strictly kept, he is fretful and troublesome. He does not like strange places. He does not like other people. Thus Simeon holds Susan prisoner. She is resigned to her captivity. [...] Susan is not happy but she has the consolation of feeling she is in the right (DAW, 95).*

The comparison reveals, however, that Scarlet still has more freedom to raise her child differently, outside of convention as suggested by her daughter's name. Weldon also uses Scarlet's and Byzántia's names to show the changing assumptions about women's roles. Byzantia's name in particular serves as a not so subtle reminder of the legacy of Byzantium: Rome, representing the old order was dying, as Byzantium, representing the new order, continued to flourish. But Scarlet cannot yet see this philosophical distinction; she can only see what she is materially unable to offer Byzantia. To show this difference more pointedly,

Weldon compares Scarlet's mother's old worn green and yellow linoleum with Scarlet's father's thick, rich carpeting (DAW, 97). Scarlet has no access to either consolation or carpeting; in fact, she lives in terror that she will lose her child to the state (DAW, 98). The responsibility for her child paralyses her with depression, makes her look upon life with despair, and overwhelms her with worry about money (DAW, 100). In this section of the book, Weldon shows how the arrival of a child can be as much of a loss as a gain, particularly when it involves mothers on the margins. She notes that Scarlet has "*abandoned youth, hope and beauty*" (DAW, 103). Indeed Weldon creates such a picture of unrelenting misery and despair that it is eventually easy to sympathize with Scarlet when she wishes the unthinkable:

> *She has a sudden panic fear that she will be reported to the Child Welfare Officer for having a child out at such an hour. She almost wishes now that it will happen. She feels that she cannot go on. The craving to live her own life is so strong she imagines she cannot act reasonably any more. She is frightened of damaging Byzantia (DAW, 106).*

This fear is a valid one; elsewhere in the novel, one of her friends scalds her own child (DAW, 6), while another friend takes her daughter with her when she commits suicide (DAW, 222).

Just as Weldon uses Scarlet and Susan to make judgments on the presence of children in their lives (Scarlet's child is described as grubby and bright [DAW, 95] and Simeon as neat and clean [DAW, 134]), so too does she use the character of the artist, called Y, to show how the presence of children can inhibit and cramp creativity:

> *"Look," she says in her heart, "you have altered me forever; you have given me children and I can never be myself again, I must be part of them. Look how they cry, and whine, and sap my strength; I have to feed them, fill them up. I have to fight them for my being. And you, look at you. You stay the same. You implant your seed in me and walk away and leave me to it." And she binds him to her with chains of guilt and penance and won't let pleasure in (DAW, 170).*

Y's competition is the childless Helen. The absence of children in her life makes Helen attractive to X, Y's husband. Weldon presents Helen's childlessness as a symbol for freedom:

> *[...] she thrives in the golden glow of sexual reputation. She is idle. She writes poetry, goes to poetry readings, tends her little home, and waits for X. She grows riotous pot plants. She waxes white and odalisque-like (DAW, 112).*

However, as we shall see later, Weldon also shows how such unfettered sexual passion and indulgence has its price. Weldon's point here, though, is that children take energy, and more specifically, they take the energy of women. This belief is given voice through another character, Audrey, who lives a more non-

traditional life than Scarlet. She tells her lover that children need space, money and time:

> *These are the things that children need most. I can give them space and money: but time? I can't give up my work, it wouldn't be fair, and all the rest of my life and energy is spent in either meeting your sexual demands or cleaning this house of yours (DAW, 210).*

Atwood expresses similar points in Cat's Eye. Her presentation of two generations of mothers and children is important to her analysis of Elaine's identity, since it incorporates both a study of the relationships between mother and daughter and some of the changes in attitude and behaviour expected from women who are mothers. In the first half of the novel, Atwood focuses on Elaine's childhood and the lessons she learns about motherhood. Elaine's mother is not like the other mothers Elaine knows; she doesn't get her hair done (47), she wears pants instead of twin sets (71), she goes for walks in the ravine by herself (75). The mothers of Cordelia, Carol and Grace wear elegant clothes or print housedresses, they know when to wear hats, and their homes are done up properly with "good" sofas, drapes, vases or pictures. The differences between Elaine's mother and those of her friends seem immense when Elaine worries that her mother has guessed about her friends' abuse:

> *She might tell their mothers. This would be the worst thing she could do. Also I can't imagine it. My mother is not like the other mothers, she doesn't fit in. She does*

> *not inhabit the house, the way other mothers do; she's airy and hard to pin down. The others don't go skating on the neighbourhood rink, or walk in the ravine by themselves. They seem to me grown up in a way that my own mother is not. I think of Carol's mother in her twin set, her sceptical smile, Cordelia's with her glasses on a chain and her vagueness, Grace's and her hairpins and drooping apron. My mother will turn up on their doorsteps, wearing slacks, carrying a bouquet of weeds, incongruous. They won't believe her (CE, 156).*

Atwood uses the differences between mothers to draw attention to the clash of expectations in the post-war era, and to the difference between the freedom Elaine's mother experienced while they were on the road and the narrow confines of city life she now faces. On the road, Elaine's mother can behave as she pleases; in the city, she has to follow convention. Atwood uses the physical manifestations of boundaries and place to interpret what behaviour is socially acceptable and what is not. Further, Atwood shows how not following these social rules exacts punishment and pain. Elaine, who is unable to follow the rules of childhood and traditionally-defined femininity, is vulnerable to the taunts of her schoolmates. Later, Elaine becomes a social chameleon, picking up cues from her friends or classmates: she tries to make herself over to what others do, even though it seems unnatural to her. In one scene, Atwood sets conflict in a seemingly innocent game in which Elaine and her friends play with cutouts from a catalogue; Elaine feels the camaraderie of playing with the girls, but she looks at the game pragmatically:

> *Grace and Carol look at each other's scrapbook pages and say "Oh, yours is so good. Mine's no good. Mine's awful." They say this every time we play the scrapbook game. Their voices are wheedling and false; I can tell they don't mean it, each one thinks her own lady on her own page is good. But it is the thing you have to say, so I begin to say it too (CE, 53).*

Based on Elaine's remembered experience, the lifestyle valued by cutting appropriate objects from the Eaton's catalogue is in total conflict with her own parents' lifestyle of minimum gear for camping and moving:

> *I find this game tiring -- it's the weight, the accumulation of all these objects, these possessions that would have to be taken care of, stuffed into cars, unpacked. (CE, 53).*

Atwood's appreciation of alienation extends throughout **Cat's Eye**, particularly when the characters think about children and childhood. When Elaine herself has her two daughters, she worries about her capabilities as a mother; she fears that she will be unable to take care of them:

> *I remember thinking when the girls were born, first one and then the other, that I should have had sons and not daughters. I didn't feel up to daughters, I didn't know how they worked. I must have been afraid of hating them. With sons I would have known what to do: frog catching, war strategies, running around in the mud. I would have been able to teach them how to defend themselves, and what from. (CE, 114).*

Elaine's first pregnancy is unplanned; Atwood describes Elaine's reaction as "unbelief." Elaine fears Jon's reaction as he has said artists should not be

encumbered by everyday life -- "*tied down to demanding families and expensive material possessions*" (CE, 336). Although Elaine refuses to have an abortion, because she fears what happened to Susie could happen to her, Elaine is not happy about her pregnancy:

> *My body is numb, inert, without sensation. I can hardly move, I can hardly breathe. I feel as if I'm at the centre of nothingness, of a black square that is totally empty; that I am exploding slowly outwards, into the cold burning void of space (CE, 336).*
>
> *[...] Every move I make is sodden with unreality. When no one is around, I bite my fingers. I need to feel physical pain, to attach myself to daily life. My body is a separate thing. It ticks like a clock; time is inside it. It has betrayed me, and I am disgusted with it (CE, 338).*

Atwood presents Elaine's pregnancy as a trap and as a betrayal. Elaine is unable to control her body and her life; her future is a void. The image is a contradictory one, since Elaine now begins painting things that aren't there -- sofas, toasters, washing machines. It is almost as if Elaine's pregnancy creates a space in which memories of Elaine's childhood can surface. Atwood uses Elaine's pregnancy to suggest that her creative energy will later be redirected, that instead of painting, she will be raising her child just as her mother did. That Elaine begins to paint again after Sarah is born becomes a source of conflict between herself and Jon. Jon does not like the fact that Elaine is achieving success as an artist, while his career languishes. His challenge to her role as painter is directed

through his attack on her ability to function as the mother of his child, and the duties which accompany traditional definitions of motherhood. Despite his avowals of flexible and modern attitudes, Jon still expects Elaine to take care of him and his needs as well as those of Sarah (CE, 341).

Elaine's role as mother allows Atwood to demonstrate how having children results in contradictions. On one hand, Elaine is able to see the world with new eyes. Atwood shows the responsibility mothering brings as a newly protective Elaine observes:

> *I brought her home from the hospital and thought: All those sharp things and hot things. All I could see was what might hurt her (CE, 313).*

Atwood describes in detail the work Elaine faces in carrying groceries and a child (CE, 339); Elaine notes: *For the first year I was tired all the time, and fogged by hormones. But I'm coming out of it now. I'm looking around me* (CE, 340). Yet in many ways, Elaine's first child is presented as a distraction from the problems at hand. Atwood frequently describes Elaine as being unable to see -- "*my hands are out of practice, my eyes disused*" (CE, 342). Elaine doesn't examine her relationship too closely; she is marking time with her own work. She is also presented as lacking self-confidence and ambition: "*perhaps all I will ever be is what I am now*" (CE, 342), a part-time artist and an inadequate mother who is

irritated by her child and husband. In comparison, Elaine's second pregnancy appears to be quite different. Atwood writes of the second child as Elaine's second chance (CE, 381). Elaine is in her second marriage; her reputation as an artist is growing; she is feeling stronger and resists being manipulated and modified by others. She is also able to resist the siren call of suicide and depression by waiting it out (CE, 380). Atwood doesn't attach the same dread or despair to Anne's presence as she did with Sarah. With Anne's presence, Elaine's identity isn't threatened anymore by her children or by her husband. They are part of her life, not her whole life.

2.3 Sexuality

Women's sexuality is a touchstone for much feminist literary criticism, particularly when it confronts traditional views of the subject. Until recently, women's sexuality was treated as something, at best, to be suspected; worse, whole systems of power -- the church, the state, medical practice -- represented women's sexuality as unhealthy, threatening or even dangerous. Feminist-minded authors, directly or indirectly, are helping to bring about a shift in popular attitudes of how women should express and enjoy their sexuality. Roller, for example, argues that "*female sexual freedom is chimerical until it is tied to real political freedom for women*" (Roller, 157). Canadian poet and critic Gail Scott

concurs with Roller, but she also believes that women's voice and women's desires are linked: "*Finding our women's voice again is a matter of getting in touch with our desire*" (Scott, 1985, 41). Both critics also reflect Cixous's approach of writing through the body. The three issues -- sexual freedom, political freedom and freedom to speak -- are part of the process for women to assert their authentic selves. In the works considered here, Woolf, Weldon and Atwood tackle patriarchal views of sexuality by exploring how the suppression of women's desire leads directly to the loss of identity. The three authors share an interest in how women are alienated from their own desire. When women appear to act upon their sexual passions, the results are considered catastrophic. Because they have lost the ability to differentiate between their own desires and those of the men in their lives, they actually ape male expectations of women's sexual behaviour. For some of the characters, their sexual experiences, both positive and negative, remembered and forgotten, continue to influence their life choices. Woolf, for instance, uses Clarissa's sexual experience with Sally Seton to demonstrate the potential risks involved in powerful emotions; Clarissa's fear of passion is really a fear of actually feeling, a condition which leads Clarissa to cut herself off from her inner self. Weldon explores the question of women's sexuality and men's attempts to control and manage it by depicting various relationships, most of which are unhealthy and limiting. Weldon also looks at how women's sexuality

can be used as a weapon, either to ensure warmth and security, or to inflict pain and revenge. Finally, Atwood considers the impact the lack of sexual knowledge and experience has on a woman through her character's uneasy and tentative forays in a time that is a bridge between the convention-ridden fifties and the more hedonistic 1960s.

It is appropriate to begin our discussion of the representation of female sexual expression with Clarissa Dalloway, a woman who is afraid of passion and of losing control, even as she admits in a tiny part of her being that she is strangely fascinated and attracted to unconventionality. On several occasions, her former lover describes her as cold and wooden, almost as if she had a protective shell which kept her inside and outside lives separate and untouched (MD, 60). As Clarissa prepares for her party, she recollects key moments of her past; through this literary process, Woolf repeats and underscores the fact of Clarissa's innocence and sheltered lifestyle, not only as a young woman, but also within her marriage. Clarissa lives vicariously through her friend Sally's daring lifestyle. She copies Sally's mannerisms to a certain extent, and Woolf parallels this past relationship with a similar fellowship existing between Clarissa's daughter Elizabeth and Miss Kilman. Although Clarissa doesn't pursue the relationship with Sally, she remembers Sally's kiss as *"the most exquisite moment of her whole*

life" (MD, 35). Woolf suggests obliquely that Clarissa is not only sheltered from sexual passion, she works to deny its existence in herself:

> *She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up the surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. For that she could dimly perceive. She resented it, had a scruple picked up Heaven knows where.... (MD, 31).*

And yet Clarissa feels passionately about Sally, because Sally makes her feel passion, desire, and joy:

> *... she could remember standing in her bedroom at the top of the house holding the hot-water can in her hands and saying aloud, "She is beneath this roof.... She is beneath this roof."*
>
> *No, the words meant absolutely nothing to her now. She could not even get an echo of her old emotion. But she could remember going cold with excitement, and doing her hair in a kind of ecstasy (now the old feeling began to come back to her, as she took out her hairpins, laid them on the dressing-table, began to do her hair), with the rooks flaunting up and down in the pink evening light, and dressing, and going downstairs, and feeling as she crossed the hall "if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy." That was her feeling -- Othello's feeling, and she felt it, she was convinced, as strongly as Shakespeare meant Othello to feel it, because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton! (MD, 35)*

Clarissa and Sally's relationship is frowned upon by her family because they sense that Sally is somehow flashy, radical and just a little extreme in her emotional displays. Woolf employs the emotional connection between the two women for

a purpose, to illustrate how far a socially respectable woman might stray from the boundaries of conventionality. Clarissa will deny her feelings and uphold convention because it is safe and proper. When Peter informs her that he is arranging the divorce of a woman so that he can marry her, he waits for her reaction, her judgement on his behaviour (MD, 45) because of her judgement earlier on a young woman who had a child outside of marriage (MD, 59). In Woolf's eyes, it is vital that Clarissa pass judgement because such behaviour is evidence of desire.

Woolf creates a world in which affluence is equated with pleasure and material comfort is defined as the thing which women of Clarissa's class should desire. Clarissa, however, is a character who desires much more. To fit into her external world, Clarissa smothers her nature and ignores her feelings. Interestingly enough, one of Fay Weldon's characters does the same thing; unlike Clarissa though, Jocelyn sublimates her desires by constantly redecorating her home. The two women share similarities in their sexual disinterest which is fostered by their husbands, albeit Clarissa's husband does so from concern for her health, while Jocelyn's partner does it to disguise his own lack of passion. Peter concludes that Clarissa lives and experiences emotions only on the surface (MD, 75); that she might miss this contact with her own husband is only alluded to in

her comments about listening for Richard's artificially quiet arrival home from Parliament and his steps past her door (MD, 32). An alternative view is offered by author Kate Millet, who suggests that "*one must consider the possibility that frigidity is a political statement*" (Millett, 1970, 116). In **Mrs. Dalloway**, one could argue that Clarissa's distance and repression in her marriage is a political act, used to maintain her sexual integrity. Certainly DeSalvo's analysis of Woolf's own marital relationship and her need to establish intimate relationships with other women would make such an interpretation possible for the character of Clarissa Dalloway (see DeSalvo, 1989). Yet Woolf describes Clarissa's occasional bursts of feeling in the kind of eroticized language that also implies a mourning for past experiences and lost opportunities:

> *...she did undoubtedly feel what men felt. Only for a moment; but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush, which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over -- the moment. Against such moments (with women too) there contrasted (as she laid her hat down) the bed and Baron Marbot and the candle half-burnt (MD, 32).*

Woolf contrasts the purity of Clarissa's emotions as a young woman dressed in white with the seamier emotions of men like Peter Walsh, whose sexual appetites are varied. Even the model of conventionality, Hugh Whitbread, represents Woolf's comment on how upstanding citizens from the middle and upper classes patronize the prostitutes of Picadilly Circus to fulfil their desires (MD, 73). Woolf also compares the appealing "abandonment" of Sally Seton's personality with Elizabeth's generation, some members of whom are described as baring their shoulders (MD, 168) or wearing tight skirts above the ankles (MD, 169) during Clarissa's party. Both examples illustrate Peter's attraction to women who use makeup; as noted earlier, Woolf makes the link between women who use such enticements in Clarissa's refined world and the women who inhabit the seedy environs of Picadilly Circus, a link which suggests that there is not that much difference between them. While secondary to her creation of Clarissa, a woman fearful of her own passions, the women of the Circus provide an alternate view of Woolf's vision of how women's sexuality is managed by men.

