

**BEYOND GENDER: THE AFFIRMATIVE FEMINISM OF
FOUR FEMALE ARTISTS OF THE NINETEENTH AND
TWENTIETH CENTURIES**

BY

MARJORIE MAY ANDERSON

**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**Department of English
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, the late Thorstein Andres Anderson, whose words and stories during my childhood provided me with a life-long fascination with literature and learning.

Chapter I: Theoretical Introduction

If the oppression that women have experienced under the patriarchal system of social organization is grounded in a fundamental disregard for their humanness, can a focus on those elements of common humanity, which all human beings share, be a corrective? The purpose of my study is to explore the ways in which that the imaginative works of women writers address this question. In order to provide a context for this investigation, I will first highlight insights of theorists, critics and feminists regarding the woman's movement, feminism and feminist consciousness. Then, in subsequent chapters, I will examine the work of four women writers whose texts offer rich possibilities for exploring aspects of "common humanity" and for questioning and extending current theories about the feminist project.

* * * * *

In her introduction to Beyond God The Father, Mary Daly provides a basic conceptual framework for understanding the distinct character of the twentieth-century woman's movement:

Women of all types, having made the psychic breakthrough to recognition of the basic sameness of our situation as women, have been initiated into the struggle for liberation of our sex from its ancient bondage. The bonding together of women into a sisterhood for liberation is becoming a widespread feature of American culture and the movement is rapidly taking on worldwide dimensions. (1-2)

Daly identifies the ancient bondage as "this planetary sexual caste system" that

involves "birth-ascribed hierarchically ordered groups," and she defines patriarchy as "the system of social arrangements" that creates, supports and perpetrates this social caste system. She insists that this exploitative system of sexual relations could not be perpetuated without the consent that is obtained through sex-role socialization--a "conditioning process which begins to operate from the moment we are born, and which is enforced by most institutions" (2). She is concerned with the manner in which the "low caste status" of women has been masked, disguised by a promotion of sex-role segregation as natural, by the status that is granted women "according to their relationships with men" and by "ideologies that bestow false identities upon women and men" (3).

Daly is not so much concerned with the mechanisms that overtly and visibly prop up the hierarchical sexual caste system as she is with the fundamental underlying, unconscious assumptions that the proponents of the system hold. In the epigraph to the opening section of her text, she includes the instructive words of Alfred North Whitehead in this regard:

When you are criticizing the philosophy of an epoch, do not chiefly direct your attention to those intellectual positions which its exponents feel it necessary explicitly to defend. There will be some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the various systems within the epoch unconsciously, presuppose. Such assumptions appear so obvious that people do not know what they are assuming because no other way of putting things has ever occurred to them. (1)

While the women's movement is diverse in its aims and goals, what Daly articulates is a common denominator of a feminist position: opposition to the

patriarchal system of male domination and female subordination. According to this definition, then, feminism can be seen as the political stance of those who name, expose and work to dismantle this hierarchical sexual caste system. In emphasizing the need for feminists to focus on those unconscious underlying assumptions that keep the system functioning, Daly identifies the major area that needs attention, but she also hints at something that has been ignored--and this is of special significance to my study: namely, our need to recognize that this system "bestow[s] false identities upon women *and men*" (italics mine).

Turning to French feminist Julia Kristeva, we get more insights into the potential future of the feminist movement. In "Women's Time" Kristeva asserts that feminism can be seen, historically and politically, as a three-tiered movement:

- 1) Women demand equal access to the symbolic order
- 2) Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference
- 3) Women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical.

For Kristeva, the symbolic order is the social contract that determines a subject's relationship to power, language and meaning--a subject's place in history. This first tier--"suffragism and existential feminism"--involves a campaign for women's entry into the public sphere and a demand for political, economic and professional equality. Because of its reliance on a model of

progressive, evolutionary social change, this tier of feminism incorporates a concept of time that is linear and "masculine"--the time of history.

Tier two, which Kristeva locates chronologically after the Paris student revolution of 1968, is concerned with "the specificity of female psychology" (198). While still wanting an insertion into history and a place in production, these feminists refuse the limitations imposed on them by this history's sense of linear time and by the ruling hegemonic forces of production.

No longer wishing to be excluded or no longer content with the function which has always been demanded of us (to maintain, arrange, and perpetuate this sociosymbolic contract as mothers, wives, nurses, doctors, teachers...), how can we reveal our place, first as it is bequeathed to us by tradition, and then as we want to transform it? (203)

There are two distinct relationships with the social contract that emerge out of the reforming impulse of the second tier: one of transformation from within; one of formation of a countersociety. Those who work within explore the constitution and functioning of this contract from their personal perspectives as subjects and as women, with the goal of making it more female-friendly. Others refuse identification with the existing social structure and "make of the second sex a countersociety" (207). As Kristeva notes, inherent in both positions are some possible traps. One is the problem of transforming, or the difficulties for women of being integrated into a value system that is essentially foreign to them. They need to find ways to function within it, while not conforming to it; they need to avoid "the centralization of power" (206). There

are also problems with a countersociety. First, in order to assert the legitimacy of female autonomy and difference, women have to focus on the absolute difference between the male and the female and, as a result, minimize diversity of women and imagine an unrealistic, perfectly "harmonious" female culture. As well, a countersociety requires a scapegoat: "As with any society the countersociety is based on the expulsion of the excluded element, a scapegoat charged with the evil of which the community duly constituted can then purge itself" (207). This need for a scapegoat and the focus on sex differences are problematic because they reinforce oppositional modes of thought and perpetuate the claim to superiority of one gender over the other--in this case, women are superior to men; the result is "a kind of inverted sexism."

In order to avoid being locked into the politics of domination and submission, feminism of the third tier rejects any notion of an essential opposition between two genders and sees the very men/women dichotomy as a metaphysical construct rather than a reflection of nature. The ethics of the third-tier attitude, says Kristeva, is based on a recognition of "the singularity of each person" along with "the multiplicity of every person's possible identification" (216).

While Kristeva acknowledges that this third attitude, or "signifying space," is "now possible," she adds a poignant caution:

It necessarily follows that this involves risks not only for what we

understand today as "personal equilibrium" but also for social equilibrium itself, made up as it now is of the counterbalancing of aggressive and murderous forces massed in social, national, religious, and political groups. (215)

The implication here is that a system of social organization that would be in accordance with a third-tier feminist perspective would take a fundamental, political, philosophical and psychological revolution. Whether such a radical change can ever come about is up for speculation; nevertheless, Kristeva's vision of a more flexible kind of feminism is worth contemplating especially because it suggests ways around what she terms "aggressive and murderous" modes of thought and action.

There are three aspects of Kristeva's theory that are relevant to the thesis I wish to advance. The first is her idea that the distinct tiers in feminist thought can be viewed as historical and evolutionary; the markers that she uses--such as "in its beginning" (1), "another generation" (214), "the new generation of Women in Western Europe was born after May 1968" (199)--cement in the reader's mind the idea that these tiers are to be considered chronological and progressive. At the same time, Kristeva promotes the idea, which may seem oddly disjunctive with the first concept, that these tiers are "mental spaces" or attitudes that are not mutually exclusive but are an interweaving of one with the other. Thus, it is possible for "the parallel existence of all three in the same historical time" (214). Finally, Kristeva's third tier of feminism is closely aligned with one of Mary Daly's feminist tenets: Kristeva emphasizes the need

to deconstruct the patriarchal notion of a natural dichotomy between masculine and feminine, and Daly draws attention to the "false identities" that this system bestows upon men as well as women. Both point to a feminist consciousness that incorporates, at some point, an awareness of the damage of a sexual caste system on both genders.

It is, in turn, this absence of a third phase that limits the value of some of the studies exploring the general profile of feminist writings, both theoretical and imaginative. One of the more recent is by Maggie Humm, and an older "classic" study is by Elaine Showalter. Humm's is a general overview of female writers of feminist theory and politics, whereas Showalter focuses on literary artists. Common to both is the description of *two* not three phases of feminist thought and activity.

In Modern Feminism: Political, Literary, Cultural (1992) Humm's concept of the first and second wave of feminism is markedly similar to Kristeva's idea of the first two tiers:

The movement, from a first wave feminism which is principally concerned with equalities, to a second wave feminism which uses women's difference to oppose the "legalities" of a patriarchal world, is a radical and visionary formation. (11)

Noting that twentieth-century feminism "has no Das Kapital, no New Testament...no originating or primary text from which it derives and to which it constantly defers for guidance" (13), Humm locates the literary site of first-wave

feminist thought in political and theoretical writings by a generation of women, from Olive Schreiner to Simone de Beauvoir. In their writings, these women work to deconstruct the notion of separate spheres. Materialism, Humm says, is a recurrent theme, and social, legal and political parity with men is an overt agenda of these "nascent" feminist writers.

While evidence of the literary championing for women's rights could be located much earlier (one reference to Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication on the Rights of Women would do it), Humm offers ample evidence for her basic contention that there is an identifiable first-tier phase of feminist writing. As Humm notes, in Women and Labor (1911) Olive Schreiner contends that women suffer double discrimination: they are excluded from the world of production and exploited in the institution of marriage. Humm sees Schreiner's arguments for redress of these exploitations as basic to the feminist movement--and as arguments that have echoed throughout the twentieth-century. Similarly Humm mentions Virginia Woolf (whose A Room of One's Own is the closest there is to an early twentieth-century feminist New Testament) as one who makes a fundamental call for equality by arguing that every woman needs financial and spatial independence--a five-pound note and a room of her own. Humm also mentions some of Woolf's less-canonized contemporaries such as Vera Brittain and Winnifred Holtby as first-wave feminist writers who press for such things as women's employment and domestic parity with men.

According to Humm, Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of the psychological and philosophical bases of gender politics is the one that names for feminists what it is that keeps them in a place of inequality and a space of negation and otherness; de Beauvoir's The Second Sex exposes as misogynistic and culturally constructed that which passes for the natural in the view of both men and women. In these examples of writers who manifest a feminist consciousness, Humm tends to blur first- and second-wave feminist thought. She locates in the first phase the emphasis on specificity and difference, those aspects that Kristeva noted in the second tier:

Women writers of this first phase are also concerned with delineating a specific psychology and point of view....There was a recognition...that social, legal, and political changes depend on major changes in thinking and in consciousness. (14-15)

Humm's reluctance to draw a distinct dividing line between the two tiers or phases seems to support Kristeva's idea that the tiers are "mental spaces," and is understandable when we turn back to the writings of Virginia Woolf. While she is credited with authorship of the "womanifesto" of material independence, we can find in her works more than a little evidence of the insistence on female specificity and difference. Woolf is able to register very clearly in To The Lighthouse a distinct female artistic and philosophical perspective. As well, in Three Guineas, Woolf provides a blueprint for the assertion of a distinct female consciousness in her insistence that women need to reject the values of a

patriarchal society (especially authoritarianism and militarism) and refuse the dominant/submission paradigms of its institutions. She speaks to men specifically: "We can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods" (366). This "Woolf call" could be read as an apt example of what Humm describes as the second wave of feminist thought in literature: a challenge to traditional political concepts and an insistence on precise specifications of woman's experiences and needs. According to Humm, women move from being objects of and in literary discourse to the position of subject: "Only feminist writers place women at the centre of knowledge as 'knowers' of inquiry, and not objects, and thus as newly recognized creators of ideas" (53).

There is, however, a notable lack of mention of a third phase of feminist writing in Humm's analysis. There is a blank space for what comes next, and there is only a registered awareness of some of the problems that Kristeva associates with the second-phase insistence on gender difference. According to Humm, "in order to assert female difference from male-conceived models, male thought, male-modelled politics, there was a necessarily minimizing of differences between women" (54). While Humm recognizes the need for women in general and women writers in particular to be liberated from "the conviction of a single, universal experience into a world of multiple and mobile racial, class and sexual preferences" (54), she is still conceiving of this

multiplicity in terms of women rather than humans in general; she is not yet in the third mental space described by Kristeva in which feminist thought rejects the oppositional positioning of male and female.

The space equivalent to Kristeva's third tier is also blank in Elaine Showalter's study of the phases of feminist thought reflected in literature. In A Literature of Their Own (1977), Showalter does identify three distinct stages of literature by women, but the second and third seem to collapse into what Kristeva identifies as the second phase. According to Showalter, female writers since Jane Austen evidence the following continuity and separate groupings:

- 1) Feminine: 1840s-1860s, one of imitation and internalization. Women write in imitation of male models but with specific feminist concerns.
- 2) Feminist: 1880s-1920s, one of protest and advocacy. Women artists write overtly of specific feminist protests and demands.
- 3) Female: 1920-present, one of self-discovery. Women write their specificity and difference into literature.

In this model, Showalter does not identify any third-tier-attitude texts, and, thus, she leaves the study of female writers at the stage of their assertion of distinctiveness and specificity from the "other" gender.

When we turn to theories on the conjunction between feminism and literary criticism, we see, interestingly, the same insistence on tiers or phases of

feminist critical activity, but the same hesitancy to register exactly what the third phase is or should be. Sandra Gilbert, for example, argues that feminist criticism takes its generative energy from the awakened political and social consciousness of the women's movement and its critical thrust from early writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. Thus, according to Gilbert, the "intellectual project" of early feminist criticism "sought to counter the *ad hominem* thinking about literature by asking a series of questions addressed *ad feminam*: 'to the woman'--to the woman as both writer and reader" ("Ad Feminam" xi).

Similarly, in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981), Showalter sees feminist critics of the 1960s as concerned with challenging the male-dominated bastion of the symbolic order--the literary canon. She explains that this phase of criticism is concerned with the woman as reader and offers "feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and woman-as-sign in semiotic systems" (459). According to Showalter texts such as Mary Ellman's Thinking about Women (1968) and Kate Millet's Sexual Politics (1970) give insights into the "politics" of literature, expose the overt misogynist tendencies of "great" writers and mock the ideological blindness of much of the mainstream, male criticism.