While Clarissa Dalloway fears sexuality, desire and the loss of control, Atwood's heroine does not. As an adolescent, and even later in life, Elaine Risely does not know what she should or should not be afraid of when it comes to sex. Her ambivalence comes from her general lack of knowledge about life,

and it is this lack of knowledge which is seen by her friends as tremendously problematic. What Elaine fears is not pregnancy (CE, 297) or the disdain of boys, it is the loss of freedom:

> *This frightens us. Whatever has happened to them, bulging them, softening them, causing them to walk rather than run, as if there's an invisible leash around their necks, holding them in check -- whatever it is, it may happen to us too. We look surreptitiously at the breasts of women on the street, of our teachers; though not of our mothers, that would be too close for comfort. We examine our legs and underarms for sprouting hairs, our chests for swellings. But nothing is happening: so far we are safe (CE, 93).*

The image Atwood uses is chillingly evocative: the leash is a symbol of control used to bring women to heel, to follow the master's orders. This kind of fear cannot be talked about; the young women do not want to ask their mothers. The distance between them is too great. Atwood uses this distance to prove the divide between women and men, between mothers and daughters, particularly daughters of Elaine's (and Atwood's own) generation. The young girls collect information and puzzle over it in secret: the wet spot on Carol's mother's bed, the contraceptives in the bedside table, the mysteries surrounding the making (and unmaking) of babies. Atwood shows how this inability to communicate directly develops from girlhood curiosities to lifelong patterns. For instance, the gulf which keeps Elaine from asking about puberty and sexuality is the same one

which keeps her from talking about her affair with her art teacher to Susie, Jon and her parents. Yet something is known, something is shared. Elaine notes:

> *There's a great deal they don't say. Between us and them is a gulf, an abyss, that goes down and down. It's filled with wordlessness. They wrap up the garbage in several layers of newspaper and tie it with string, and even so it drips onto the freshly waxed floor. Their clotheslines are strung with underpants, nighties, socks, a display of soiled intimacy, which they have washed and rinsed, plunging their hands into the grey curdled water (CE, 93-94).*

Elaine picks up the rules of sexual behaviour more readily than she did the rules for childhood. She notes:

> *What I do with the boys is nothing to worry about. It's normal. [...] There are rules for necking, which we observe: approach, push away, approach, push away. Garter belts are going too far and so are brassieres. No zippers (CE, 239).*

Sexuality for Elaine is not a physical thing but a visual one. She rejects the true-romance comic book perspective, and focuses on the body. Atwood uses the image of a murdered, sexually molested girl to address women's responsibility for sexuality. Elaine thinks:

> *This murdered girl troubles me. [...] It's as if this girl has done something shameful, herself, by being murdered. So she goes to the place where all things go that are not mentionable, taking her blonde hair, her angora sweater, her ordinariness with her. She stirs up something, like dead leaves (CE, 241).*

Again, Atwood uses imagery in a particular way to evoke a feeling. Here Atwood focuses on the young woman's blonde hair and her angora sweater; for Atwood's character, these are symbols of femininity and sexual attractiveness. The contrast between sexual purity and availability also opens the scene to tension about women's responsibility for managing male sexual desire, both to arouse it and to rein it in. This image is also notable for Atwood's depiction of the fragmentation and disintegration of the young woman into a collection of parts. She has no personality, no self of her own and is re-presented through her sweater, her hair and her ordinariness.

The secrecy which surrounds intimacy, sexual or not, precludes the open acknowledgement of information: "*a long whisper runs among us, from child to child, gathering horror*" (CE, 94). Adults share and embellish information in the same way; Elaine is aware that the older women in her art class know about Susie and Josef (CE, 285), and so, she takes pains to maintain her relationship with him a secret, even though her motivation is rooted in competing with Susie (CE, 296). Yet Susie knows, and it is Elaine Susie calls when she nearly dies from her botched attempt to abort Josef's child (CE, 319). The abortion is not acknowledged either, but added to the store of secrets about sex and the consequences of sexuality:

> *But what she's done has set her apart. It belongs to the submerged landscape of things that are never said, which lies beneath ordinary speech like hills under water. Everyone my age knows about it. Nobody discusses it. Rumours are down there, kitchen tables, money exchanged in secret; evil old women, illegal doctors, disgrace and butchery. Down there is terror (CE, 320).*

Susie has lost her self to Josef, and replaced it with an ideal that cannot match the demands of reality. In Atwood's presentation, the lesson for Elaine to learn from Susie's misery lies not in learning to take control of her own needs but to deny them in others, as well as herself:

> *He expects me to console him, for his own guilt and the damage that has been done to him. But I am not good at this. I am beginning to dislike him.*
>
> *(...) The spectacle of his suffering does not make me compassionate, but ruthless.*
>
> *"You are cruel to me," says Josef. This was something he used to say before, in a sexual context, teasing. Now he means it. Now he is right (CE, 322).*

Atwood shows how sexual cruelty is an instrument women can use to manipulate their partners. Elaine has failed to use her strength in a positive way. Ironically, Elaine later uses her unexpected pregnancy to cement her relationship with Jon. Their marriage is not the result of mutual desire to form an egalitarian partnership, but the result of an unplanned pregnancy and the social pressure to make the child and the relationship legitimate in the traditional fashion.

Woolf, in **Mrs. Dalloway** and in other writings, concentrated on women's sexuality as an internal struggle; Clarissa, for instance, feared sexual feeling for its potential to consume or to devour. Atwood's representation focuses more on the outward signs of women's sexual expression; more precisely, Atwood looks at how sex is used to make connections and to forge relationships between people, and compares it with what this says about a woman's sense of self. Fay Weldon explores this concept more fully, especially in the ways women can use sex to connect people who perhaps otherwise would not invite or accept any sort of attachment to each other. In effect, Weldon uses the sexuality of her characters to show how women transform themselves and rationalize their activities to fulfil some other ideal. For example, in Wanda, Weldon has created a woman who is intent on destroying the margins, in pushing the boundaries of sensibility and convention. Wanda embodies what Cixous hopes women will do to the margins of real life. She shocks her daughter with crude language, sings rude rhymes and challenges the "norms" for women of her áge and background (DAW, 10). While she is ready to condemn her daughter for being pregnant, Wanda is herself always searching for some means to connect with others:

> *She does not like little men. She waits, and will wait for ever for a tall handsome bully who will penetrate her secret depths.*
>
> *"Can't stand men with little cocks," she cries, but what she really means is, if only there was someone who would stay long enough to listen, go deep to touch my*

> *secret painful places, so I would feel again I was alive (DAW, 10).*

Weldon's characters rationalize their behaviour, and minimize the risks. They also view sex in a direct way. In Weldon's universe, sex and its manifestations are not often portrayed in kind and romantic terms. Scarlet's friends, for instance, see her pregnancy as "*swollen and monstrous*" (DAW, 20). She symbolizes their worries every month, their fears that they too may cross the line and be branded as sexual beings:

> *There but for the grace of their hormones, the chancy consideration of men, go they. Yet they envy her. Something has actually happened to Scarlet. She has left the girls, and joined the women, and they know it (DAW, 20).*

Sex changes the young women and it changes how they see the world. Weldon uses Scarlet to show the distance between reality and rumour (DAW, 47), and to demonstrate how frustrated desires eventually lead to the fulfilment of stereotypes. Scarlet's mother and hér stepmother see Scarlet as sexually experienced, even though she is not. Once the baby is born, Scarlet tries to find an identity and she takes up the one that is offered most readily: the slut. Weldon confronts the contradictions embodied in Scarlet's actions and her family's responses. Scarlet's mother is horrified by her daughter's behaviour: "*like a cat on the tiles*" (DAW, 102). Scarlet tells Wanda she thought her mother supported

sexual freedom. "*Not for mothers,*" Wanda replies. Here Weldon locates the crux of the matter; once Scarlet crosses the line from virgin to madonna, she cannot openly cross the next line and become the whore, the only option in the classic triad available for women yearning for sexual freedom. Yet Scarlet does cross the line, and her role as prostitute (within and without her first marriage) is a symbol of sexual knowledge, use and control. It is a way Scarlet can rebel against the rules and boundaries attached to the role and responsibility of an unmarried mother. It is a way in which Weldon shows how her characters try on different personae and different emotions before they find the one that really matters.

It is through the character of Jocelyn that Weldon shows most clearly how women can become like cookie cutouts, no different from one or another, in maintaining the illusion of the "proper" way to express female sexuality. Jocelyn is described early in the novel as having a healthy sexual appetite; she takes lovers as casually as she would play a game of tennis or hockey (DAW, 15). Following her marriage, Jocelyn represses her sexual appetite. She becomes embarrassed by "*the intimacies of married life*" (DAW, 114) and hides her body. She channels her energy into redesigning her apartment on a regular basis; as she goes about remaking her home, she eventually comes to the bedroom, now a room with as little emotional meaning as any other (DAW, 115):

> *There was almost an embarrassing moment when the change from the double bed was made, and almost a spoken protest from Jocelyn, but the moment passed. Philip takes care to join Jocelyn in the other bed at least once a month, and more often, sometimes when he has taken a client to a blue film or a strip club, and the memory still looms in his mind.*
>
> *Jocelyn, out of kindness to her husband, trains herself in sexual disinterest, even distaste. Presently she is apologizing to the world for her frigidity (DAW, 115).*

Jocelyn's transformation is one of separation from the reality of her desires, and the feelings in her body. She eventually takes a lover, and her behaviour, while shocking to a part of herself, is also pleasing. She sees it as a subliminal revenge on her husband, yet she is unable to articulate her rage and resentment. When she encounters her former lover, she is shocked to see how much he looks like her husband, and how much her replacement looks like her. Weldon highlights the trauma of this discovery to show how Jocelyn's attempt to re-integrate her past with her present, even through the risks of extramarital sexual adventures, has failed. However, Jocelyn does learn from the experience; she discovers that Philip has smothered her sexual persona, and she decides to leave him and renew herself (DAW, 227-8).

3. Illness, Madness, Rebellion: Telling Tales of the Self

> *[...] a woman is harassed by the petty demands of her psyche which exhort her to comply with whatever anyone wishes. Compliance causes a shocking realization that must be registered by all women. That is, to be ourselves causes us to be exiled by many others, and yet to comply with what others want causes us to be exiled from ourselves. It is a tormenting tension and it must be borne, but the choice is clear (Pinkola Estes, 85).*

We have seen the three novelists show, through the experiences of their female characters, how the imposition of social conventions and expectations can diminish, smother and erase a woman's sense of identity. Some of the dramatic conflict and tension in these novels is created by these impositions; much more is created by the characters' realizations that they have lost their sense of who they are. In these particular examples of women's writing, the writers use illness and rebellion as the metaphors for this realization. Rubenstein suggests that illness is a metaphorical representation of women's boundaries being altered or breached and of women's sense of self being threatened (Rubenstein, 1993, 232). Penny Brown suggests that:

> *images of entrapment, thralldom and suffocation [are common] as women characters grow to an awareness of the extent to which they are prisoners of their womanhood (Brown, 1992, 224).*

In all of the novels, depression is used to convey the feelings of discontent, fear, loss of control and being managed. Woolf, in **Mrs. Dalloway**, uses another illness -- a heart condition -- to demonstrate how Clarissa has lost her soul.

Similarly, rebellion, as with illness, is presented as a symptom of the greater problem. The authors studied here universally use the breaking of social taboos to represent rebellion: Clarissa Dalloway contemplates suicide, Elaine Risley attempts suicide and abandons her marriage, and Scarlet Rider has extramarital affairs. It is important to consider that illness (either physical or mental) and rebellion are not necessarily distinct. Andrea Lebowitz (1987), for instance, has argued that the role of illness in early nineteenth century novels by women was itself an act of rebellion. By taking to their beds, these pre-Victorian heroines manipulated and controlled their environments. According to DeSalvo, Woolf's own parents thought that Virginia was using her health to gain attention; their treatment was to deny her access to any sort of writing or reading materials. For example, Molly Hite observes that Woolf, writing in **A Room of One's Own**,

> *backs away from her own identification and outrage (... since) the lesson is clearly that open rebellion continues to exact too great a price. Not only will it be interpreted as madness, but eventually, ineluctably, it will produce madness (Hite, 1989, 29).*

It seems clear that Woolf's own experience with mental illness influences her description of Clarissa Dalloway's illness, even if her own experience of medical treatment is more in keeping with her descriptions of the kind of treatment prescribed by the psychiatrists or what Woolf called the "Priests of Science" for Clarissa's foil, Septimus Warren Smith. Clarissa' physical health is frequently noted, not only by herself, but also by her family and friends. Interestingly, Woolf never allows Clarissa's true condition to become known; it can be suspected that she has suffered from influenza, exhaustion or some kind of heart disease, or possibly a combination of diseases. Similarly the poor health of another character, Evelyn Whitbread, is also left ambiguous, described on one occasion as "*being out of sorts*" because she suffers from an "*internal ailment*" (MD, 6). The non-specific nature of these complaints is detailed enough to raise concern but also vague enough to allow some activity. In many ways, we can see how Woolf uses the image of illness in **Mrs. Dalloway** as an image of control and as a means of ensuring male devotion. In particular, Woolf shows how women can control the domestic parts (at least) of their lives through their illnesses if they seize the opportunity. While Evelyn Whitbread seems confined to her home and only comes to London when she must visit a doctor, Clarissa is able to plan parties, go shopping and still have a rest after lunch, albeit a rest organized by her husband Richard.