Revisionary criticism, however, keeps the feminist scholar tied to the

male tradition, looking for the errors of the past. Feminist criticism obviously needed a subject of its own and could not be concerned solely with a re-reading of the male canon and an intellectual antagonism to the male establishment. Thus, the second mode, that which is identified as the rejection of the male symbolic order by Kristeva, is committed to uncovering the "lost" tradition of female literary heritage and identifying a specific female aesthetic in both writing and criticism. Once again, Showalter offers an insightful analysis of this phase. As she argues, feminist criticism should not continue "to feed on the discourse of the masters" but should become the corrective "gynocriticism"--a sustained investigation of literature by women, which aims at uncovering the "lost Atlantis" of female literary productivity and at rescuing the feminine from the stereotypical association with inferiority ("Feminist Criticism" 460). According to Showalter, gynocentric criticism focuses on difference--that which Kristeva saw as a defining feature of second-tier feminist thought--and has four sub-modes of criticism: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical and cultural. Each of these modes is an effort to define and differentiate the distinct qualities of the woman writer and the woman's text.

Showalter's scan of the critical literature of the 1970s shows this era to be rich with texts that focus on the woman as writer. She identifies The Female Imagination (1975) by Patricia Meyer Spacks as the text that marks the shift from androcentric to gynocentric feminist criticism. Other influential studies

were Ellen Moers's Literary Women (1976), Showalter's A Literature of Their Own (1978), Nina Baym's Women's Fiction (1978), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic (1979) and, as Showalter so aptly notes, "hundreds of [other] essays and papers [in which] women's writing asserted itself as the central project of feminist literary study" (185).

The challenge to male dominance evident in the two phases of feminist criticism outlined by Showalter acquired momentum and direction from French feminist critics and theorists: Julia Kristeva and her contemporaries Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. Working from the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and with the deconstructive techniques of Jacques Derrida, these feminists offer a radical critique of the modes of Western philosophical thought and the constructs of a phallogentric language system, which, they claim, repress women's experience. They advocate a writing that inscribes and celebrates *différance* and *jouissance* (a spontaneous outpouring of the body).

Many critics, however, have noted the dangers inherent in this second mode of feminist criticism. Annette Kolodny cautions against focusing on a new oppositional party line: "just because we will no longer tolerate the specifically sexist omissions and oversights of earlier critical schools and methods does not mean that, in their stead, we must establish our own party line" (184). In Conflicts in Feminism (1990) Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller offer another caution against a new ideology of "truth" by stating that

feminist critical theory "is an activity that would only be imagined as unified and seamless under the illusion of a unitary governing ideal: in the first case, of 'woman' or in the second, of 'truth'" (2). Ann Rosalind Jones also warns against "a monolithic vision of shared female sexuality" and advocates a vision "outside the male-centered binary logic altogether" (255). Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn's view is particularly relevant to this study in that they see gynocriticism as an "intermediary" stage on the way towards "a more comprehensive literary criticism which considers both male and female traditions in their interactions" ("Feminist Scholarship" 25).

There seems to be, then, critical recognition that the feminist thought and activity identified by Kristeva as first- and second-tier is readily available in literature and literary criticism; Kristeva's envisioned third phase is not as easily locatable. Critics seem to stop short of searching for any third-tier consciousness in works they deem feminist, while, at the same time, recognizing that as professionals they need to get "beyond" gynocriticism and its insistent focus on female difference and specificity. The central question for these feminist critics who feel that they no longer want to be "locked in" to a limiting vision is how can one consider both the male and the female and their interactions in terms other than oppositional?

Sally Minoque, the editor of the recent study Problems For Feminist Criticism (1990), deals with this question and offers insight into ways of

traversing the critical minefield that lies ahead. First, she states her concern that feminist criticism is becoming exclusive and reductive in that it tends to focus only on writing about women, by women and that it tends to label as "literary misogyny" any textual ideology that is other than feminist. These tendencies put "the claims about gender above any other consideration in our approach to literature" and "lock [us] even more firmly into psychological stereotypes than before" (11,8). For Minoque, critics need to pay attention to that aspect of literature that charts a way beyond stereotypes and beyond the binaries of gender:

Literature was and is...not a form of imprisonment but a form of escape; not a means of subordination but a medium of power...literature provides [us] a route into a shared creation of the imagination, in which [our] minds are equal with others. In this way I do believe that literature can purvey truths...not didactic moral truths, necessarily, but truths about the complexity of human nature and its relations....What it seems to me is lost by a commitment to a feminist view of literature is that sense of its applying to and being concerned with a common humanity. (8-9)

I applaud Minoque's argument that we should turn to literature as a site of "common humanity," but I do not think that this is necessarily at odds with a feminist perspective. For as I see it, what constitutes the feminism of a number of works by female artists is an identification and exploration of the "shared realities" of females and males, of their mutual needs, motivations, vulnerabilities and reactions. In works of this kind, we find both the qualities that Minoque associates with "literature"--and hence a way beyond gender

preoccupation--as well as directives for a new kind of feminism. Here, the idea of going "beyond gender" does not imply a disregard for the realities of either men or women, but a change in focus on the relationships between the two.

* * * * *

My purpose in the following chapters is to explore the way that four female novelists provide an affirmation of shared realities. My focus on this genre derives from what Mary Eagleton, in her introduction to "Gender and Genre," calls "women's special relationship with the novel" (Feminist 88). She reinforces Virginia Woolf's belief that "the novel alone is young enough to be soft in women's hands" (Room 80) with her own contention that "here was a form without a long history of male authorities" (88). She sees this genre as women's opportunity to reintegrate into the public realm feminine values that had been relegated by sexual division to the private sphere. Thus the novel has been one location for "the ideological confrontation between masculine and feminine values" (88), and is, therefore, an excellent genre in which to find evidence of feminist consciousness. As well, because the novel is a site for this brand of confrontation, we can look to it as a location for ideas on how to go beyond confrontational attitudes.

In choosing to begin with novelists from the nineteenth century, I do not intend to perpetuate the assumption that prior to this time women had no fictional voice--such a notion has been effectively exposed by Dale Spender's

Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen. I start with novels from the nineteenth century because of the strong and obvious conjunction of the emergence of women novelists and women's agitation for liberation in the political and social realms. Because the "Woman Question," as it came to be called in Victorian England, was becoming a more visible and potent political force, novels of this era constitute a provocative site not merely for beginning an exploration of how creative women artists articulated their politics but also questioned the "new feminism" of their time.

While there are a number of nineteenth-century novels that manifest political consciousness, Margaret Oliphant's Miss Marjoribanks and George Eliot's Daniel Deronda are particularly appropriate for testing theories of gender politics and for stimulating a view of gender relations as something other than the "battle of the sexes." Miss Marjoribanks has received remarkably little attention from feminists, despite the fact that it is clearly a novel of social criticism. Oliphant was a popular, domestic novelist of manners with a satirical view of her society and its belief in what was "natural" in human inclination and conduct. Her examination of the notion that men and women "naturally" belong to separate spheres offers material well suited to an investigation of shared realities.

George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, frequently eclipsed in critical attention by Middlemarch, is also rich in material that has interpretive potential for feminist

critics. Because this novel not only introduces a female character with one of the strongest feminist voices of the nineteenth-century but also features both a male and female plot, Daniel Deronda is particularly appropriate for the investigation of gender differences and similarities. In addition, Eliot has long been considered one of the "great" writers of the nineteenth century, and her texts have long been included in the traditional canon. Thus, an examination of her work alongside a consideration of Oliphant's will allow us to consider whether a "major" and a "minor" writer from an earlier time shared a common feminist consciousness and whether their texts already articulate a consciousness that could be identified as third-phase feminism.

To choose twentieth-century texts that most appropriately evidence a concern with going beyond notions of sexual asymmetry is difficult because of the very fact that ours is an age of increasing feminist political awareness and activity. Particularly since the 1960s, creative artists have been writing in a context where knowledge of the dynamics of gender relations and inequities is widespread and easily accessible. Thus, literary feminist agendas appear to be more conscious, overt and textually integrated and also more the norm for today's women artists. There are, therefore, many twentieth-century women writers whose texts could be analyzed for evidence of third-tier feminism. Once again, however, two artists, Margaret Drabble and Carol Shields, stand out as ones whose works offer rich possibility for the study of the inscription of

"common humanity."

Margaret Drabble, a prolific and academically acclaimed writer, is a British contemporary of Shields and manifests a similar ability to write from the male perspective. Although more hesitant than Shields to declare, unequivocally, that she is a staunch feminist, her balanced artistic approach to the representation of women's and men's lives testifies to her resistance to the dominant/submissive paradigm of gender relations. With Drabble, I deviate from my practice of focusing on a single text because her works are less like isolated narratives and more like linked stories in that there are significant intertextual as well as intratextual parallels in the lives and personalities of her main characters. This is particularly true of the two texts I will analyze: The Needle's Eye and The Realms of Gold.

Canadian author Carol Shields, winner of the 1994 Governor General's Award for her novel The Stone Diaries, is a professed feminist writer who claims to have "never for a minute doubted the value of women's experience" (qtd. in Wachtel, "Introduction" 3). She is also equally open about and acclaimed for her interest in exploring the complexity of human personality. In an interview with Eleanor Watchel she declares "The *real* mystery is what my other books have been about, which is the mystery of personality. How do you know anyone? How does art come out of common clay?" (42, italics mine). Her desire to explore the "mystery" of male as well as female personality is

evident in that, often, her narratives give equal weight to male and female consciousness. Through the technique of parallel plots, she deals with the domestic, emotional and psychological detail of women's and men's lives, but also resists writing what she has identified in a private conversation as "the novel of sexual polemics." None of her other works contain as obvious an effort to demonstrate that men experience life very much as women do emotionally as does The Republic of Love. Thus, this text is particularly appropriate for investigating how a self-proclaimed feminist writer may envision a third-tier space beyond the ideological clash of the traditional feminine and masculine stances.

My critical methodology is best termed eclectic, for it has facets of the New Critical, the structuralist, the deconstructionalist, as well as of the psychological and biographical schools of criticism. As I see it, the New Critical method of close reading needs to form the ground base for any type of analysis, because it encourages seeing the text as a site for the debate of ideas and because it involves attention to the way that messages are conveyed through diction. In the spirit of Annette Kolodny ("In our heart of hearts most critics are structuralists" [184]), I also examine the presence of narrative structures that, through repetition or striking variation, enable us to identify thought patterns that lie beneath consciousness. Conversely, I employ deconstructive strategies to elucidate both the methods these authors use and the techniques that the

readers need to understand the way these works expose and dismantle the logic of the binary, oppositional mode of thinking. To complement this cultural form of analysis, I also engage in a certain amount of psychoanalysis, which according to David H. Richter can be focused on "the mind of the author, the minds of the author's characters and our minds as we read the text" (641). I have approached these texts with none of these facets of psychological criticism as a firm agenda, but speculations relating to all three permeate my discussions.

Finally, I employ a type of biographical approach by including, as supplementary material, personal interviews I have conducted with Margaret Drabble and Carol Shields. In including the personal views of these two authors, I am aware of being charged with committing the intentional fallacy, but I suggest that one thrust of feminist criticism has been to question the separation of the personal and the public that lies behind such a taboo; indeed, returning body and person to the disembodied authorial voice is something on which Margaret Drabble insists. She refuses the "death of the author" paradigm by interjecting her own voice into her narratives. She also rejects the stance of authorial omniscience by declaring that "omniscience has its limits" and by inviting the readers into the creative process to "invent a more suitable ending if you can" (Realms 341, 356). As well, because feminist critical enquiry is as much a political as an academic or literary exercise, and because the personal is the political, the stated personal views of these authors help us immeasurably in

understanding their artistic, but nevertheless political, expression of feminist consciousness. In recognition of the problematic nature of giving the authors' views parity with critical insights, however, I have included the interviews as supplementary material.

The interviews also allow for a dialogue between author and reader, which balances a current critical emphasis on silencing the author and giving authority to the reader. Allowing the author to speak, not just specifically on the work but on the creative act and on her general philosophy of life, is, thus, one method of resisting the "silencing act" that has been committed on women in general. If we see fiction as the intersection of the personal, the literary, the political and the social, then interviews are a significant thread of the overall fictive fabric that we are viewing. While still wanting to keep the distinction between the woman as writer and the woman as private individual, we need to bear in mind that a writer's personal experience feeds her writing; thus, the personal is the fictive in the same way that the personal is the political.

Incorporating the author's personal voice can also help to counter the reductive readings of a text, which may result when critics look for political statements that endorse their own particular ideology. Creative writers are providing something more than feminist theories; having a glimpse of the woman and the lived experience behind the text automatically makes the text multi-dimensional and militates against a one-dimensional political reading.

Because such personal input is not possible in the case of Margaret Oliphant and George Eliot, in my discussion of these two writers, I have tried to compensate by including a wide variety of critics' responses.

Finally, in my discussion of the work of Oliphant, Eliot, Shields and Drabble, I want to raise the question of how one should deal with features of their texts that do not seem to be consistent with a feminist orientation. Specifically, I wish to consider whether certain aspects of these works might appear to be anti-feminist simply because these writers do not present gender relations as essentially oppositional. If this "problematic" content can be shown to be an integral part of the writers' feminist visions, then more than ever these works can be seen as offering insights that are "useful" for the movement.

My procedure, in dealing with the work of these writers, then, will first involve an examination of aspects of each text that suggest first- and second-tier feminist consciousness, and then I will go on to highlight what I consider to be aspects of third-tier feminist consciousness--those philosophical insights that take us beyond a specific concern with gender to a more general vision of what it means to be human.

Keeping in mind the three-tiered impetus of the feminist movement, I would thus label the first as *Attack* against the patriarchy, the second as the *Assertion* of female authority, and I would argue that we now need to turn to a third "A"--*Affirmation*; for, it is in the affirmation of the mutual vulnerabilities

and needs of the male and female *human being* that we can find a critical position beyond the heated gender debate.