Clarissa's uneven sense of well-being, or perhaps more accurately, her depression, is contrasted with Warren Smith's steadily deteriorating mental health. While Clarissa's feelings of dis-ease are not made readily apparent to other characters in the novel, Warren Smith's problem is directly attributed to shell shock arising from his wartime experiences. In fact, one could argue that Woolf also uses Warren Smith's shell shock as a metaphor for the feelings of trauma and dislocation experienced in post-World War One Britain. But Clarissa is depressed, and Woolf gives the reader enough clues to suggest that it is really her mental well-being that is in trouble and at the root of whatever physical ailments she may have had. Clarissa begins her day full of energy and vigour, but periodically she wilts. She is frequently described as having grown very white since her illness (MD, 4, 36); more interesting is that this descriptor is often followed by comments that Clarissa is very cold or hard, impermeable to the emotions and feelings of others around her (MD, 43, 49, 60). This combination suggests death, and Clarissa often describes her single bed in terms which suggest a coffin:

> *The sheets were clean, tight stretched in a broad white band from side to side. Narrower and narrower would her bed be. For the House had sat so long that Richard insisted, after her illness, that she must sleep undisturbed (MD, 31).*

Despite Clarissa's evident pleasure in planning her party, thoughts of death are not far away: "*Laying her brooch on the table, she had a sudden spasm, as if, while she mused, the icy claws had had the chance to fix in her*" (MD, 36). During Peter's visit, Clarissa is gripped again by another thought: "*It was all over for her. The sheet was stretched and the bed narrow*" (MD, 47). Woolf brings forward the very powerful image of the winding sheet, used to wrap the dead for burial. Woolf describes almost at the end of the novel Clarissa's own contemplation of suicide, when during her party, Clarissa withdraws from the crowd to ponder the suicide of Warren Smith and her intuited conclusion that he found life with the Bradshaws and Holmeses intolerable. She recalls how she too has flirted with the idea of death as an embrace (MD, 184), and she describes the feelings which draw her to death:

> *Then (she had felt it only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely; there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had not been there reading the Times, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with another, she must have perished. But that young man had killed himself (MD, 185).*

On two occasions during the day, Clarissa feels desperately unhappy, and she struggles to pinpoint the cause. The first comes when she fears that Richard

no longer loves her (MD, 31) and the second when she feels that he has laughed at her plans for the party (MD, 120). Woolf uses the idea of women's financial and economic insecurity to describe the precariousness of life, a theme she explored more pointedly in her novel **Jacob's Room**. In **Mrs. Dalloway**, Woolf uses Clarissa's fear that what she does is laughable, and therefore not worth doing at all, to demonstrate how much some women have invested the opinion of others in their own sense of status and integrity. Clarissa wonders what people she cares about, like Richard and Peter, think of her; her unhappiness during the day stems from worrying that she herself is not important. Woolf describes in great detail Clarissa's disappointment at not being asked to go with Richard to Lady Bruton's lunch:

> *...feeling herself suddenly shrivelled, aged, breastless, the grinding, blowing, flowering of the day, out of doors, out of the window, out of her body and brain which now failed, since Lady Bruton, whose lunch parties were said to be extraordinarily amusing, had not asked her (MD, 31).*

Part of Clarissa's worrying comes from not having Richard there; as noted earlier, illness can be used to control, and Richard's devoted presence is a source of security for Clarissa. Woolf uses Clarissa's fear of Richard's absence to suggest that he no longer loves her, that he is no longer willing to be around an invalid, and that he instead has found comfort with the witty Lady Bruton. Woolf's imagery is revealing of Clarissa's perceptions of herself: being seen as shrivelled,

aged, and breastless suggests Clarissa sees herself as no longer useful, attractive and creative. The pain of not being taken seriously colours Clarissa's perspective and she fears that this is what happened to Warren Smith -- that Dr. Bradshaw did not take his fears seriously. In fact, when Clarissa encounters the doctor at her party, she concludes, rightly, that "*one wouldn't like Sir William to see one unhappy. No; not that man*" (MD, 182). In both situations, what is at stake is Clarissa's concept of herself; her relationship with her husband is important because he allows and respects her to be herself. Her ability to connect with people is another aspect of her identity; through her parties she makes connections and is connected. That she appears to be not worthy enough of an invitation to Lady Bruton's luncheon suggests that Clarissa, despite her parties, is also disconnected from the elite. This is not a small point in the world view of a character like Clarissa, where social engagements, entertaining and status are key factors of a supposedly successful life.

By using images like white sheets and cold places, Woolf explores the symbols of physical illness, as well as the impact of mental turmoil and unease (particularly in the consideration of suicide). In some ways, Woolf's interpretation of how mental distress can alter perceptions of reality is echoed by Margaret Atwood's writing in **Cat's Eye**, in which Elaine, like Clarissa, is also disconnected

from her self and her feelings. Atwood considers the physical manifestations of such mental discord; Elaine experiences severe anxiety and engages in self-destructive behaviour, such as shredding the skin on her fingers and feet, as well as contemplating suicide, which she eventually attempts. Like Woolf, Atwood also flags depression and anxiety as warning beacons that something unpleasant yet critically important is happening (or has happened) in her character's life.

Throughout the novel, Atwood establishes Elaine's fear of mental illness, the blanks in her memory and the abusive behaviour of her friends to challenge the common assumptions about reality and experience. In the beginning of the novel, Elaine observes that until she moved to Toronto, she was happy (CE, 21). Her life was a peripatetic one, where she did not go to school, lived in tents or abandoned mining camps, and she played with her brother on fairly equal terms. Yet from her books, she is aware that there is a world of girls and women that she knows little about, and which seems enticing and pleasant (CE, 29). As Elaine begins the process of remembering her childhood, she notes that she doesn't understand why she constantly feels hatred to things and people (CE, 58), why she feels anxious (CE, 253), why she is afraid of losing her mind (CE, 355), and why she gets upset when other women try to manage her (CE, 91). Writing

in Elaine's voice, Atwood comments on how adult depression is linked to childhood experiences:

> *There are days when I can hardly make it out of bed. I find it an effort to speak. I measure progress in steps, the next one and the next one, as far as the bathroom. These steps are major accomplishments. I focus on taking the cap off the toothpaste, getting the brush up to my mouth. I have difficulty lifting my arm to do even that. I feel I am without worth, that nothing I can do is of any value, least of all to myself.*
>
> ***What do you have to say for yourself?** Cordelia used to ask. **Nothing,** I would say. It was a word I came to connect with myself, as if I was nothing, as if there was nothing there at all (CE, 41).*

Atwood uses the images of invisibility and erasure to convey Elaine's loss of self, while pain and depression are used to convey Elaine's growing awareness that something has happened to her, something which has coloured her perspective and influenced the way she lives. Elaine's feelings and inner self are often described as a black square filled with nothing (CE, 107), the days of nothing (CE, 114), or believing she was nothing (CE, 199). One day, the children are asked to draw what they do after school:

> *I stare at my own paper, which remains blank. Finally I draw my bed, with myself in it. My bed has a dark, wooden headboard with curlicues on it. I draw the window, the chest-of-drawers. I colour in the night. My hand holding the black crayon presses down, harder and harder, until the picture is almost entirely black, until only a faint shadow of my bed and my head on the pillow remains to be seen.*

> *I look at this picture with dismay. It isn't what I meant to draw. It's unlike everyone else's picture, it's the wrong thing (CE, 162).*

The so-called childhood games take on a more sinister meaning as Elaine's psyche deteriorates. Atwood describes the growing messiness of Elaine's penmanship, a reflection of her inner turmoil and tension, but permits her character to play along with the game, whatever its form, so that she can fit in, which gives Elaine a sense of relief (CE, 54) and makes her feel wanted (CE, 135). For example, when she begins studying art and drawing, she turns herself into the pale and wan artiste dressed in black (CE, 276-7). When she graduates, she buys a beige suit and wears her hair in a French roll (CE, 329). When she becomes pregnant, she turns into a young mother who had to get married (CE, 340). Once the baby is born she tries to revert to her earlier younger self and wears mini-skirts (CE, 329). But Atwood makes it clear that this game of pretend does not satisfy the true needs of the soul. As Elaine grows old, the game grows more sophisticated, but also much more complicated. She begins to faint as a way out of pain and tension; through the fainting spells, Elaine is able to leave her body, to blur the edges between reality and feeling (CE, 170-173). She thinks about killing herself:

> *I think about becoming invisible. I think about eating the deadly nightshade berries from the bushes beside the path. I think about drinking the Javex out of the skull-and-crossbones bottle in the laundry room, about*

> *jumping off the bridge, smashing down there like a pumpkin, half of an eye, half of a grin. I would come apart like that, I would be dead, like the dead people.*
>
> *I don't want to do these things. I'm afraid of them. But I think about Cordelia telling me to do them, not in her scornful voice, in her kind one. I hear her kind voice inside my head.* ***Do it. Come on.*** *I would be doing these things to please her (CE, 155).*

Although Elaine later finds the strength to reject Cordelia's power over her, some residue of this influence remains. Elaine's life is forever coloured, even if Cordelia's presence is forgotten or ignored. When Elaine's marriage deteriorates, she increasingly feels smothered, controlled, and managed:

> *I don't want to see anyone. I lie in the bedroom with the curtains drawn and nothingness washing over me like a sluggish wave. Whatever is happening to me is my own fault. I have done something wrong, something so huge I can't even see it, something that's drowning me. I am inadequate and stupid, without worth. I might as well be dead (CE, 372).*

One night though, when Jon does not return, she thinks he has left her:

> *Love blurs your vision: after it recedes, you can see more clearly than ever. It's like the tide going out, revealing whatever's been thrown away and sunk: broken bottles, old gloves, rusting pop cans, nibbled fishbodies, bones. This is the kind of thing you see if you sit in the darkness with open eyes, not knowing the future. The ruin you've made (CE, 373).*

She attempts suicide but is found by Jon, who takes her to the hospital. She is afraid to talk about the voice of a nine-year-old child who urged her to suicide, in the same way that she heard the voice of Cordelia so long ago. To admit to the

voice is to admit to mental instability, and Elaine already has the example of Cordelia being shut away in a hospital to keep her from admitting to this unacceptable frailty.

In both **Mrs. Dalloway** and **Cat's Eye**, loss of identity is represented figuratively: losses of heart and feeling, of trust and belief, of memory and sense. There are also breakdowns in moral boundaries; the growing awareness among the female characters that something has gone wrong is depicted through expressions of rage, anger, resentment, depression, discontent and rebellion. Fay Weldon displays the same awareness, in a number of ways. Scarlet's rage is manifested in rebellious and sometimes strange behaviour; for example, she has an affair with another man for two pairs of stockings. Both Audrey and Sylvia suffer from physical illnesses: Audrey with internal complaints which suggest there is not much she can stomach about her life, and Sylvia from poor hearing and eyesight which together keep her from hearing and seeing the truth about her existence. Jocelyn, who was so athletic and co-ordinated as a young woman, becomes accident-prone in her adult years, which are marked by alienation and repression. Susan's discontent and disease are represented through the loss of her inner life. Bored or frustrated by her life, Susan escapes into fantasy, dreaming of living in the forests of her New Zealand youth (DAW, 39); but as her personal

integrity is challenged, Susan finds she no longer has the inner strength to do even this.

Weldon is interested in other kinds of metaphors. She describes repeatedly the green and yellow linoleum on Wanda's floor as if it reflected the psychic mood of the household. Its deterioration began when Wanda first left her husband. As it gets older and grittier, so does Scarlet. Symbolically Scarlet's attempt to clean up the linoleum represents her own half-hearted attempts to clean up her life. The birth of her daughter ends Scarlet's dimmed hopes for rescue from her destiny of poverty and despair. Scarlet is different from the other girls: her class, her upbringing, her current existence as a single mother threaten and in fact prevent her from living out the middle-class dream of marriage, a white veil and a husband who will provide for her and her daughter. Unable to expel dirt and grime from her household, Scarlet doesn't know how to attract and lure men; she is open and honest about who and what she is:

> *"Look through the surface of me into my soul," she begs of all comers, "see what's there! See how I can love, feel, respond, love, oh love. If you will just accept --" But why should they bother? Why take the trouble to inspect a dismal soul when there are a myriad glittering surfaces to attend to? Scarlet's surface does not glitter. Even her low-cut black sweater is dusty; her shoulder straps dirty (DAW, 106).*

Out of desperation for Byzantia's future and comfort, Scarlet marries. The relationship is worse for Scarlet than the economic and social uncertainty she faced as an unmarried mother. Weldon writes:

> *Years pass.*
> *Scarlet walks like a zombie. Regard Scarlet's personality as if it were a plant. Come the winter it goes underground. Come the spring it will force its way up, cracking concrete if need be, to reach the light.*
> *Scarlet's spring seems a long time coming. No sun rises to bathe her world with warmth (DAW, 131-2).*

Weldon now employs another set of metaphors, borrowed from the plant world. She implies that the loss of sun during these years means not only cold, but the prevention of growth, and the onset of stasis or decay. Images of death abound, but so too do images of rebirth and renewal. Weldon uses the fear of death from nuclear bombs and the ensuing fallout to provide the germ of an idea for Scarlet's liberation. Faced with seeming oblivion, Scarlet wonders if she should take risks and run away from it all -- *the fact (...) once spoken, stays in her mind. It feeds, grows, nourishes the roots of her being. Is spring coming? (DAW, 132).* She has an affair; she rationalizes her behaviour with the belief that since Edwin, her husband, believes she is a whore, she may as well act like one (DAW, 133). Her perplexed sense of identity is warped further when her young stepmother, Susan, comes for a visit and tells her that her life is horrible, and that she is fat and miserable (DAW, 135).

Acting upon an idea planted by Susan, Scarlet decides to leave Edwin. She also decides on a new image. She dyes her hair and perms it, then gets a job as a live-in maid. Her family and estranged husband conclude from her actions that she is mad (DAW, 156-7). Although Wanda is the one who proposes that Scarlet see a psychiatrist, it is Edwin who pays the bill. Scarlet is mistrustful of Edwin; she is unsure of her future. She wonders "*how can anyone be so good and yet so awful?*" Edwin continues to insist that Byzantia's name be changed, but Wanda, then Scarlet, resists. Wanda sums up Scarlet's dilemma when she says "*The most important thing in the world is to be oneself*" (DAW, 158). The more Scarlet believes in this, the more she changes.

Weldon marks the internal change in her character with a similar change in appearance: Scarlet goes from fat, miserable, dusty and muted, to sleek, thin, clear and lively (DAW, 159). Weldon shows similar changes in another character, Audrey-Emma. Audrey's potter boyfriend Paul decides he will change her name, from Audrey to Emma, and in her acceptance of the change, Audrey-Emma also changes her identity:

> *She would not dream of arguing with him. He knows so much, and she has so much to learn. Even sex, at which she thought herself well trained, now appears a mystery (DAW, 33).*

The conflict this engenders is tremendous: Audrey abandons her friends, buries her senses, and behaves in ways she would not have before she became involved with Paul. When she ends up in hospital, Audrey tries to regain her identity. Weldon shows how Audrey loses the battle: "*My name is Audrey, says Emma, and worsens*" (DAW, 43). Audrey gives in and becomes Emma, becomes absorbed into the life and identity of her potter lover, and it is only much, much later, that she is able to substitute another identity, similar to the one she abandons, through a sexual relationship in which she plays the dominant, not submissive role (DAW, 175). Weldon shows how Audrey-Emma has lost her girlish roundness and has become peaky, dowdy and resentful-looking, almost like the chickens that dominate her life. Weldon uses the contrast between her appearances when Audrey-Emma encounters her former employer, and she recollects the power, prestige, and role she once had (DAW, 175). Her contact with the Editor transforms Audrey from bedraggled earth mother to a pretty, animated, female, nonsensical, laughing mistress (DAW, 176). This change comes not from being with a different man, but because Audrey (no longer Emma) is different.