Chapter II: Margaret Oliphant (Miss Marjoribanks)

Margaret Oliphant's writing is a good place to begin an investigation of imaginative feminist writing, for her contributions to the literary representation of a feminist consciousness have not been fully documented; thus, a certain amount of interpretive freedom is still possible in this area. Also, she was widely read and highly acclaimed during her day but fell into obscurity in the ensuing years. Although she can thus be viewed as representative of those whose voices were, for a period of time, "silenced" by the shapers of the traditional canon, another factor in an analysis of her work is the problem her writing seems to pose. In Henry James's words, she appears to be one of those "difficult cases" for criticism, for, in his opinion, while there is so much "cleverness, courage and humanity" in her fiction, there is also a "reckless rustle over depths and difficulties" (Notes on Novelists 354-55).

As one of the most prolific writers of her time (nearly a hundred novels, over two dozen non-fiction works and more than two hundred critical articles and essays for magazines such as Blackwoods and Cornhill), Oliphant initially won some elaborate praise from her contemporaries. According to William Blackwood, the publisher, "Mrs. Oliphant has been to the England of Letters what the Queen has been to a society as a whole" (qtd. in O'Mealy, 44). Yet, she was not "canonized" as the Brontës, George Eliot and Jane Austen were, and her works slipped into critical obscurity for years. While some critics view

Oliphant's decline as part of "the wave of anti-Victorianism which came at the turn of the century and destroyed so many once flourishing reputations" (Colby xiii), there is also the feeling that her works are second rate. Thus, while modern critics have been sufficiently captivated by her insights into the drama of social life to want to study her texts, they feel an obligation to offer qualifying statements such as, "Mrs. Oliphant marshals her thin resources to the best advantage" (Cunningham 230).

In her day, Oliphant was sadly aware how her worth as an artist would be viewed, especially in comparison to the two "bigger" artists of her time, George Eliot and George Sand. In the introduction to their biography on Oliphant, Vineta and Robert Colby quote Oliphant giving vent to a whimsical sense of injury over her comparative obscurity:

George Eliot and George Sand make me half inclined to cry over my poor little unappreciated self... "Many love me (*i.e.*, in a sort of way), but by none am I enough beloved." These two bigger women did things which I have never felt the least temptation to do...but how very much more enjoyment they seem to have got out of their life, how much more praise and homage and honour! I would not buy their fame with these disadvantages, but I do feel very small, very obscure, beside them, rather a failure all round, never securing any strong affection, and throughout my life, though I have had all the usual experiences of women, never impressing anybody,--what a droll little complaint!--why should I? I acknowledge frankly that there is nothing in me--a fat, little, commonplace woman, rather tongue-tied---to impress any one; and yet there is a sort of whimsical injury in it which makes me sorry for myself. (xv)

And often in criticism, true to Oliphant's sense of her "rivals," she is faulted for

not being able to match George Eliot's artistry: "Her work is very inferior to that of George Eliot. One senses a reluctance to become fully engaged with her subjects and [an] unwillingness to explore the depths whose edges she skirts" (Watson 418).

Although a Margaret Oliphant revival has been building in criticism since the 1960s, there is still critical ambivalence about her work. Those credited with initiating Oliphant's recovery, Robert and Vineta Colby, echo an often heard criticism when they qualify her as one who "wrote too fast and too much" (xiv). As well, feminist critics, whom her works attract because of her insights on nineteenth-century gender politics, often maintain an ideological distance from Oliphant. Joseph O'Mealy explains that for some critics, she was not feminist enough in life (she spoke out against voting rights for women in her early years), and, for others, she does not offer a strong enough denouncement of patriarchy in her fiction (46). Yet, in conjunction with these obvious critical reservations, elaborate praise of Oliphant's works is once again surfacing. There are those who believe "it is impossible to overpraise" some of her writing and at least one of her novels "can stand comparison with the best contemporary novels of its time" (Williams 89).

There would seem to be two possible reasons that, at this point in critical, social and political thought, Oliphant's works can once again speak so strongly to her readers. One might be that her brand of feminist consciousness is more

accessible to us now in a time of heightened feminine awareness; another may be that her feminist insights are, at present, particularly relevant because they reflect third-tier feminist concerns. In order to test these suppositions, I will turn to an examination of the novel that has elicited the most positive response from her critics.

* * * * *

Miss Marjoribanks (1866) is a witty, satiric romp through the mind and manoeuvres of a young Victorian woman who "intended her will to be law" (47). Lucilla Marjoribanks, at nineteen years of age, returns home from school after her mother's death, ostensibly to "be a comfort to [her] dear papa," but strategically, to establish a rule of "enlightened despotism" in the genteel society of Carlingford (57). Her father, a wealthy physician and traditional patriarch, does not want her actively to comfort him, and the society, conventionally minded and male-centered, does not want a woman overtly to hold the reins of power. Thus, Lucilla must engage in the manoeuvres of a political or military strategist to overcome this resistance and establish her reign in her father's household and her townpeople's lives. She arbitrarily decides not to marry for ten years in order to achieve her aims and, thus, banishes all suitors, including her cousin Tom. Temporarily freed from the fundamental responsibility of a Victorian woman--to find a man to marry--Lucilla sets out to "revolutionize society in Carlingford" (36). At home, she "smilingly"

withdraws the authoritative and culinary "reigns of state" from the "unconscious hands" (50) of her father and his cook Nancy; in society, she establishes herself as the hub of Carlingford's social wheel with her Thursday Nights, which are social soirées of dinner and light entertainment referred to by the author as her "great works" (43).

In marshalling all activity in Carlingford to the beat of her drum, Lucilla must manage religious leaders, manipulate local politicians and mix people of all classes--sometimes with a benign disregard or haughty disdain for all those of lesser force, regardless of their sex or social standing. In one instance, she brilliantly out-manoeuvres the evangelical rector, Mr. Bury, who, for propriety's sake, wants the motherless Lucilla to accept a Mrs. Mortimer in the capacity of live-in chaperon. Lucilla feigns misunderstanding and implies that a new mate for her father is being offered. At this indelicate suggestion, the Rector is thunderstruck and retreats, Mrs. Mortimer swoons into Lucilla's care, and our female "genius" (89) sails on unencumbered on her sea of independence. Later on in her career, by recognizing that women may not have the vote but have "all" the influence, Lucilla manages to have Mr. Ashburton run for and become Member of Parliament for Carlingford. She convinces Ashburton to run, through delivering a politically astute if not politically correct speech: "What does it matter what people think? I suppose when it comes to doing anything, the Whigs and the Tories are just the same. Mr. Ashburton, it is the man [not

the party] that is wanted" (347). And, as the narrator ironically implies, what is wanted by Lucilla, who is "a quick mind, a good deal occupied with itself" (23), should be what is wanted by all people in Carlingford. As well, in restructuring society to her advantage, Lucilla reshuffles social alliances, boundaries and expectations. Barbara Lake, the daughter of a socially questionable drawing master, has a voice exactly suited to blend with Lucilla's, so this socially marginal young woman is enfolded into the midst of genteel society on Thursday nights. Mrs. Woodburn, mimic extraordinaire, is cut from social prominence, and Mrs. Mortimer and Mr. Cavendish, social outcasts, are brought into social circles to serve the purposes of this reigning social monarch.

Lucilla's trajectory to social prominence is straight and sure, and she achieves her aim of "enlightened despotism" (57) in the ten years allotted for such. Then, new forces come into play. Lucilla, depicted in an uncharacteristic plunge into introspection, realizes that she has "outlived the occupations that were sufficient for her youth" (395). She comes to see that Carlingford--"that chaos, which was then called society" (41)--could not be permanently transformed, and that "her capacities were greater than her work" (395). Also, at the death of her father and the discovery of his financial misfortunes, Lucilla becomes unexpectedly without adequate means for independence. At this point in the narrative, Oliphant lays painfully bare the true terror and vulnerability at the heart of someone as economically dependent and socially constrained as

Lucilla. The author does not, however, leave her financially destitute. Cousin Tom Marjoribanks conveniently reappears on the scene to propose and provide a new theatre of operation for Lucilla. She sallies forth to her new life in the country with visions of "a larger sphere opening before her feet" (497).

Although the narrator's notation that Lucilla did not even have to change her name suggests that we can envision the continuance of an independent spirit, there is still the reality that Lucilla's "independence" is "dependent" on a man. Thus, we know that her sphere of operation will continue to be limited.

* * * * *

The overall good humor that characterizes Oliphant's depiction of Lucilla and her society is unmistakable, and is also a cause of some critical consternation. One critic is concerned that Oliphant's lens of humor distorts the portrait of a young Victorian woman and undermines the author's ability to question or challenge the prevailing patriarchy, or to treat her women characters as the repressed "other" (O'Mealy 44). Another claims that Oliphant's humorous lens causes her to create "superficially emancipated" heroines who "remain well within the limits of moral and social convention" and thus are "in no way a serious challenge to patriarchal stereotypes of feminine character and behaviour" (Stubbs 39).

I would argue, however, that there is a very "serious" indictment of sexist type-casting in Oliphant's text, and that in order to understand how her

humor operates, we need to recognize that it is the Horatian rather than the Juvenalian kind. Just as Horace's satire was focused on the general human condition, so the object of Oliphant's satire is not so much Lucilla the woman as it is Lucilla the human being.

Henri Bergson's insights into the nature of the comic are helpful in understanding the effects of Oliphant's satirical wit. In Laughter Bergson suggests that the difference between comedy and drama is that the comic deals with classes/types, while drama is concerned with individuals. Therefore, according to Bergson, "every comic character is a type" (148). Lucilla, then, can be viewed as representative of a type or class--but not just of the "class" of women. Bergson offers another insight that is relevant to understanding Oliphant's humorous lens:

In one sense it might be said that all character is comic, provided we mean by character the *ready-made* element in our personality, that mechanical element which resembles a piece of clockwork wound up once for all and capable of working automatically. (148)

Bergson points to social construction, the "ready-made" element of personality, that covers our natural inclinations. He indicates that it is not the "natural" human being that is the object of humor, but the layers of social construction that are accumulated because of prescriptive norms of conduct. Oliphant is indeed aiming her satire at those elements in Lucilla's personality that are ready-made, socially constructed, human and representative of some acquired human

strutting and fretting with which we can all identify. Thus, the humorous lens that Oliphant holds up to her characters is a means by which she leads us to see through and beyond gender. Lucilla is a "human" representative and her traits at which we laugh are those that we all--men and women--share. Furthermore, in using this strategy, Oliphant is especially able to resist patriarchal assumptions, because these assumptions are based on a belief that masculinity and femininity are natural polar opposites and on a disregard for the social construction of gender.

As well as the critical assumption that humor automatically diminishes Oliphant's ability to offer a serious feminist statement, another assumption that we need to question pertains to the standards by which Oliphant is measuring Lucilla. A case in point is O'Mealy who identifies one level of Oliphant's satirical exposure:

Lucilla is smarter and abler than any of the men in her world. She becomes thereby Oliphant's emblem of the unfair limitations placed on Victorian women. In a world where female imagination has no *real* outlet, and female ability can gain no *real* power, Lucilla makes impressive use of the meager resources at her disposal. (47, italics mine)

There is, of course, ample evidence to support the view that Lucilla's inclinations for power are beyond her opportunities for greatness. Direct narrative comment is unmistakable in this regard: "When a woman has an active mind, and still does not care for parish work, it is a little hard for her to find a sphere" (395). The notions of success and failure that O'Mealy invokes,

however, unwittingly reinforce an assumption that Oliphant herself is concerned to expose and deconstruct. For, Oliphant is also challenging the conventional reading of concepts such as "important," "great," "powerful," and "real." In the spirit of a modern-day feminist who questions male standards of greatness by suggesting that we need to ask not why women are not presidents of major corporations but why men are, Oliphant adopts fictional strategies that lead the reader to ask why the "real," the "powerful" and the "great" are exclusively that which is defined by male inclinations, male activities and male accomplishments. In doing so, she becomes a forerunner of current feminist attempts to expose the way that the male has come to be regarded as the norm. In order to understand the ways in which Oliphant is able to redirect our views on gender relations, we need to examine some of the philosophical and theoretical roads into this notion of the male as norm.

* * * * *

According to psychologist and feminist activist, Nina Colwill, getting beyond gender entails careful deconstruction of metaphors of gender that float about in our mental spaces as dust particles do in the air: essentially unnoticed, but there, and there with a profound effect. One of the most potent, unstated assumptions about gender is that the male is norm and, therefore, the female is deviant. Colwill explains what she believes is a universal "common belief":

Males and all things masculine have greater value than do females and

that which is feminine. This belief is manifested in rituals as humiliating and life-changing as clitorectomies and as seemingly innocuous as a woman's name change at marriage....The differential value places women and men in two completely different worlds. ("Where are We Going" 1)

Colwill's position is reiterated by other feminists, among them Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuek Tarule who collectively undertook a determined exploration of the "other side" of silence in Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind:

With the Western tradition of dividing human nature into dual but parallel streams, attributes traditionally associated with the masculine are valued, studied, and articulated, while those associated with the feminine tend to be ignored....[and] nowhere is the pattern of using male experience to define the human experience seen more clearly than in models of intellectual development. (6-7)

According to these authors, the ramifications of this ubiquitous, unstated assumption of the male as defining norm are deep and wide:

Our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definitions of ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private persona, our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality. (3)

Colwill believes that in order not to "perpetuate to another generation the historical and universal belief that men are more valuable than women" (2), feminists have to recognize the horns of the dilemma on which they have been caught. Colwill envisions the beliefs about sexual difference as a continuum:

the notion that "males and females are similar lies at one end of this continuum," and the notion that "males and females are different lies at the other end" (3). Feminist stances shift back and forth to the opposite ends of the continuum because one stance "does not always [yield] the results that feminists would choose" (5). According to Colwill, the reason for the bind seems obvious: given that men define the norm, any attention drawn to difference highlights female inferiority; any focus on similarities highlights those ways in which women can and do emulate men.

Taking these insights back to Kristeva's concept of tiers or phases of feminist thought and activity, we can see what underlies much of the struggle in conceptualizing equality of the sexes, and much of what gives rise to the cacophony of voices that declare stances along this imaginary continuum. We can also see, afresh, what is needed to get us to the third-tier space of freedom from the metaphysical constructs of gender: an examination of, a reaction against and a deconstruction of the male as norm.