Weldon uses the transformation of the body to show that something has happened within the character. As with Scarlet and Audrey-Emma, so it is with Jocelyn. Weldon initially describes Jocelyn as active, athletic and co-ordinated,

but Jocelyn's sense of self is erased as she moves into an unloving marriage; she also becomes more clumsy, more stupid in her actions. Weldon is clear to note:

> *Jocelyn is not stupid. Let us say she is going through a stupid patch, as people will when they are attempting to evade unpleasant truths; and Jocelyn, these days, maintains that she is happy (DAW, 139).*

Jocelyn turns on the gas and nearly kills her cat (DAW, 114); she mixes up the salt and the sugar (DAW, 124); she kills her parrot because she forgets to close the window (DAW, 138); she takes her dog for a walk and it drowns when she throws a stick onto a semi-frozen pond (164); she breaks her ornaments while dusting and trips over the vacuum cleaner (DAW, 144); she blows all the fuses (DAW, 145); and she sets fire to the bedroom when she leaves an electric blanket on for too long (DAW, 212). Weldon shows how the cumulative effect of the "accidents" wears on Jocelyn until she finally takes out her resentment and rage on her son:

> *The accident I had been working up to. All those accidents, like one's life, becoming less funny and more bitter as time goes on. I was bathing him, and forgot to put the cold water in, and lowered him into scalding water. There is, of course, no such thing as an accident. I did it on purpose to my child, because he looked like Philip (DAW (230-1).*

Susan, on the other hand, becomes neater and more organized, but just as repressed as the others. Weldon illustrates the fragility of Susan's identity in the

first major conflict of her marriage, when Susan is faced with the prospect of her husband's daughter giving birth in her bed (DAW, 50). Susan's internal refuge, of fantasizing of the silent kauri forest of her New Zealand childhood, in turn becomes threatened after Scarlet argues that Susan's view of a neat-and-tidy world is not accurate:

> *Susan runs headlong into her dark kauri forest but it has shrunk: she is only there five seconds before she is out the other side and into brilliant sunshine again. It is Scarlet's fault (DAW, 50).*

When Susan is able to send Scarlet home, she retreats again to her forest. But sunshine has come in again, and where once there was peace and silence, now there is a magpie, screaming "*Go on out*" (DAW, 53). The magpie is chained, and soon, so is Susan:

> *It would be difficult to fault her, and she knows it. She keeps the flat beautifully: she dresses neatly; she cooks from a cookery book and not from memory; she keeps strange cats, strange dogs, strange people, strange germs at bay. These days she does not wander in her secret forests, she has forgotten them. She is the chained magpie. "Go on out," she screams in her soul, and wakes in the night with an angry fluttering of black wings about her (DAW, 95-6).*

Susan suffers a nervous breakdown and has no escape for peace (DAW, 135). Later, she makes contact with Wanda, her husband's first wife, and builds a tenuous connection to the outside world that, in its strangeness and peculiarity, provides her with some support. Susan finally invites Scarlet to dinner, but it is

a failure; Scarlet and her father, Kim, have another fight. When Kim comforts Susan in a perfunctory manner, Susan is resentful; she believes it is his responsibility to look after her. She worries that he is ill, and she wonders what will happen to her. With that thought, her forest returns:

> *her kauri forest springs up around her: wraps her once again in its dark protective silence. It has not been lost; it has been hiding: too dark and powerful ever to dissolve. [...] She has her inner life back again (DAW, 192-3).*

Weldon reinforces Susan's dependency on external things to maintain her identity, but at this point, they no longer provide her with the propping up she needs. Despite the "*highly polished glittering world she has created*", all of her snowy sheets, polished chandeliers, thick towels and blankets, clean kitchen, orderly weedfree garden and her excessively neat and clean little boy, Susan feels "*dull, stodgy, and isolated*" (DAW, 193). Yet when her husband dies a short time later, and all of her possessions must be sold to meet the bills, Susan is transformed, from dull and pop-eyed to bright and centred (DAW, 198), able to function alone, independent of all else. Susan has had, metaphorically speaking, the patriarchal weight of husband, home and material goods lifted from her shoulders, like a yoke is lifted from an ox.

4. Picking up the Pieces: Self Integration as a Narrative Strategy

> *[...] like everything else this strange morning the words became symbols, wrote themselves all over the grey-green walls. If only she could put them together, she felt, write them out in some sentence, then she would have got at the truth of things. [...] Such were some of the parts, but how bring them together? she asked (Woolf, To The Lighthouse, 147).*

Woolf presents an active process, in which women's heretofore formless, invisible, and unacknowledged presence in the text is brought forward, examined, evaluated and explained, and its different parts put back together. In so doing, the feminist critic can also take the lead and place similar efforts in interpretation against the background of her own experiences and those of other women. The quest for identity is a complex process, one which involves telling the truth, taking control, and asserting the creative self. In the previous chapters, we have seen how the authors use the images of patriarchal roles and values imposed on women to narrow their lives and experiences. The impact of these impositions varies. For some of the female characters, depression or mental illness and stress are signs that their lives are no longer their own. For others, the authors show how symbols of physical illness represent the worm within that is eating their souls. The realization of the gulf between reality and fantasy, of freedom and restraint, provokes a crisis, one which prompts the female characters to name their feelings of discontent, oppression and marginalization.

The result of acquiring language and acknowledging these women's past experiences means an adjustment in both perception and understanding; if we perceive differently the reality of women's lives, we also appreciate the kind of language necessary to describe it and to name it. The power inherent in such an act is ultimately a creative force, one which gives women a voice, an opportunity to be heard, and a means with which to prompt change. Language becomes the site of social struggle because of its role in creating the social reality. The tension created by this struggle not only reflects the efforts by women to change the false reality which has been imposed upon them, but as poet and critic Adrienne Rich concludes, it is also the means by which the struggle is achieved:

> *Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity; it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male dominated society (Rich, 1975, 90).*

In addressing the issues of speech and silence in women's texts, the feminist critic must consider the validity of entering into a discourse community largely organized and formulated by a patriarchal authority, particularly one which has worked so hard to silence women's voices and to deny female culture:

> *To think like a woman in a man's world means thinking critically, refusing to accept the givens, making connections between facts and ideas which men have left unconnected....And it means that most difficult thing of all: listening and watching in art and literature, in the social sciences, in all the descriptions of the world, for*

> *the silences, the absences, the nameless, the unspoken, the encoded -- for there we will find the true knowledge of women. And in breaking those silences, naming our selves, uncovering the hidden, making ourselves present, we begin to define a reality which resonates to us, which affirms our being, which allows (us to take) charge of our lives (Rich, 1979, 254).*

Taking control of language, of making a claim to legitimate ownership of speech, is an essential part of feminist discourse. As women use the language which has been denied to them, they are able to recall the past and to help determine the future. The term "taking back" and the phenomena of reclaiming has been identified throughout the worldwide women's movements: women have not only decided to participate more fully in the future of their societies, but have evidently decided that one of the best means to do so is to analyze the past, to "*dive into the wreck*" (Rich, 1975, 65), and to bring back what society and particularly women (collectively and individually) will need to accomplish their goals.

In the novels studied here, women's silence is the price exacted for the appearance of well-being. Women keep quiet about their sexual abuse, their emotional deprivations, their lack of security, both in relationships and in bank accounts, and also in the (sometimes sordid) reality of their experiences. The lessons they learn about silence are reinforced by external messages: a wife has

a duty to her husband; only bad children get punished; if you say too much, you will get into trouble. In **Mrs. Dalloway**, Clarissa keeps silent about her feelings; to reveal too much of herself is to risk challenging the opinions and attitudes of her friends and family towards her true self. In **Down Among the Women**, Weldon's female characters hide the reality of their experiences behind carefully constructed walls of forced gentility and respectability or equally forced outrageous behaviour. Consequently no one talks about Emma's isolation, Scarlet's deprivation, Jocelyn's frigidity, or Susan's infantilization. **Cat's Eye** is a study in suppression of experience; for Elaine to speak about her schoolmates' abuse is to become further isolated in territory that is mined with unfamiliar proscriptions. The truth is revealed in glimpses; the symbols in Elaine's paintings speak without using the physical voice.

If we consider silence and speech indicative of character, so too can we consider the absence and presence of sélf in the same light. Nicole Brossard observes: "*To write 'I am woman' is full of consequences.*" The process of affirmation leads to empowerment. Part of this empowerment comes from naming oneself and one's reality. Cixous articulates the concept of "*l'ecriture feminine*" writing the body, yet using language to express a reality which has not

been validated is also difficult. It is one way in which women writers have taken on the challenge to bring their female characters, in Brossard's words, into being:

> *it is like determining what exists and what does not, it is like determining reality (Brossard, 139).*

Through writing, a text is created; a woman gives birth to herself through the process of writing a text which reflects her experience at the same time that she creates it. Canadian critic Barbara Godard integrates both Cixous and Brossard's perspective when she writes:

> *Writing is not transcription, but inscription, a means of resisting language through a foregrounding of process. Writing does not transcribe a moment of origin but inscribes what may be experienced, the wherewithal to raise questions about self-referential works' own genesis. Writing is at the origin of language, underlining the absence at the heart of presence (Godard, 1985, 46).*

I would argue that some women writers use the construction or reclamation of identity in female characters as a narrative strategy, because it is a process-oriented strategy which affirms and makes present women's perspectives. Roller notes:

> *since women so often live in that part of life which has no order, the ability to shape and form and create -- to give meaning to the world anew in one's work -- brings a special satisfaction (Roller, 182).*

The process-oriented narrative strategy focuses on the women characters taking the power to order their own lives, to give shape to their experience and

knowledge, and to create alternative models of being women. Woolf parallels Clarissa's preparations for her party with the internal preparations for her decision to live or die. Weldon uses the multiple perspectives of her characters to bring meaning and sense to her characters' confused and damaged lives, as well as to mirror the changes each undergoes. Atwood uses the retrospective of Elaine's work to organize her character's recollections and the recovery of her sight, so that the process becomes an introspective one: by the end, Elaine is able to discern meaning in paintings that had hitherto escaped her, and she is also able to recover her repressed memories. This process is also a self-conscious journey through time and memory, propelled by what critic Barbara Rigney describes as the necessity "*to return to one's childhood home, to explore the past in order to confront the present*" (Rigney, 1987, 4). The three novelists use this return in both literal and figurative ways: Atwood's character returns to the city of her youth, while Woolf's and Weldon's characters return to their youth by creating a space in which they can "go home" and reflect upon important events.

The authors use different ways to engage these processes. Woolf's technique is much like a camera lens; as a novel progresses, her lens focuses tighter and tighter on her subject so that Woolf's development of fictional characters emerges as a series of close-ups contrasted with the series of wide-

angle views noticeable at the beginning. The sudden clarity of the image or the memory, what Woolf described as the "bump" resulting in the recognition of the "it" which brings rest, reveals the meaning of the experience and provides the reader and the writer with the final component in a complex pattern. We can see that Woolf creates meaning by locating the subject within the shifting contexts of time, space, and experience. Woolf's bumps were later renamed moments of being. To borrow another phrase well-used by contemporary feminists, these "clicks" of understanding act as signposts on the journey for knowledge and perception; they build cumulatively, leading to a moment of vision, in which the character experiences a moment of intense emotion and perceptual clarity, thus enabling the character to acknowledge some essential truth about herself. Woolf believed that simple, everyday events had the potential to reveal important truths about human experience, that they formed the context and the background against which the hidden and the invisible could be exposed. Woolf's use of moments of being can be better understood if we consider her purpose for employing such a technique, the way in which she used it, and the effect on both the character and the reader with respect to memory, identity and the integration of self. The critic Pamela Transue argues that Woolf developed her style of writing as a challenge to linear narrative form, a form which did not respond well to her own interpretation of women's life experiences:

> *Woolf arrived at a form which could "use up everything I've ever thought," giving the impression of simultaneous connections between the inner and the outer world, the past and present, speech and silence: a form patterned like waves in a pond rather than a railway line (Transue, 92).*

In **Mrs. Dalloway,** Woolf offers a character whose inner world is open to the reader's inspection. Clarissa Dalloway is a socially defined woman: she is a middle-aged matron, wife to a Member of Parliament and the mother of an intelligent, nearly grown daughter. The novel is constructed in such a way as to engage the reader in a process whereby information is collected, not in a straightforward and linear fashion, but in a seemingly random, diffuse and scattered manner, in which one thought need not logically follow another. The effect is not random: Clarissa's character is put together through a process where

> *scenes, characters, images and so on [that] might initially appear to have been selected arbitrarily are subsequently revealed to be pieces of the hidden pattern (Schulkind, 1976, 20).*

Thus coherence, or the imposition of order upon chaos, is achieved through the establishment of emotional and intuitive connections.

The novel takes place in one day, during which Clarissa prepares for her party -- buying flowers, mending her dress, directing the servants. But the novel also describes how Clarissa is brought to a place and a time in which she can

recognize and realize a truth about her self, her identity and her purpose. Her day is filled with reminders, the moments of being which recall a younger Clarissa, and which invite a comparison and evaluation of her choices, her relationships and her experiences in life, all informed by the perspective of the older woman who finds herself emotionally bereft. In fact, the moments of being bring Clarissa to a point where she must literally answer a question of life or death: she herself must decide if she is to live or die. The news of the suicide of Septimus Warren Smith, a man unknown to her, challenges Clarissa to break out of her emotionally frozen state; finally able to imagine what his death was like, to feel in the very core of her being what it meant to make that kind of choice, Clarissa is now reborn because she has chosen not to die.

In **Mrs. Dalloway**, we can see how Woolf uses the moments of being and vision as a process of validation. Clarissa Dalloway needs to see herself and her life as important, as having meaning. Her moments of being are touchstones to further revelations, and they lead the reader, as they do Clarissa herself, to a moment of complete understanding and integration. Throughout the novel we have seen examples in which Clarissa feels unconnected to her husband, her daughter, her friends at Bourton. She spends her day trying to re-establish connections, because those memories and relationships make up so much of who

she is. She has lost touch with herself and her family: her husband sleeps apart from her, her daughter spends all her time with a bitter governess, and Clarissa herself hides in a little attic room away from everyone else. When Woolf sets up the scene in which Clarissa relives the suicide of Warren Smith, it is for a particular purpose; Clarissa allows herself to feel his pain as her own, and she feels his joy of escape as hers too. Woolf's insistence on Clarissa's being able to feel and to exist illuminates Nicole Brossard's comment:

> *It is in finding the words -- and nowhere as in writing does one look so hard for one's words -- that a woman initiates herself into that positive image which makes her exist as subject (Brossard, 142).*

By articulating her feelings and thus choosing life, Clarissa is being positive, and Woolf's ending of the novel -- "*For there she was*" -- is an assertion of Clarissa's decision to feel, to take action, to be (MD, 194). Clarissa's decision is echoed by Sally's exiting statement: "*What does the brain matter compared with the heart?*" (MD, 194). Woolf takes Clarissa from a passive, almost ethereal state, in which she ponders and reflects, to an active, assertive place where Clarissa can recover what she was, to make herself whole again, and to re-establish connections with the people in her life.

Woolf's writing style and approach to character development parallel her own technique for making sense of her own experiences (Schulkind, 1976, 17).

One could argue that Clarissa has been cut off from reality, that she has no soul and is unable to empathize with the experiences of others. Without the ability to feel, Clarissa perceives herself to be incomplete, even fragmented (MD, 37). Clarissa embarks on this process of re-integration, not deliberately or consciously, but as part of a mid-life crisis precipitated by seeing her daughter Elizabeth facing the same kinds of choices Clarissa faced when she was her daughter's age. In the beginning of the book, Woolf presents a woman whose options were narrowed and constricted by convention, a situation which enforces Clarissa's inability to express, or even acknowledge, what she felt. By the end of the day, in the midst of her party, Clarissa sees the unknown man's death as the last piece in the puzzle, the missing link that put the whole picture (her life) into perspective. She says: "*(Septimus) made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun*" (MD, 186). Indeed, until then, before her party, Clarissa can only feel when she is in her room, in a space where she is safe, and where no one else is allowed to enter. Yet at the time of the party, Clarissa is able to face the world, complete and whole. She says to herself, "*she must assemble*" (MD, 186), and she does, returning to her successful party, where the connections are being made between the people she has brought together, not only from her summer at Bourton, but also from her present life. She accepts her intuitive self as valid, and she reunites it with her reasoning self, to create a context from which she will move forward.

In **Mrs. Dalloway**, Woolf marks the change within Clarissa with two significant events or moments of vision in the novel: Clarissa's recollection of Sally Seton's kiss and her imagining the sensations of Septimus Smith's suicide (see Rachman). In both moments, Clarissa experiences intense emotions, but the former encounter leads her to repress further expressions of emotion and physical desire while the latter event leads Clarissa to accept and encourage them once again. The impact of Sally Seton's kiss is to direct Clarissa's life choices towards conventionality, since she is unwilling or perhaps unable to take the risk involved in exploring or admitting to physical desire. The incident of the maid who married above her station and Clarissa's response to Sally's reporting of it reveal in a lesser way Clarissa's feelings about sexual desire and expression. Sally herself, at Clarissa's party, alludes to Clarissa's snobbishness when she describes her own marriage to a miner's son (**MD**, 190). Clarissa's first moment of vision reveals her true self, the one she has kept locked away from private view, and the moment exposes the real and still hidden reasons for her disavowal of the power in Sally's kiss, her rejection of Peter Walsh, and her choice of Richard Dalloway as her husband, a man who would not consume her or sublimate her identity to his own.