The belief in the male as norm is central to the notion of "separate spheres," an ideology that literary theoreticians and historians have long recognized as fundamental to nineteenth-century social perceptions on the roles of the sexes. In Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920 Patricia Stubbs explains the role of the Victorian woman and her confinement in the domestic sphere. Stubbs first acknowledges that women's position in the

economy was altered radically by industrial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Then, she explains that while high numbers of working-class women were jettisoned into the labor force, bourgeois women became enshrined in the home:

The middle-class woman, with no economic function to perform in the home and debarred by a patriarchal ideology from work outside it, became a dependent in a more direct way than ever before. Economically impotent with only a social, decorative and childrearing role to perform, there was an ever-widening gulf between her life and that of the working-class woman who had become a wage-earner outside the home, albeit an exploited one, and whose life was untouched in any material way by the ideas of Victorian domesticity. (3)

Historians, sociologists and literary critics, in an attempt to make visible some of the conscious and unconscious assumptions of a nineteenth-century middle-class mind regarding the ideas of Victorian domesticity and the role of the sexes in general, have relied on this geometric analogy of the sphere. In Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England, Sonya O. Rose explains the sphere consciousness: "The ideology of separate spheres was a central organizing motif in the world view of bourgeois men and women...home and work [were portrayed] as separate and different spheres suited to the natural proclivities and responsibilities of women and men, respectively"(23).

According to Rose, the rules of respectability dictated that any violations of societal expectations of place would violate a fundamental assumption about society. The legendary stories of the nineteenth-century female writer hiding

her creative efforts from the judgmental eyes of those who thought creative writing was beyond women's sphere come to mind.

Laws, as well as customs, were in place to support this sex-role ideology. Women were not allowed legally to own property, hold public office, be members of the clergy or vote; the private world of nursery, drawing-room and social soirées was, then, not only the middle-class woman's expected domain, but her only legitimate one. There were a host of justifying assumptions that lay behind these rules, including the invocation of attributes of men and women that had nothing to do with anatomy or physiology:

In the nineteenth century [gender] attributes were counterpoised as oppositional: men were active, independent, strong, rational; women were passive, dependent, weak, emotional. Furthermore, the cultural meanings associated with being woman and being man were assumed to be "in nature," to be "in" the original anatomical and physiological differences between women and men. (Rose 15)

Because of the clothing of the culturally constructed as that which was naturally ordained, women were in a double bind, and the paternalistic power structure had a double edge to its control of women. If that which law and social structure dictated was, after all, "natural" and "right," then any resistance to it would be moral if not criminal rebellion.

* * * * *

In Miss Marjoribanks, Oliphant addresses and questions the notion of separate spheres through words that specifically denote "space" or "place,"

through the circumstances and settings she chooses for her characters and through a revisioning of what constitutes "the natural." First, we can note that sphere consciousness is ubiquitous in Miss Marjoribanks and that none of Oliphant's fictional people function outside of their "proper" spheres. Lucilla Marjoribanks, who did not like "to live without a sphere" (416), insists on assuming what was "natural" and "proper" for a young woman--the ordering of domestic and social existence. Whatever Lucilla's abilities and inclinations, and despite her realization that "her capacities were greater than her works," she is never credited with even the dream of apprenticing with her doctor father or with ideas of championing for more liberal laws or fairer social dictates. "She was not a woman to make protests," we are told (395). She is also shown to be insistent that others recognize the unwritten laws of proper sphere and place. She reduces Archdeacon Beverley to his "proper place" (234) and feels that "it was her duty to put Mrs. Woodburn down" (192) when the mimic assumes a position of prominence that is beyond what is proper for her place in society. Other characters also represent tacit, female compliance with the societal norm. Mrs. Mortimer justifies her uncle's bypassing her and willing his wealth to a young male companion: "He had no son of his own and I was only a girl" (224).

On this level of exposure and analysis, Oliphant's witty, light satire of the status quo for the sexes is coupled with a registration of good-natured awareness

of "those undefinable peculiarities of difference that exist between the mind of woman and the mind of man" (194). Mr. Cavendish's "manly calm" is contrasted to his sister's "womanly panic" (294). Men are seen as "the stronger vessel" from a male character's perspective (295), but they are regarded as "that inferior branch of the human family" by a female character (37). Dr. Marjoribanks lacks "the fairer part of existence" in his grim, well-ordered house, but then, we are assured by the narrative voice, "he was only a man and a doctor and knew no better" (34). The female element "so long peacefully ignored and kept at a distance" is "a restless and troublesome element" in the eyes of the old medical patriarch. In reference to Archdeacon Beverley, the narrative voice declares that "he, as was natural, knew nothing about the matter. He...[had] the natural obtuseness which is so general among the gentlemen" (176).

The opposition between the sexes and their confinement in totally separate spheres is thus, initially, given light treatment in this text. However, while Lucilla is presented with considerable humor as one who uses the social dictates regarding separate spheres to her advantage, she is also shown, in a more serious light, to be a victim of that rigid order. Thus, while Oliphant provides a recognition of the status quo for women, she deserves more recognition than as a writer of "domestic realism" who "uses the novel to demonstrate...women's proper sphere" (Ewbank 41). She registers not only an

obvious dis-ease with the notion of separate spheres but also a strong indictment of it as a cultural construct based on false assumptions about the inherent powers and proclivities of women.

In one passage in particular, which is uncharacteristically sententious for Oliphant, the cloak of humor is dropped and we (and "the British public") are given stark evidence of the desperate straits of a woman outside of a proper sphere. In this passage Lucilla is surveying her first ten years of social reign in Carlingford. We are asked to recognize that she "had come to an age at which she might have gone into parliament herself had there been no qualification of sex." Then the passage becomes more directive:

When a woman has an active mind and still does not care for parish work, it is a little hard for her to find a "sphere" and Lucilla...was still more or less in that condition of mind which has been so often and so fully described to the British public--when the ripe female intelligence, not having the natural resources of a nursery and a husband to manage, turns inwards, and begins to "make a protest" against the existing order of society, and to call the world to account for giving it no due occupation. (395)

At first there is a tone of gentle poignancy in the recognition that the sphere for women does not necessarily offer opportunities for an exercising of all female aspirations and abilities. Then the poignancy turns to a bleak recognition of the inequalities between the sexes and the hierarchical ordering of the spheres. This recognition results in a wry scoff as the narrator continues: "there are instincts which go even beyond dinners." The critique of sexual asymmetry is

unmistakable, as is the advocacy of the whole passage, which is for wider opportunities for such a powerful female spirit; for, as Lucilla has come to recognize, "there is little good in the existence of a power unless it can be made use of for some worthy end" (395). As well, the ironic reference to a nursery and a husband as "natural resources" and the reference to the fact that "there are instincts beyond" alert us to Oliphant's critique of what passes as "the natural"--a much repeated abstraction in her text.