Woolf uses this recollection first to show how Clarissa cut herself off from feelings and powerful emotions, and second, to show how the act of remembering leaves Clarissa open to feeling again and to relating to a stranger's act of rebellion. The second moment of vision allows Clarissa to feel what an act of unconventionality is like; suicide is not seen by the proper doctors of Harley Street, nor by the society matrons of her class, to be an heroic act. Yet Clarissa's experience allows her to see how Septimus's suicide validates freedom of choice. He chose to die rather than lose his identity and self to the Priests of Science who "*would force his soul*" (MD, 184); Clarissa chooses to live since her own power as a conduit, that is, a person who can bring people together, has been validated and recognized. Having been able to feel the unacceptable and to acknowledge it as a positive choice, Clarissa is freed from the constraints of conventionality and she is able to consolidate the parts of her life that had been separated and isolated. Clarissa's party brings togetner all the people who had influenced her, and that process parallels her own internal reunion of the memories, events and choices which shaped her.

As a narrative strategy, these moments of vision bracket the novel and Clarissa's life. As a young woman she is poised on adulthood; she makes a choice which changes her life. As a middle-aged woman, she is given another opportunity

to make a life-changing choice: to live or die. Woolf contrasts these two events with the preparation for the party; the first moment comes early in the day, creating a spiralling process which culminates at the peak of Clarissa's party with the second moment. Woolf also uses the recurring image of clocks dissolving in the air to show time passing, and to mark the steps, events and relationships which signal the passage of Clarissa's life. Ultimately, Woolf's moments of being reveal truths about Clarissa's life and self. She models the structure of the novel on an internal conversation: Clarissa is able to say things to herself, and then to see them for what they are, reflecting the truths she has chosen not to see with her mind's eye, her heart.

There are also moments of being in **Down Among the Women**, moments which build a picture and a reality the female characters -- Scarlet and her friends --- can see for themselves, moments which empower and direct them to take control of their own lives and experiences, undefined, unmanaged, and unlimited by men. The function of telling the truth is also crucial to recovering an identity that was smothered by myths and conventions. To use Linda Anderson's words, women in telling tales of themselves reject, rewrite and recreate their own scripts because the ones they inherit from the patriarchy oppress and repress "*alternate stories, other possibilities, hidden or secret scripts*" (Anderson, vii). In Weldon's

novel, the women's conversations with each other reveal snippets of truth about their lives. The spoken word has more power here than the internal one; there is another voice against which the women can sound their experiences. Weldon uses multiple voices and shifting points of view to illustrate the fragmentation of women's lives and selves to good effect. For example, in the opening chapter of **Down Among the Women**, Weldon's first person narrator introduces the five young women of the title, and the reader learns that the narrator is one of these women whose stories we are about to read. Before we learn the name/self of the narrator, Weldon switches to a third person narrator to go back in time to the period in which the young women did not have their own voices, when they did not, in effect, have or know their own selves to which they would give breath. By shifting the narrative focus, by moving between one story and another, Weldon also shows how these women did not have the power to direct their lives since they were still mouthing the lines of the patriarchal script. By ending the novel with the revelation of the narrator's identity, Weldon reiterates the same paradigm she has used with her characters in their search for identity; after many detours, tangents, digressions and regressions, there is an act of affirmation, a public statement of who "I" really is. Roller argues that fracturing the female character in this way demonstrates the schizophrenic view of women in modern culture as well as the internal battle women experience "*between the old ways and*

the revolutionary spirit, between one's ambitions and desires and a restrictive social structure" (Roller, 1986, 68). More specifically, Roller sees the fragmentation of perspective as a novelistic technique which shows the fragmentation of women's personalities by society's expectations:

> *[the fragmented point of view] mirrors the disjunction, fragmentation, and separation of personality one finds in the modern world. It reflects the frustration of women's needs in a world where unity is achieved only by imposed limitation. Women may have work or love, not both; solitude or relationship, not both; community or singleness, not both (Roller, 1986, 69).*

Weldon uses the mother-daughter-granddaughter set of Wanda, Scarlet and Byzantia to articulate the changing expectations for women over a generation and to draw our attention to the struggles which they must still face to gain authenticity of self. The three women anchor the novel in their representation of the past, the present and the future for women. In this way, Weldon is able to show how each woman must write her own story, if she is to survive, instead of following the patriarchal script.

Weldon also uses her multiple characters to demonstrate the diversity of women's experiences and realities. For example, Scarlet's experience of being a single mother is first seen as unusual, a departure from what young women are expected to do. Yet as the novel progresses, both Sylvia and Helen also join

Scarlet as single mothers, their own experiences echoing Scarlet's reality with some differences. Where Scarlet once dreamed of being a mistress in a little Kensington flat, it is Helen who reproduces this fantasy with disastrous results. Sylvia assumes her boyfriend will marry her because he has been living with her, unlike Scarlet whose pregnancy resulted from a one night stand. Yet she too is shocked when the script does not unfold as she expects. Although the experiences of Sylvia, Helen and Scarlet mirror each other, the reflection each casts is different depending upon the perspective from which it is viewed.

A closer study of Scarlet's story shows how these shifting perspectives allow the reader to mark the changes in the development of the characters' identities. In the beginning of the novel, Weldon describes how Scarlet gets stuck on her knees while washing the floor. She asks her mother for help, not only in getting up, but also in managing her life. Wanda has no answers and Scarlet panics: "*What am I going to do? (...) How am I going to live? What's going to become of me?*" (DAW, 28). Scarlet's life is aimless, she falls into a marriage because she fears she is unable to look after her daughter or herself. Her belief is reinforced by her mother, her father and her husband. Even after she leaves Edwin, she still depends upon him for money. When he begins pressing her for an answer on what she intends to do, she begins to understand that she does not have to

answer to him at all. Furthermore, she understands that he is not her protector, but a controller. After a particularly nasty fight, Scarlet jumps from Edwin's car with her daughter. Another man pulls up and offers assistance; Scarlet refuses, saying "*no thank you [...] I can look after myself perfectly well*" (DAW, 180).

This discovery about herself changes Scarlet; she has grown up and is no longer in need of father-figures, real or substitute, to help her. Scarlet also realizes that she doesn't need to depend upon men for anything. She applies to university and at the same time boots out her lover, who protests that they are doing no one any harm by their actions. But Scarlet now sees her life differently:

> "*We are doing me harm. [...] I want a proper husband of my own age, and some more children; I'm fed up with other women's leftovers*" *(DAW, 196).*

When Scarlet decides to put herself first, she tells the truth about her life -- living on the margins, as daughter, mother, wife and lover no longer suits her (if it ever really did) and she decides to create her own self: independent, educated, self-supporting (DAW, 215-6). Scarlet's life affirming decision is parallelled by similar acts of affirmation among her friends. Sylvia discovers that "*it is perfectly possible to live happily without a man*" (DAW, 215). While the absence of men in her life is more accident than design -- a result of the National Assistance decree that she not be involved with men or she will lose her social assistance -- Sylvia is happy

with her circumstances, and her vision, her hearing and sense of well-being improve. Only then, does she, like Scarlet before her, find pleasure and contentment in a relationship. Jocelyn's moment of epiphany arrives at a moment when she feels most debased, most like the prostitute Wanda accuses Scarlet of being. But the experience teaches her

> *there are other universes to inhabit, and that I was really just like any other woman, and deserved as much and as little; and once I knew that, all kinds of reasonable, sensible things became possible (DAW, 231).*

Finally, while Scarlet, Sylvia and Jocelyn ultimately reject relationships with men which require them to be dependent and subordinate, Helen continues to sublimate her desires so that she can be admired and adored by men, like a statue on a pedestal:

> *Helen has tried. She has done what she can do to build a new life. She goes to parties, makes friends; allows herself to be taken out, wooed, even bedded. But there is a dusty film over all experience. She sees with dead eyes, hears with dead ears. She moves herself through the world like a puppet. She pulls strings to make herself dance, go to fortune-tellers, play with her child (DAW, 217-8).*

Since Helen can never accept the possibility of living without her lover X, she becomes a prisoner of her fantasy. When she realizes the emptiness of her life, when she realizes she will never be able to answer the question she asks herself -- "*what do I mean when I say 'I'?*" -- she kills herself (DAW, 221-222). Weldon

contrasts Helen's story with those of the other women to show how the denial of self is destructive.

The narrative structure of **Down Among the Women** is similar to Woolf's narrative strategy in **Mrs. Dalloway**. However, in the latter work, Woolf's pattern has a focus; there is an implicit resolution with Clarissa's decision to continue with life. Weldon's approach reflects what Roller calls the "*passive and floating quality of female characters' lives (...) which do not progress, but simply continue*" (Roller, 68). Weldon begins her novel with a nameless woman in a park describing the lives of her friends. She ends her novel in the same place, only now we know that Jocelyn is the speaker. Yet given Weldon's narrative with its multiple stories, connections, and flashbacks, the novel does not really end in the same place where it began. The novel's repetitive, cyclical structure carries with it the weight of knowledge and the culmination of diverse experiences and realities which resists the rigid order of linearity and embraces the outward twists of the spiral. Weldon's ironic voice invests meaning in Jocelyn's contention that she and her friends are the last of the women, the kind of women who have been brought up to replicate patriarchal values. It will be Byzantia who chooses not to rewrite the patriarchal script, but to create her own model for the future:

> *'I see nothing wrong with her,' says Wanda. 'She lives in the present, that's all. She means to be free and*

happy now, not some time in the future. You and I lived by saying "one day I am going to." Byzantia says "Now! Let's go!" It's much healthier' (DAW, 217).

Woolf's narrative strategy places Clarissa in a place where her past is reflected back, not only in memory but through her party. Weldon's multiple perspectives also function as mirrors, although they primarily serve to reflect the discrepancies between reality and illusion. The practice of reflection and mirroring is made much more obvious in **Cat's Eye**; the book's title suggests a vision, as well as one of the games of Elaine's childhood, involving a marble that is as common as it is mysterious to the eye of a child. (It is also the title of one of the paintings in the retrospective, which will be addressed later in this chapter.) In this novel, the role, place and phenomenon of the self in art is a central theme. Like a mirror, art can show reality unadorned; like a mirror, art can also distort or modify reality through a number of means, including perspective and the ability of the creator to select (and thereby obscure) images. **Cat's Eye** continues Atwood's exploration of self in other texts, but it is distinct from her previous work in that the novel self-consciously scrutinizes memory, the work of making art, and the consequences of analyzing a personality. **Cat's Eye** is very much a self-referential text. As in **Mrs. Dalloway**, the voice we hear is the narrator inside the protagonist's head. Here, the inner voice belongs to Elaine, and is one which

ambiguously presents the facts of her life in an objective fashion, yet also judges matters from a highly subjective point of view. The meanings we construe are projected from Elaine's own experience. A construct of the artistic culture in which she is immersed, the adult Elaine moves in a world filled with objects that continually acquire value, partly from society's desires, and partly from her own dimly recognized ones. The novel is a record of a process, one in which Elaine's identity is reconstructed from the images reflected in her own pieces of art, many of which mirror her otherwise forgotten childhood experiences. The occasion of Elaine's return to her childhood home of Toronto is an artistic retrospective, an event which is designed primarily to look back, to place things in a unique, one-time-only context. It is a celebration of Elaine's achievements and of her status as a successful artist. Professionally, it marks a turning point in her career, for it is a rite of passage in which she will now be conferred (if not by the deans of the art establishment, then at least by the women's art community) a greater degree of respect. Atwood uses the retrospective as the opportunity to explore more personal issues, and to provide another sort of turning point, this time one more true to the meaning of "retrospective." The paintings lead Elaine back into her own past and allow her to view parts of her life that had been forgotten, ignored, mistrusted or revised. The works of art prove to be more than physical objects or even icons of commercial value: like mirrors, they expose Elaine's self

and show what cannot be denied. Textually, the retrospective is key to **Cat's Eye**, for it -- like a mirror -- frames our view of the Elaine Risley world; we can only evaluate what we see in a mirror, and we can only judge Elaine by what her paintings (re)present. Since Elaine's review is largely chronological and self-referential, Atwood builds the retrospective as a narrative strategy to explore Elaine's issues of self-discovery.

The works of art speak independently to viewers unfamiliar with Elaine's history and the circumstances of their creation, and effectively each takes on a life of its own. In the continuum of viewer-art-creator (similar to the audience-text-author paradigm advanced by Stanley Fish and many other literary critics), the art can be appreciated if not necessarily understood by the viewer even if she or he has no knowledge whatsoever of the creator's intentions and background. However, Elaine's paintings retain their mirror-like qualities for the creator, and indeed each presents a more potently honest message as Elaine ages. For example, the painting titled **Three Witches** features three sofas, one chintz, one maroon velvet and one (in the middle) coloured apple-green, with a large egg cup containing a broken eggshell. For Elaine (and the reader) the symbolic references become clearer with each bit of information dredged up, remembered and placed within a particular context: the three childhood friends, Cordelia, Grace and

Carol and the games they played with the catalogue; the fairy tale about breaking the eggshell to prevent witches from escaping; Elaine's rejection of the class values supported by her friends and represented by the sofas; and finally her own rejection of her tormentors' power.

The painting serves as a reminder of Elaine's act of rebellion, the assertion of herself in the face of ringleader Cordelia's terrible and awesome influence. The viewer can draw from this painting, at least as Atwood describes it, as much as he or she likes, but the experience of considering the painting is limited if that special knowledge is not known. It is remarkable, but not unusual, that the creator herself has somehow forgotten or obscured the reference points that together make the frame for that portion of Elaine's life. Once these points are known, the painting is a veritable mirror, although it is essentially a living object: like the others, the power and meaning of each changes through the continuum of time. I would argue that all of the paintings in **Cat's Eye** act as mirrors, and that the retrospective -- in which representative paintings have been organized chronologically -- allows Elaine to see herself reflected in a number of different ways. Consider the self-portrait titled **Cat's Eye** in which there are two incomplete views of Elaine, one front view, and one back view in a mirror, self-reflecting backwards thro[illegible]me:

> *Behind my half-head, in the centre of the picture, in the empty sky, a pier-glass is hanging, convex and encircled by an ornate frame. In it, a section of the back of my head is visible; but the hair is different, younger.*
>
> *At a distance, and condensed by the curved space of the mirror, there are three small figures, dressed in the winter clothing of the girls of forty years ago. They walk forward, their faces shadowed against a field of snow (CE, 408).*

It becomes obvious early in **Cat's Eye** that Elaine has blanks in her memory, which are connected to Elaine's childhood friend and tormentor Cordelia. These absences are reflected in the painting's literal and figurative representation of the incompleteness of Elaine's vision of herself. In reviewing the paintings included in the retrospective, many of which are themselves collections ot symbols which represent people and events in her past, Elaine undertakes a retrospective of an internal kind, one which recalls memories she had buried for a number of reasons. Ultimately, Elaine is able to replace the blanks in her mind and to unite the disconnected parts of her personality. The paintings, invested with so much meaning during the process of creation, return the favour in a way by restoring to the creator the source material that contributed to their very existence. They are aesthetic achievements, but they are also physical artifacts with a heritage all their own. They cannot lie: they display the parts of Elaine's life without prejudice, although they clearly isolate particular elements of her existence and therefore do demonstrate some element of bias. The eye appreciates a mirror

best when a particular object (for instance, a human body) is presented directly in front of it; by moving the mirror or the object, the aspects of representation change as the axis of point of view changes. Similarly, Atwood uses shifts in perspective (visual, emotional, theoretical) to isolate different parts of Elaine's self in her paintings, each speaking to a separate part of the character's past.

At the beginning of the novel, Elaine talks about time as "*a series of liquid transparencies,*" through which one looks down, "*like water*" (CE, 3). Collectively, Elaine's paintings are these transparencies of time's continuum, through which she looks at the accumulated memories of a life; they are also individual mirrors suspended in time, in which the person she sees reflected in the works of art is not the person she thought she had been. Elaine's awareness of the distorting power of her mind is revealed when she first starts to paint and becomes involved in the feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s. She realizes that:

> *it's shocking and exciting to hear such things emerging from the mouths of women. I begin to think that women I have thought were stupid, or wimps, may simply have been hiding things as I was (CE, 344).*

But it is not through speech and words that Elaine will reveal the secrets of her past, but through her paintings and her images, where the multiplicity of meaning and interpretation can still keep Elaine's secrets hidden. She remains true to her instinct to communicate, to reflect herself, but she chooses a medium that allows

and sometimes demands ambiguity. Not long after Elaine discovers her passion for art, she takes part in an all-woman show, and the results profoundly inform the approach she will take to her work as she matures. Previously Elaine has focused on more commercial representations; when she describes her shift in focus, she says, "*Now I begin to paint things that aren't there*" (CE, 337). The absence of a physical object is reflected in the absences Elaine feels in her memory:

> *I know that these things must be memories, but they do not have the quality of memories. They are not hazy around the edges, but sharp and clear. They arrive detached from any context; they are simply there, in isolation, as an object glimpsed on the street is there. [...] They are suffused with anxiety, but it's not my own anxiety. The anxiety is in the things themselves (CE, 337).*

By painting these absent objects, Elaine draws to the surface those events and people which shaped her and which created her. Atwood's approach here is very similar to the one used by Woolf. The character of Clarissa picks up on symbols and events which have specific meanings to her; these, in turn, lead her to reflect upon the people and events in her life which have influenced and shaped who she is. The revelation of the personal and the hidden is disconcerting to Elaine, but with her first exhibit, a collective effort, she is not yet at the point where she can bring her memory into focus, nor is she able to offer meaning to her work beyond the surface representation.

While Elaine retains no memory of the abuse she experienced, her paintings remain a constant and puzzling reminder of pain, particularly when she realized that the parents of her tormentors knew and approved of their behaviour. Swiss psychoanalyst Alice Miller, herself a survivor of abuse and whose memories of it had been suppressed until she began painting late in life, comments on the impact such knowledge would have on a child in this situation:

> *If but a single person had understood at that time what was going on and had come to my defense, my entire life would have taken a different course. That person could have helped me to recognize the cruelty and not tolerate it for decades as something normal and necessary, at the expense of my own life (Miller, 1990, 7).*

Miller used painting as therapy. Atwood sees in painting a similar path, one in which Elaine discovers therapeutic and healing values. By placing so many symbols and subjects in Elaine's paintings, Atwood is able to construct for Elaine a deliberate forum through which Elaine can effectively dismiss from her daily life the elements that caused her so much grief. This is similar to Brossard's assertion that women must become the subject of their own text; in **Cat's Eye**, Atwood uses Elaine's paintings as canvases upon which a life can be analyzed. Ultimately, though, Elaine cannot help but see what the paintings show her, an act which brings back the pain yet also helps her understand what she didn't or couldn't comprehend when she was younger. Elaine Risley does not "lie" in her art; rather

she obscures the truth to such an extent that teasing out the threads which reveal the truth is a complicated and hazardous process, one which is uncertain in either its direction or purpose:

> *Now I can see myself, through these painted eyes of Mrs. Smeath: a frazzle-headed ragamuffin from heaven knows where, a gypsy practically, with a heathen father and a feckless mother who traipsed around in slacks and gathered weeds. I was unbaptized, a nest for demons: how could she know what germs of blasphemy and unfaith were breeding in me? And yet she took me in.*
>
> *Some of this must be true. I have not done it justice, or rather mercy. Instead I went for vengeance.*
>
> *An eye for an eye leads only to more blindness (CE, 405).*

Although Elaine uses her knowledge as an adult to see the despair which coloured Mrs. Smeath's life, her recollection of her forgotten childhood is softened by the added remembrance of kindnesses received by Mrs. Finestein, Miss Stuart and Mr. Banerji, a forgotten memory she makes the subject of her painting Three Muses (CE, 406-7). Even though Atwood suggests that Elaine does not remember why these acts of kindness would mean so much when she creates the painting, Elaine flippantly comments "*but why shouldn't I reward them, if I feel like it?*" (CE, 407), comments which only reinforce the vulnerability she felt, and her overwhelming need to have an adult condemn the abuse she experienced.

As Atwood imagines it, this is only possible when Elaine returns to Toronto, the scene of the crime, after years of absence, and she is confronted by the double-edged sword of the retrospective. Like Persephone and other characters of mythology, Elaine descends to the underworld; she is held captive not by a devil but by her own need to find herself. She remains caught between the demands of her two worlds, imagination and reality:

> *This is the middle of my life. I think of it as a place, like the middle of a river, the middle of a bridge, halfway across, halfway over. I'm supposed to have accumulated things by now: possessions, responsibilities, achievements, experience and wisdom. I'm supposed to be a person of substance.*
>
> *But since coming back here I don't feel weightier. I feel lighter, as if I'm shedding matter, losing molecules, calcium from my bones, cells from my blood; as if I am shrinking, as if I'm filling with cold air, or gently falling snow.*
>
> *With all this lightness I do not rise, I descend. Or rather I am dragged downwards, into the layers of this place as into liquefied mud (CE, 13).*

Although the retrospective is a professional honour, the event is nonetheless an artificial construct. It celebrates a professional lifetime of achievement, but it is not an achievement in its own right. Atwood shows how this honour allows (and perhaps demands) others to take Elaine more seriously, and will give new definition to old work. Intrinsically, it is limited as an artistic experience, but it is also a moment of truth. As she readies herself for the opening night, Elaine wonders:

> *A leaky ceiling, a match and some kerosene would finish all this off. Why does this thought present itself to me, not as fear but as temptation?*
>
> *Because I can no longer control these paintings, or tell them what to mean. Whatever energy they have came out of me. I'm what's left over (CE, 409).*

Recognizing herself as the residue of her work, Elaine analyzes the ingredients in the process of making art. By extension, they permit Elaine to confront her own ambivalence about her past, newly remembered, and her troubling relationship with Cordelia, first her tormentor, then her best friend. The use of the paintings as mirrors in **Cat's Eye** is not just evidence of Atwood's skill as a writer and manipulator of images, but also as a consideration of memory and its importance to human social and emotional development. In **Cat's Eye**, Elaine's "forgetting" is a form of survival, and her "remembering" is a process of unification for a mind and soul dislocated by social expectations and assumptions. The paintings depict what Elaine feels but cannot say; the act of collecting her works for the retrospective is the same as gathering up the mixed up pieces of her childhood and putting them together to make a complete whole. Elaine is the product of her memory and imagination as much as she is also the product of her childhood and her culture. At the end of the novel, or more accurately at the end of this process we read as a novel, Atwood reveals an important truth: for Elaine, the face in the mirror is at last her own.

5. Postscript: Writing the Self into Being

> *It's been said that anonymity is the proper condition of women. But storytelling is something we do all our lives, men and women. We shape a narrative and cast ourselves and those we love as characters. We choose to achieve, retreat, engage, understand -- or merely survive. For women to take control of their own life stories, in effect to write them, means to act rather than be acted upon. And that flash of authorial ego is nothing less than revolutionary (Powell, 1992, 36).*

The Canadian writer Sylvia Fraser had already earned critical and popular approval as a novelist before she broke new ground with **My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing** in 1987. Readers of her work, already accustomed to the provocative, were stunned by the book's revelations: Fraser disclosed how she had buried and forgotten her childhood memories of sexual abuse by her father, and, during recovery of these memories, realized how she had created a second personality to protect her sense of identity. This second, externalized personality was the one that suffered incest, so that young Sylvia herself could survive. Fraser also disclosed how this hidden trauma had manifested itself in her novels, even though she was unaware of its influence as she was writing them.

Telling tales about our experiences is both a risk and a challenge. Tunde Nemeth in her research on taboos and silence in women's writing notes that speaking the truth subverts patriarchal discourses. Part of the appeal of

fictionalizing autobiography seems to lie in telling the truth about an experience, but telling it slant, to shift the perspective deliberately to see what meanings can be derived from its new form or place (Olsen, 1978). Molly Hite suggests that "fictional" self writing is appealing to the writer self because "*it implies acknowledgement that the self is always to some extent (and in some senses) a fiction*" (Hite, 1991, xv). In particular, Hite argues that

> *Subsequent female autobiographical theorists [have] noted that female autobiographers are often motivated to write by their awareness of the ways in which their identities have been constructed. They are aware these identities have been constructed because these identities are correspondingly narrower and more constricting than the identities acknowledged as belonging to privileged men. [...] All this suggests that for the marginal subject, the act of 'writing oneself' is unlikely to be perceived as a process of simple transcription, the faithful replication of a 'self' presumed to exist prior to all discourse. For such a subject, self writing tends to be participation in the multiple discourses that establish and re-establish this 'self.' It is by definition a revisionary activity, inasmuch as it reinscribes a prescribed subjectivity in another register, intervening in the social construction of identity to bring a somewhat different self into being (Hite, 1991, xv).*

My Father's House is a suitable companion to the books I have considered in the previous chapters. Not only does Fraser's memoir demonstrate Roller's belief that autobiography is the "beginning place" in making the connection between literature and feminism, the book also demonstrates Hite's analysis that self writing contributes to the birthing of another different self into being. The

woman who begins telling her tale about herself is and is not the same woman who brings this chapter in Fraser's life to a resolution. Fraser's awareness of her self as constructed is amplified throughout her text; while not fiction, **My Father's House** uses novelistic techniques to tell its parallel stories, and it reads like a sister story to the tales of Clarissa, Scarlet and Elaine. Indeed, Fraser drinks from the same artistic pools that nourished Virginia Woolf, Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood, three sisters also drawn to the integrity of women's identity. Early in the book, "Sylvia Fraser" is presented as if she were not quite a real person; by the end, of course, we understand why the author has portrayed herself in quasi-fictional terms: so that her eventual recovery and healing may make her then seem more real, more whole. To carry off this strategy, Fraser, interestingly, explores many of the same issues which are key to understanding the three representative novels considered in this thesis: these issues include marriage, sexuality, conflict, and the painful process of recovering identity.

5.1 Marriage

Like Clarissa Dalloway, Sylvia Fraser (the book's protagonist, as opposed to its author) relies upon her marriage to rescue her from insanity. Unlike Clarissa, Sylvia ultimately is unable to maintain her relationship. Her life with her husband Daniel Hobson is destroyed, ostensibly through her own self-created

sabotage of an extramarital affair. In reality, her actions come from her unknown self's desire to share the secret of childhood sexual abuse. Before she embarks on her life-shattering journey, Sylvia's relationship with Danny is a veritable life line. When Sylvia graduates and Danny challenges her behaviour, she denies her reputation, and he believes her:

> *I am in love.' I love, and I am loved.*
> *What was the golden arrow that struck me with such force? Simply this -- kindness. I denied their lies, and I was believed. I am believed. [...] He holds me, binding the pieces of myself together, allowing me to heal. [...] He believes me. He believes in me (MFH, 109).*

Danny's belief in Sylvia is more than just a token expression of his refusal to believe the lies said about her. At this point, Sylvia is not aware of what she suffered as a child. Nonetheless, Danny's love for her touches a part of her that lies buried, a hint of the alter ego she will later discover. She provokes fights to test the limits of their relationship (MFH, 118). Even though she has found an escape, from her father's house to her husband's, Fraser does not feel secure in her new position. In fact she does not feel very much at all. Like Clarissa Dalloway, Sylvia is cut off from her emotions, and she feels like a severed head -- without body, without blood, without heart (MFH, 120).

Sylvia begins to recover some of what she has lost through **Pandora**, a novel Fraser wrote following the loss of her job, partly to satisfy her own growing need to re-explore her childhood. She notes that **Pandora** began with "*a gush of primordial pain from a part of me I never knew existed*" (MFH, 151). Through the character of eight-year-old Pandora, Sylvia's other self found a voice: "*My other self leads me to the edge of her secret world, offering up murky clues without taking me over*" (MFH, 150). But this other self, now released, begins to take over her life, and she is unable to lock her back in, lacking both the key and the knowledge with which to begin her search:

> *When the time came to burst out of my marriage, it wasn't so much passion that tempted me, but compulsion that drove her. 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 (MFH, 154).*

Sylvia's marriage is no longer able to fulfil her needs for safety and amnesia: "*One moment it (Fraser's marriage) was the centrepiece for which the rest of our lives existed. The next it was not*" *(MFH, 186).* Although Sylvia does not understand then why she has to end her marriage, nor end it with adultery, later she acknowledges about her marriage and her husband "*that I had been compelled to leave him to struggle with demons far nastier than we could have guessed; that he had made survival possible by giving me faith in myself*" *(MFH, 245).* Sylvia's faith

in herself goes through many tests; ultimately she is able to develop her own inner strength so that she no longer has to depend upon external definitions or expectations, even when they are positive influences, to guide her life.

5.2 Children

Fraser's focus on sexuality is on the loss of innocence, the result of the forced brutality of her incestuous childhood, and her confused, even paradoxical desires to break sexual taboos. As we will see later, these issues are also connected to Fraser's decision never to have children. As in the novels considered previously, the child itself is not the problem. In this case, the problem is a threat of invasion, of an attack to the body. Throughout the book, Fraser uses negative images, some borrowed from the world of medicine (infection is a major theme), to reflect how she internalized incest. Sylvia's entire body is a taboo writ large; Fraser writes how the fear of becoming pregnant was intrinsically connected to the possibility of rediscovering what her father had done to her. The first of several moments of discovery occurs when Sylvia has just reached puberty, and her two selves are distinct:

> *My other self lies on her daddy's bed, her arms glued to her sides, her legs numb. For the first time, penetration is attempted, though it is by no means completed. [...] The emotion she holds so tightly in her chest that it blocks everything else is grief. She is old enough, now, to know about blood and babies. She is old enough, now,*

> *to understand how completely she has been betrayed (MFH, 43).*

The incident Fraser describes has just followed a scene in which Fraser and her friends exchange what little information they have about sex and the making of babies. Up to now, only Fraser's other self knows the pain of the incest; with her new knowledge, this other self now knows what she has become -- her father's lover -- and what may happen.

The fear of what might happen -- pregnancy -- dominates Fraser's high school years, a fear she perceives as irrational, even though it can be interpreted as a warning from one self to the other:

> *Because I now hated my father without knowing why, I hurled myself into extracurricular activities, spending as little time as possible in his house. However, now that sex had also invaded my peer world, that world had become almost as threatening. Because of overlapping territories, what had begun as a leakage of emotion between my other self and me had become a hemorrhage (MFH, 66).*

As we will see later, issues around sex and the expression of Fraser's sexuality become the exclusive property of the self which knows about the incest. We can read the fear of pregnancy to also mean the fear of discovery of the incest, with the pregnancy acting as evidence of sexual misconduct. When Fraser learns that

her best friend Lulu is pregnant, Fraser is once again gripped by the fear that she is also pregnant:

> *And then: I look at myself sideways in my mirror. Have I gained weight? Everywhere or...? But that's impossible. You can't get "it" from toilet seats, no matter what Tonya claims. Yet my anxiety builds, fed by the more relevant fears of my other self (MFH, 98).*

Sylvia is not pregnant, but her friend's pregnancy is still a significant event for her. From her perspective, two things happen. First, Fraser sees that Lulu's pregnancy results in her dropping out of the play, high school, and effectively life as they knew it. Fraser says: "*Lulu is over. She is no more*" (MFH, 102). The message Fraser perceives from this unplanned pregnancy is that having children means your life comes to an end, and that your dreams and ambitions are put on hold or erased. Second, Sylvia's other self becomes angry, in that she too has fears -- that pregnancy may happen and "end" her life the same way Lulu's life appears to be over. This rage erupts during one of her father's assaults, and Fraser's second self is then able to end the incest: "***Touch me again, and I'll kill you***" (MFH, 103).

When Sylvia later becomes involved in a long-term relationship, her fear of pregnancy remains, even though the incest has stopped. The fear from her other self continues to leak into Fraser's known world, it becomes translated into

a fear of being possessed. Having agreed to marry Daniel Hobson, Fraser wants to establish some boundaries, and one of them includes not having children:

> *I get to the nub of the matter: "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 her warning: If you get pregnant, I won't be able to stand it and you will go stark raving crazy (MFH, 132).*

Fraser's images and language are shocking: horrendous, parasitic, possession, helpless, out of control, guilt, shame, stark raving crazy. In the best of circumstances, a planned pregnancy suggests other images and calls for other kinds of language. For Fraser, the incest has caused a reversal in her perception, and the result is extremely negative.

Fraser continues with this kind of image when she describes her illness. The fibroid tumours which have invaded her uterus and have been removed in an operation remind her of something else: "*Yet in getting rid of the gnarled tissue in my womb, I couldn't shake the disconcerting belief that I had aborted Satan's child*" (MFH, 217). These images are repeated when she re-experiences the abuse in the process of recovering her memories. The language also recalls childbirth, but with different results: the convulsions and contractions Fraser describes produce more memories, memories which invoke "*thoughts of the incubus who, in*

medieval folklore, raped sleeping women who then gave birth to demons" (MFH, 222). It is significant that Fraser links the three processes of recalling past memories, reclaiming her childhood and writing her life's story to imagery of giving birth and other body metaphors. For Fraser, the body is both the battleground and the sidelines, the site of conflict and the passive place of rest. Reconciling both, through recollecting her forgotten childhood and then writing her experiences, contribute to integration and point to health and recovery. Yet Fraser frequently describes the fear of invasion, of losing one self to another through the process of pregnancy, more clearly than her other fear, that of being unable to parent. The risk involved here is being unable to protect her own child from harm in the same way that her mother was unable to protect Fraser from her father. Fraser describes her rage when she hears a former classmate disbelieve a child could be a victim of abuse. Fraser's rage is further intensified when she learns that this same classmate has been charged with abusing his stepchildren. The rape image is used again, when Fraser, looking back on the memories of abuse, understands her fear of pregnancy from the point of view of the child self who absorbed the knowledge of the incest: "*Now I understand my fear of pregnancy which, to my child's self, would have seemed like yet another physical invasion -- a nine month rape*" (MFH, 223).

5.3 Sexuality

During her recovery, Fraser learns why the notion of desire has carried such heavy baggage. When Fraser marries, she does so from her need to establish a relationship on mutual respect and affection, not desire (MFH, 146). Desire in fact terrifies her, and its presence induces panic and anxiety, as well as the re-appearance of the unknown self, the shadow twin who carries sexual knowledge. Fraser does not remember her wedding nor her wedding night, saying: *Sexual initiation is the territory of my other self. She-who-would-not-wear-white has been summoned to stand fierce guard over her own secrets* (MFH, 141). The expression of sexuality is inextricably bound with danger and excitement; the suppression of her sexuality is also the suppression of her other self's history as her father's illicit sexual partner.

Fraser's first encounters with sex are associated with secrets and pleasure, of being made to feel special (MFH, 6); however, when her mother catches her trying to masturbate, her feelings are transformed into something dirty, soiled and rebellious (MFH, 7, 8). As her father becomes more aggressive in his assaults, Fraser begins to have nightmares, "fits," and convulsions, and the images she uses to describe them are linked with nasty smells, vomit, and losing her breath. When she becomes desperate and tries to end the abuse, her father threatens her with

the death of her kitten, the only thing she has which loves her unconditionally (MFH, 10-11). Because she caves in to her father's threat, the abuse, and therefore sexual expression becomes associated with guilt, fear and responsibility, feelings she internalizes as the result of her own actions, and not her father's:

> *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. I'm afraid to strike him with my fists. 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. Guilt fear guilt fear fear dirty dirty fear fear fear fear fear fear.*
>
> *One day I can stand it no longer .... (MFH, 14).*

Fraser's descriptions are rich with words suggesting powerlessness (her arms stick to her sides, her legs are like worms) and culpability (she doesn't like me because I am dirty). The weight of abuse is too much for the small child, so she separates herself into two: one self to be her daddy's lover and rebel, the other to be the good child and fairy tale princess (MFH, 15). Yet as she grows older, the line between the two become blurred, and she begins to behave in ways that are contradictory to what she believes to be true about herself:

> *Whatever the reason, this hiatus gave me a chance to stabilize, to imitate normalcy, to begin to close the gap in sexual awareness between me and my other self, to escape with relief into my peer group and to absorb its moral values. It did not stifle my anger. If anything, tenuous safety made me more openly rebellious, more disdainful of all authority, more outwardly raging, the*

> *way a small dog yaps loudest when a glass door seems to protect it (MFH, 39).*

Fraser's work, more than any other writer discussed here, shows how closely the loss of identity is linked to the assumptions and moral values commonly associated with sexuality. Fraser's initial split between good girl and bad girl, innocence and knowledge, madonna and whore is a very black and white demarcation in her moral development. Fraser is able to remove herself mentally from the knowledge of abuse, and in so doing, loses her memory and part of herself in the process. Yet something of this hidden self is apparent, if not to Fraser herself, definitely to others. For example, following a raid on a slumber party, Fraser is defined by the boys in her Grade Eight class as the sexiest of her group (MFH, 63). To replace what she feels is missing, and to recover some control over her life, Fraser creates a sexual persona, an alter ego she calls Appearances:

> *I invented her to fool myself as well as the world. I invented her to paste over the pictures that do not appear in this box -- dark photos, still underexposed, of my other self and daddy daddy won't love me love me love me.*
>
> *The job of my glamor-puppet, whom even then I called Appearances, was to demonstrate that everything was super keen while I was at my most despairing. [...]*
>
> *So now there were three of me, all vitally connected yet somehow separate. Like my other self, Appearances began as my servant and then I became hers (MFH, 65).*

Fraser's social calendar is managed by Appearances and she dates constantly, always with a different young man (**MFH**, 102). The moral code Fraser adopts is contradictory:

> *Everything about the pristine and unforgiving fifties, with its glorification of a girl's virginity as her most prized possession, was destined to make my other self's fear of exposure an omnipresent terror. Ironically, though I created her to look after daddy's sexual needs so I could lead a more normal life, she was now so remorseful that she functioned as my guilty conscience, using her special knowledge to torture me (MFH, 94).*

Although some situations, such as close dancing, make Sylvia nervous, she participates in cheerleading, in which the young women wear short skirts and perform suggestive moves to rally the male athletes (MFH, 68-70). She buys a provocative dress, a scarlet strapless formal, for a "nice" date (MFH, 79) and she later dyes her hair bleached blonde (MFH, 89). Appearances creates a reputation and acts like a billboard, "*advertising the wrong things*" (MFH, 66). This is a fact which does not go unnoticed by either her friends or enemies. Fraser is subjected to harassment and innuendo and she receives anonymous obscene letters and phonecalls (MFH, 90, 91, 105). At one point she fears she is going crazy (MFH, 94), while on another occasion she is subjected to an assault on the bus (MFH, 99). The reality is that Appearances is like the movie stars Sylvia emulates: a sexual persona that is largely illusion:

> *Now the split between what I am and what I pretend to be is so wide I can barely straddle the gap. I see myself dancing across the stage like a stringless marionette, nodding, smiling, joking, laughing with red lips. Once this puppet was my slave, made up of shiny bits and pieces of what other people admired. She performed in my name. I held the strings. She protected me. Now she is a caricature of what I want her to be. Appearances is my enemy, mocking me, serving me up. She is destroying me by destroying herself (MFH, 101).*

5.4 Illness, Madness and Rebellion

Like the novels considered previously, **My Father's House** speaks to issues of power and control in women's lives. In this case, the protagonist is controlled by her alter ego; this loss of control manifests itself in depression and other behavioral extremes. Fraser uses the imagery of photography to describe her life first as a child, then later as an adult. We can take Brossard's idea of the "positive image" and consider how a negative, or an opposite image, such as the alter ego, can also be used to reinforce the unhealthiness of such reversals and contradictions. For Fraser, her opposite, unhealthy and negative self contained the knowledge of her abuse and this informed her positive self's reality, as simply as a film negative determines what the final proof will be:

> *Thus for me the usual childhood reality was reversed. Inside my own house, among people I knew, was where the danger lay. The familiar had proven treacherous, whereas the unfamiliar, the public, the unknown, the foreign, still contained the seeds of hope. My world was*

> *a photographic negative of my playmates' worlds: for white, read black (MFH, 16).*

We can see how the positive - negative dichotomy is a symbol for Fraser's disconnection from her "selves," and a commentary on personal autonomy. Fraser often describes herself in **My Father's House** as a "head person," someone who focused exclusively on her intellectual capacities to avoid acknowledging the messages from her body, and thus surrendering control of her self:

> *From the way the picture is cropped, it looks as if I'm also wearing a black gown. That is an illusion because only my head went to college. My severed head. That was how I rid myself of the red-shoed mannequin I invented to hide my other self -- I chopped off her head and registered it in Honors English and Philosophy at the University of Western Ontario, eighty miles away.*
> *[...]*
> *My incestuous relationship with my father was now over for good, leaving a sooty aftershadow of self-hate which I mistook for the residue of my bad experiences at Hamilton High. Philosophy was my high-minded defense against this legacy. Through rational knowledge I would put together a functional and successful person I could respect. Feelings were on hold. They were irrational, hence dangerous (MFH, 120).*

Fraser sees her identity as something to construct and to shape to her needs since her experience suggests distrust for what she knows and discomfort with what she believes her self to be. What was first a tool for survival and control -- an alter ego to absorb the memories of abuse -- becomes a tool of destruction, even though she is still unaware of her other personality:

> *Now darkness covers half the sky. Raindrops slash against the windows. The highway is black with water, the ditches a-churn with mud. A small cloud has turned into a major meterological disturbance. In no time at all it is night.*
>
> *And so it is with me (MFH, 146).*

Fraser is confused by the contradictions facing her. She has a good job, a happy marriage, a comfortable home, and an adventurous lifestyle and yet she feels desperately unhappy:

> *This pessimism isn't easily acknowledged, articulated or confided. As depression deepens into despair, I become obsessed with the hangman's noose. It's the last thing I see at night and the first thing on opening my eyes in the morning. It fills my dreams. It hangs before me, framing everything I see, inviting me to stick my neck inside it, offering relief (MFH, 146).*

The suicidal feelings are incongruent with what Fraser believes to be true. Unbeknownst to Fraser, the other self wants to be released from the prison, and she begins to make her presence known as depression during a time Fraser feels most happy:

> *Depression begins seeping like poisonous fog through the cracks of my life. In the past when I was down, I was able to look to specific causes. Now the sun is shining, but I am slipping into the shadows. [...] I am experiencing the unexpressed sorrow of my other self. Love disarmed her, challenging work kept her at bay, but she still possesses a vital part of me -- a part I need to become whole. It is precisely because my life is tranquil that she is staking her emotional claim (MFH, 147).*

On a visit home, she finds drawings filled with violence, rage and pain. Fraser wonders: "*What could have been on my mind?*" (MFH, 148). She channels her energies into a book, ultimately titled **Pandora**, after the mythical character whose opening of the forbidden box unleashes, in Fraser's words, "*a plague of ills*" (MFH, 148). The act of writing seems to exorcise some of Fraser's demons, even as she is puzzled by their appearance. She notes "*the ground feels solid under my feet. The sky is clear for as far as I can see*" (MFH, 148).

Fraser's dark clouds disappear and she achieves professional and artistic success. Yet appearances are not what they seem, and Appearances is still a present, if secret, part of Sylvia's life. Her secret self leads to a hazardous quest that seems to mirror her childhood experiences: she engages in an affair with the father of her best friend from high school. The affair is an act of rebellion for Fraser's other self; Fraser deliberately draws a connection between it and the incestuous relationship with her father. Fraser acknowledges that in writing **Pandora**, she gave this other self a voice, and now the self wants more:

> *My other self paces her underground prison, trailing cobwebs like a rotting bridal veil, remembering that she was once a princess. She telephones, jarring me from a sound sleep: "I'm coming up" (MFH, 161).*

We can see how Fraser's world operates on multiple levels: appalled by what she is contemplating, she seems unable to stop it, once again controlled by her

creation, the Glamor Puppet, whose reappearance and unstoppable drive to risk everything by challenging sexual taboos is another signal that something is not right. Fraser describes herself as an actress, a theme she raises in her earlier description of her high school years:

> *Closing my eyes, I steady myself against the sharp corner of the dresser, suddenly weary, as if I was preparing for the hundredth performance of a play that wasn't very good in the first place. I don't want to go. I never have a good time, no matter whom I'm with, and it's getting harder to pretend (MFH, 79).*

The space in between, from persecuted high school student to successful career woman, has put the Glamor Puppet in retirement, but now she is out again

> *boning up for her next performance, hating the deceit as much as the infidelity, understanding, suddenly, that the marriage which once made me feel so authentic has now become the place where I playact while the real drama goes on somewhere down the street (MFH, 174).*

Fraser is increasingly aware that she is absenting herself from the familiar and engaging in the unknown; she puts on identities that suit the occasion -- actress, flirt, dutiful wife, adventurous journalist, provocative novelist, and mistress, which she believes to be false and inadequate representations but not understanding why:

> *...realizing that I am losing control, that something irrational is taking over my life. I try to conjure up Danny in our apartment, furnished with the mementos of our life, but I can barely remember what he, or*

> *anything I once valued, looks like. Nothing matters to me anymore but seeing Paul... (MFH, 179).*

Fraser begins to fear the cumulative impact of her contradictory behaviours; she believes she is going crazy. She leaves her husband, moves into a new home, and continues to find herself doing unusual things: "*in the past I've liked my environment lean and sleek. Now I find myself putting ruffles on things.*" Fraser is unable to explain to her sister what she has done in leaving Danny; she only knows that she needs a place where she does not have to pretend:

> *Often I feel excitement as if I've picked up the threads of my own story after a long sleep. Often I feel drugged. I lose weight no matter what I eat (MFH, 188).*

Fraser decides she will kill herself. Her fear of being mentally unbalanced forms an unhealthy combination with her behavioral and emotional changes. In much the same way she would create "scenes" as a child to force her other self to take over and let the rage out (MFH, 35, 46, 78), Fraser creates scenes which force the end of her marriage and her affair. As an adult, Fraser no longer has access to the convulsions and hysterical fits she used as a child to express her anger and fear; this is because a fit would mean reliving her experience within her body, now dangerous territory, but also because such behaviour would mark her as truly mad. Although her public rejection of her lover makes her suspect, presented as it is like a child's tantrum, Fraser's rage accomplishes one thing: it brings her in

touch with her other self, even if the other self now has "*full control of my mind and body*" (MFH, 195).

Fraser frequently describes her other self's knowledge in terms which suggest contamination, toxicity, and infection, terms like the stink of fish and fear (MFH 20), the virus of terror (MFH, 73), the poison of self-loathing (MFH, 77), sooty (MFH, 120), and poisonous fog (MFH, 146). These images echo how she viewed pregnancy as a parasitic invasion, capable of overwhelming her (MFH, 132), and are reintroduced later in the book when Fraser describes her physical illness of fibroid uterine tumours. While one self grapples with the medical consequences, the other self is aware of the "other" truth, namely her incestuous relationship with her father:

> *I have a pain in my womb. It doesn't go away. Two doctors say I must have a hysterectomy. My response is stoical, but I have bad dreams. [...] Nature, it seems, abhors a vacuum. Where once I nursed fibroids the size of a five-month fetus, now I nurture a virulent infection (MFH, 212-3).*

After Fraser recovers, she is still plagued by infection, but of another sort. Her dreams become more focused and she feels that she is on the verge of some kind of discovery, one she believes to be connected with sexual experience:

> *I now suspected I'd forgotten much that was vital about my earliest years. I also suspected something terribly wrong might have taken place. But I couldn't leap from*

> *suspicion to accusation, even in my own mind. I was never going to believe anything I dreamed to have literal truth, no matter how persuasive (MFH, 217).*

5.5 Picking up the Pieces

We have seen how metaphors and expressive imagery -- particularly those associated with illness and disease -- are used to link the outward self with the inward one. Fraser uses other tools to demonstrate the division of identity and its subsequent reunification. Among these is the deconstruction of fairy tales and myths from childhood, a process which helps integrate her selves and to re-present her authentic voice. One motif that Fraser uses in a variety of ways is the mirror. Mirror imagery is also common to the other books considered previously. In **Mrs. Dalloway**, the mirror is Clarissa's collection of friends and memories, which together reflect the sum of her self. The paintings in **Cat's Eye** serve the same function for their creator, Elaine. In **Down Among The Women**, cosmetic appearances, as reflected in a simple looking glass, are tied to moods and feelings; Weldon also comments on social conventions about how women should appear, implicating the mirror as a tool of feminine servitude. In **My Father's House**, the mirror appears in a number of forms: actual mirrors, photographs, fairy tales, myths -- all of which reflect and project different parts of Fraser's life,

and more importantly different parts of her self, known and unknown. At the end of the book, Fraser uses the mirror image to reconnect these selves:

> *The central glass is cloudy with smoke. Gradually, it clears. I see a five-year-old child with matted hair and blue fangs staring back at me. Around her throat is the bloody mark of a broken leash. She lays her outstretched palms against mine. They fit exactly. We are one. She says: "I love my daddy."*
>
> *Before my eyes, the child grows older. [...] I see a gaudy cheerleader with brassy hair. She, too, wears the bloodmark of her daddy's leash. I try to pull my palms away to blind my eyes but they're stuck to hers. She says: "I love my daddy." She too is I, and I am she. All three of us -- my adult self, the blue-fanged child, the gaudy teenager -- are reflected in the triple mirror (MFH, 227-8).*

Fraser adopts other symbols from fairy tales, such as the enchanted red shoes, the fairy-tale princess in the castle and the emperor with no clothes, to illustrate loss of control and the effect of being controlled by someone or something else. These are images which are paradoxical: the red shoes make the owner dance, the princess cannot command her kingdom, the emperor does not trust his own judgement and falls prey to the will of others. Even Fraser's own creation, the Glamor Puppet, pulls the strings and pushes the buttons for Fraser, not the other way around. But these are also images which reflect different stages in Fraser's life and her journey to recover her authentic voice and control her own life. Fraser's interest in the myth of Pandora, expressed dramatically in her

suspiciously prescient first novel of the same name, finds a more full expression in later years; the unleashing of her own demons brings on great chaos, but also results in the discovery of hope and healing. The image of the fairy-tale princess has particular connections to Fraser's childhood. Her own blond curly hair and her "princess" looks make Fraser feel special and loved (MFH, 5, 7, 18) as a young girl. When she is not the centre of attention, she can command it to affirm her sense of self as someone worthy and worth loving (MFH, 5, 10, 75). Fraser uses four fairy tales to illustrate this period in her life: *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel*, and *Cinderella*. What the four fairy tales have in common is a central character who is threatened with or actually separated from her identity and her role as princess. In *Snow White*, the evil queen banishes (in fact tries to kill) Snow White to eliminate courtly competition; Fraser reinterprets this story to reflect the competition which was set up between her mother and herself for her father's attention (MFH, 231). In *Sleeping Beauty*, the princess is placed under a sleeping spell for a one hundred years; in Fraser's life, the second self slept for over forty years, until Fraser was able to reawaken the memory of her presence. Fraser also notes how she was both "*cursed and blessed at birth*":

> *I was given the poison and the antidote at the same time and by the same people. The well that poisoned me also provided me with the ability to resist that poison. Specifically, I was of the first generation of my family to receive the education and social resources and the personal support to fight back (MFH, 252).*

With *Rapunzel*, the parallels are not so clear but they are still relevant. The story describes how a witch locks Rapunzel in a tower to keep her from fulfilling her destiny as a princess; the witch gets in and out by climbing on Rapunzel's hair. For Fraser, the image represents her entrapment in the secrets of abuse (MFH, 6, 27). In the story, the prince can get in because he knows the password; in Fraser's own life, her father knows how to maintain Fraser's silence by threatening her with the death of Smoky (MFH, 10, 12).

The *Cinderella* story has the least references, but of all the fairy tales used, it is perhaps the one with the most connection to Fraser's overall perspective on life as she once saw it. In the story, Cinderella is pushed out of her rightful place as the good daughter and she is forced into drudgery and dirt. Fraser repeatedly notes how she felt like a princess (MFH, 15) but her behaviour -- convulsions (MFH, 11), tantrums (MFH, 12, 35), shouting matches (MFH, 46, 78) wilfulness (MFH, 29, 37, 53, 77, 113), disobedience and rebellion (MFH, 39, 89, 96) -- created a person who was anything but a princess to her family and her boyfriend (MFH, 114).

Fraser also uses another story, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, to illustrate the theme that expectations and appearances were reversed. In that story, an emperor

is hoodwinked into believing two charlatans who say they are weaving magic cloth only people of discernment can see. Similarly, Fraser shows us how denial was used to ignore and even cover up the truth of Fraser's childhood (MFH, 77). Fraser describes how her experience of the abuse and the response of her family kept her from being able to develop trust and the ability to see the truth (MFH, 253). In the emperor of legend, the one who had such an inflated sense of his own importance that he was blind to the evidence and others around him, Fraser found another link to help explain the devastating impact of the abuse on her own self-absorption:

> *My main regret is excessive self-involvement. Too often I was sleepwalking through other people's lives, eyes turned inward while I washed the blood off my hands. My toughest lesson was to renounce my own sense of specialness, to let the princess die along with the guilt-ridden child in my closet, to see instead the specialness of the world around me (MFH, 253).*

Where the princess motif was used to show Fraser's sense of specialness for positive reinforcement, Fraser's use of *The Red Shoes* story amplifies most loudly the negative effects of Fraser's feeling (or perceiving to be) special. In this fairy tale, a young woman is so enchanted with her red shoes and dancing, that she defies convention and wears them to church on Sunday. As a result, the shoes take over and compel the young woman to dance on and on until she collapses and dies. Fraser makes many references to this story; in many ways she believes

parts of her life parallel the events in *The Red Shoes.* Fraser often describes feeling managed and controlled, of feeling compelled to do things sexually which she might not ordinarily do. These things include behaving like a tease while in high school and, for a short period of time, in university (MFH, 85, 105, 122), and having an affair with the father of her best friend and leaving her marriage when she is an adult (MFH, 184). Her dramatic and public ending of her affair and subsequent planning of her suicide are described in terms which also suggest compulsion and coercion:

> *"Hey, you're not going to walk, are you? It's six miles."*
> ***Not I really, but my other self, now in full control of my mind and body.***
> *I'm amazed how easily the yards click by. It's as if I were running barefoot on grass instead of striding in three-inch heels on cinders [...] It vaguely occurs to me that I could jump off the viaduct, thus saving myself the walk, but I seem unable to stop the click click of my feet moving without fatigue and of their own volition (MFH, 195-6).*

Fraser's "red shoes" are physically represented in her Glamor Puppet creation, and it is not surprising that "her" colour is red. Fraser's use of the colour red is important. Not only does it connect the reader to the sexual issues which are the subtext to Fraser's life, but they also serve to reconnect the story of the red shoes with the character's compulsion. The colour red is most often associated with illicit sexual expression; young girls are taught that red lipstick, nail polish, shoes and clothing suggest sexual availability or carnal knowledge. Fraser suggests her

connection with the colour red is another symbol of her secret self's knowledge of the abuse (MFH, 66, 78). Red is also the colour of blood; Fraser makes reference to Lady Macbeth's bloody hands and the guilty knowledge she conceals (MFH, 94). Fraser's sexual persona is signified by the blood she draws from the attacks of others who acknowledge, even as she doesn't, the message she appears to send:

> *All I can see are mouths, hurling down obscenities that unroll like used toilet paper. A dart, spiked with a pen nib, hits me in the forehead. Blood gushes. [...] Blood spatters my yellow sweater with its scarlet letter. Blood, blood, blood, I am drowning in blood (MFH 88-9).*

The loss of blood also represents the loss of life, both literally in the potential loss expressed by a menstrual cycle (another reference to the consequences of unprotected sexual intercourse), and figuratively, in Fraser's loss of self and the knowledge the other self contained.

It is clear throughout the book that Fraser always suspected something was wrong about her life:

> *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. Now it all fits, you know it's true, but during all that time you never actually saw this person.*
>
> *And so it was with me. She was my shadow-self, unknown to me. She knew passion where I only knew*

> *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 (MFH, 228).*

Like the mythical Pandora, Fraser's curiosity and need for the truth led her to confront, in her words, "*demons far nastier than we could have guessed*" (MFH, 245). She also notes, that like Pandora, she too recovered hope and love where she did not expect to find it (MFH, 241). Aside from the truth of her childhood, Fraser also learned from digging through the Pandora's box of interred memories that there was another side to the picture:

> *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 some luminosity.*
>
> *I have been loved once, unconditionally, and I have loved in return. That, like the gift of air, can never be withdrawn. The disguises I assumed -- cheerleader, philosopher, princess, journalist, author -- all had something to teach me about sorrow and about laughter. Since I had early been damaged by love, my ruling passion became curiosity -- the desire to experience and to know. Since I could not trust what happened inside my father's house, I turned for adventure outside it. Since I dared not parent children, I created books (MFH, 251).*

6. Conclusion

> *It's possible to reimagine a world that's female, to reinterpret nature and identity, not to accept anything that is accepted and not to believe anything that's pre-ordained. There are women who are overturning stereotypes, pushing against the limits of convention, living what they fully admit is a marginal life. [...] With female eyes we look back at history. We become aware of possibilities that exist in our present, meanings that have never been explored. Out of all this change and struggle may come an image of woman that is at once more human, more complex and more true (Powell, 1992, 47).*

Central to my thesis has been the argument that the selected authors studied here challenge the authority of the patriarchal image of women. They show how the world of women has been marginalized by social values and expectations which have no grounding in female experience, reality or sense. In the works considered here, there is common ground, despite profound differences among the authors. Virginia Woolf, Fay Weldon, Margaret Atwood and Sylvia Fraser describe similar journeys of loss, fragmentation and affirmation. Their female protagonists have come to metaphorical crossroads that seem strangely paradoxical: to go forward, they must retreat. In that process they mine memory and exhume experiences forgotten or suppressed; overlaid with new knowledge and sudden understandings, the women become the stories they tell. Ancient stories and myths are echoed in their tales, but with modern, feminist twists. Like Isis-Athene, these characters birth themselves and midwife their sisters, their

mothers and their daughters. These characters are depicted as being independent, free, and bound to no man. The authors themselves reimagine the world in fiction, to provide an alternative vision to the conventions of patriarchy. In this new world, female characters are subject, not Other; they are presence, not absence; they are truth, not fantasy.

In the introduction, I argued it was more useful to consider the relationships, or connections, between women's realities, experiences, and social roles as the foundation of women's identity instead of separate, isolated fragments that exist without connection to each other. From the three novels and the autobiography studied here, it is possible to see how the former allows more room for interpretation, exploration and understanding of the female character. Virginia Woolf, for example, sees women's identity as a series of moments which culminate in a flash of understanding; these moments overlap and are related tangentially, while shifting perspectives allow the overall pattern to emerge. Central to this approach is women's access to time and space: in preparing for her party, Clarissa Dalloway also assembles herself, from the beginning of the day at the open window through her sorrow in her attic room, to the quiet affirmation of life and feeling in a room separate from, but still a part of, her party. At the other end of the continuum, Sylvia Fraser demonstrates how identity may be

constructed for a purpose. However, without understanding the connections between one experience and another, she found the absence of knowledge of these selves and their affinity for each other undermined, subverted and destroyed her ability to make sense of her lived reality. In her autobiography, Fraser details how her alter egos -- Appearances, Glamor Puppet, the Golden Princess, and the Little-Girl-Who-Knows -- were given and then assumed responsibility for the secret knowledge she could not carry. Yet the almost complete absence of this knowledge created problems in understanding the pattern being developed slowly by the presence of the occasional intuitive flash of perception. She too argues for physical and mental space in which to assimilate the new information gleaned from inward journeys.

Both Fay Weldon and Margaret Atwood offer views of identity which are similar to those held by Woolf and Fraser. For Weldon, though, the influence of patriarchal conventions is more obvious, and consequently her analysis is grounded in a theory which owes more to politics than psychology. The modern feminist agenda -- which encompasses the politics of reproduction, self-determination, and access to resources and opportunities, among other things -- informs Weldon's concept of identity as something to be struggled with and fought for as part of a continual challenge. How decisions are made, who makes

them and how others respond contribute to the development and/or affirmation of women's sense of self. Perhaps of all the writers studied here, it is Atwood who reads women's sense of self and its relationship with the body as text, a Rosetta Stone of female experience to be decoded, the symbols releasing their meanings slowly over time and distance. For Atwood, understanding the concept of identity depends upon shifting one's perspective; only then can the connections between the relationships of role and expectation, and the multiple layerings of knowledge, experience and desire be seen.

In a similar way, the writers approach social expectations, and the roles they embody, with a view to re-examining the roles of marriage, motherhood and sexuality in the formation of a woman's identity. The conclusions vary; these roles and their accompanying value systems find different meanings in different characters, with the authors presenting a spectrum of choices and opinions among their fictional creations. For example, marriage is presented as a haven for Clarissa Dalloway and a prison for Scarlet and her circle of friends. The images of pregnancy and mothering evolve in each book: sickness, renewal, life, lifelessness, purpose and defeat -- all are represented, reflecting how these women authors, like many others, are bringing the elements of their ordinary lives under intense scrutiny.

I hold that this scrutiny of identity is a critical feature of contemporary fiction by many women authors. I find this is particularly so in authors who engage in a conscious examination of women and their social roles; who are intrigued by the politics of everyday life; and whose literature is the intersection between realism and image, symbol and representation. The selected authors happen to illustrate these elements in particular and the evolution of twentieth century feminism in general: in Woolf, there is the burgeoning awareness of the modern feminist self and the anticipation of better times ahead for the next generation; in Weldon, there is the anger of the working class woman and the excitement of early 1970s feminism; in Atwood, there is the shift to interior contemplation and self-discovery; and in Fraser, there is the uncovering of the taboo of sexual abuse and the process of personal recovery and healing.

This evolution in literature has been mirrored, to some extent, by developments in feminist literary criticism, to some of which I referred in the introduction. In my view, it is important for feminist academics to acknowledge the correlation between identity and narrative strategy in women's writing to advance our field, as well as our understanding of how and why women write about themselves and their lives. Again the four authors are united by their similarities in focusing on process as a narrative strategy; however, they differ in

their approach and style, demonstrating the diversity and multiplicity of female experience. For example, Woolf presents one day in the life of one woman to pull together the threads of memory and feeling; the seemingly mundane activities of preparing for a party are contrasted with the rich interior life of the central character. What seems at first to be an unravelling of identity comes round to be assembled into a coherent whole. Weldon uses multiple voices and multiple perspectives to represent a fragmented reality, one which is lacking meaning and coherence. The quest for unity here is not as clearly defined as it is in Woolf's work; more importantly, for Weldon, the establishment of the authenticity of self through the making of connections between the commonalities of women's experiences is, in her view, the key to women's survival. Margaret Atwood, on the other hand, uses the explicit nature of the painter's retrospective as her narrative strategy. On the surface, Atwood's technique of framing her subject -- a portrait of the artist looking back -- by the retrospective seems artificial, and even rigid. However, even within this construct, there is opportunity to retrieve memory and understanding by moving through a fluid, shifting landscape. Finally, Sylvia Fraser begins her work with the explicit intention of uniting the two selves which contain such radically separate views of her life. Through an examination of fairy tales, the taboos of sexuality in the 50s, and the feelings of depression, madness and decay, Fraser is able to bring her opposites

together to make a whole which reflects, synthesises and recognizes the integrity of the self with the diversity of experience.

As noted earlier, feminist criticism has become much more complex than the early models presented only a generation ago. In the course of writing this thesis, some other questions concerning identity arose which were beyond the scope of this work to undertake, but which I believe point the way to future study. For example, a comparison of the novels of development featuring young female protagonists with other novels of integration, similar to the ones examined here, with their older protagonists, could offer some interesting thoughts on the function of age and experience in facilitating the integration of self, and the relationship between class and culture and the construction of female identity. It should also be noted that the works considered here reflect only a small sample of white, Western, and (largely) urban experiences of female identity; consequently another area of research could be the quest for identity in writing produced by women of other cultures and ethnicities to examine the influence of sexism, racism and colonial/diasporic experiences on the development of women's sense of self. Nevertheless, I believe that greater recognition of the integration of identity as a narrative strategy can strengthen the ability of contemporary criticism to illuminate women's writing, past and present.

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