Sometimes Oliphant uses the term "natural" ironically, as she does in the above quotation, to reveal how the socially constructed is passed off as natural; sometimes, however, she is drawing our attention to those inclinations and instincts that she believes are "natural" to the human species and, therefore, non-gender specific. A scan of the circumstances in which she uses the term or terms related to or implying the natural allows us to chart her resistance to the appropriation of the term for ideological purposes as well as her attempts to revision it for her readers. In the tracking of this theme, we can thus find evidence both of Oliphant's first-tier awareness of sexual inequality and of the way she insists on looking altogether beyond the superior-inferior dichotomy that governs notions on the roles of the sexes.

The repeated use of terms such as "naturally," "by nature," and "as was natural" in conjunction with recurrent reference to that which was "well known," "thoroughly established," and "as was to be expected" calls our

attention to the fact that the term "natural" is frequently assigned to that which is social custom. One example of this conjunction occurs early in the narrative where Dr. Marjoribanks is described as one "who gave only dinners to which *naturally* as there was no lady in the house, ladies could not be invited" (42, italics mine). As well, assumptions of superiority based on social position or title are exposed by Oliphant as that which is posited as the natural. Rector Bury assumes a privilege "in a manner natural" for a man who is in a position of authority and has "a large female circle who admired and swore by him" (85). Oliphant also points to the fact that social expectations regarding the physical appearance and personal conduct of a young woman are assumed to be the recognition of something "in nature." Any abnormality in one of these areas could signal a person's general inclination to "go against" nature:

The Doctor's daughter was not a mild young lady, easy to be controlled; but, on the contrary, had all the energy and determination to have her own way, which *naturally* belonged to a girl who possessed a considerable chin...and tightly curling tawny tresses, which were still more determined than she was to be arranged only according to their inclination. (35, italics mine)

In this passage, Oliphant points to the social expectations of what is natural for a young woman and then juxtaposes a comment on inclinations to highlight the fact that social positing of what constitutes the natural is often diametrically opposed to an individual's personality and physical constitution.

The humorous tolerance evident in these early passages, however, is gone

from ones later in the narrative in which Oliphant injects a caustic tone into her observations on patriarchal assumptions regarding what is "naturally" to be expected in a woman's life:

There can be little doubt that the chief way in which society is supposed to signify its approval and admiration and enthusiasm for a lady, is by making dozens of proposals to her, as may be ascertained from all the best-informed sources.

Oliphant then goes on to suggest that these "best-informed sources," the "They" who determine social dictates, also, of course, determine a woman's sense of self-worth:

No woman feels herself set at her true value until some poor man, or set of men, have put, as people say, their happiness into her hands....The truth is that this well-known and thoroughly established reward of female excellence had not fallen to Miss Marjoribanks' lot. (339)

As well as providing a critique of the standards by which women are to measure their worth, Oliphant is also pointing to the marginal status of a single woman and the assumption that even a "poor" man is worth having. As well, the reference to "poor" men ironically suggests her society's skewed attitude toward poverty; given the social restraints against females achieving financial independence, it is they who deserve this economic metaphor. Thus the unfairness of the "thoroughly established" is registered in keeping with first-tier feminist emphasis upon inequality.

As well as an indictment of patriarchal appropriation of the term natural, however, Oliphant also offers us her vision of wherein the natural does lie.

Often, that which is posited as natural to only one sex, she implies, is part of human nature and instinct. Thus Lucilla had "an instinct of government" (36) and "possessed by nature some of the finest qualities of a ruler" (39). She had "the natural confidence of a genius" (239) and "knew by instinct what sort of clay the people were made of by whom she had to work" (57). According to Oliphant, just as a woman's nature could be fit for rule, so a man's nature could be fit for compliance. For example, in obeying one of Lucilla's imperious requests, her cousin Tom "had struggled against his fate, poor fellow, but when it happens to be a man's instinct to do what he is told, he can no more resist it than if it was a criminal impulse" (76). The association of male submissiveness and legal deviance is a subtle way for Oliphant to acknowledge how far male subservience is from what is considered the norm, while at the same time suggesting that personal psychology rather than gender predispose a person toward certain postures.

What is evident in Oliphant's handling of "the natural," in short, is a resistance to the idea of biology being destiny and sole cultural determinant. The distinct separation of the male and female cultures, she implies, exists more because of ideology than because of inherent differences between the sexes. This insistence on the specificity and difference of each individual allies her vision with second-tier feminist awareness, but her insistence that deviation from the cultural norm is as true of men as of women demonstrates that her feminist

vision also goes beyond any single-gender advocacy.

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In his analysis of nineteenth-century fiction, in Tradition Counter Tradition, Joseph Allen Boone claims that most novels of this era are double discourses in that overtly there is a compliance in form and content to the artistic traditions and social conventions of the day, but covertly there is material that registers a resistance to these traditions. Oliphant's feminist critique doubly adheres to this pattern, for her primary means of questioning the tradition of separate spheres for women and men, and of criticizing the hierarchical ordering of and the inequality of opportunity between the two spheres, occurs via a depiction of false fronts and at the level of linguistic play.

In the initial exposure of the dynamics of Lucilla's world, for example, Oliphant alerts us to the discrepancy between the assumed and the actual, between how things "ought to be" according to societal expectations and how they actually are. Lucilla's response to her mother's death is outwardly in accordance with what was proper. She feigns grief and manufactures tears in response to "a program of filial devotion resolved upon, in accordance with the best models, some days before" (31). Actually, however, her mother's death brings Lucilla exciting visions of new furniture for the drawing-room, new "long" mourning clothes, and a "new reign of youth and energy" (30) in her father's house. She continues to adopt the role of dutiful, submissive daughter

who above all else wants to be "a comfort to [her] dear papa." She stays, on her own insistence, inside the female sphere of home and community, overtly paying lip service to submissiveness and proper decorum, while covertly marshalling her world and the people in it with all the political astuteness and manipulative strategies of a "great" ruler, politician or army general.

Even more subtle than such a situational critique is the way that Oliphant uses inflationary and deflationary strategies to undermine conventional attitudes toward what is normal. The description of Lucilla as a "domestic oracle" (46) is combined with, and in a way discredited, by alternative images drawn from the public spheres of the military and government. The language of war and the military is often used in connection with this young woman: she is given the epithet, "Joan of Arc" (351), is a "distinguished revolutionary" (41), the "young dictator," an "accomplished warrior" (54); she "defeated the Rector" (90), and took Barbara Lake as "her captive" (57). Images of politics, government and leadership pepper descriptions of Lucilla and her activities: she has an "instinct of government" (36), is a "rightful sovereign" (75), and administers to "her constituency" (75); she possesses "a mind made to rule, is a "woman of genius" (118), and is consumed by "the greatness of her mission" (60). Such terminology, drawn from the male-dominated, public arenas of activity is too numerous not to unsettle us, jar us at a subliminal level and lead us to new considerations. Instead of being confined to a vision of a young woman in a

submissive, dependent, restrictive role, we are led to a consideration of her as a powerful, creative, resourceful individual with the will, abilities and instincts to do anything that is humanly possible.

In addition, by directing us to expand our consciousness of what is "womanly" possible, Oliphant draws attention to widespread societal assumptions regarding the concepts of greatness, power and superiority: that these traits are exemplified in the areas of the military, the political and other male-dominated areas and are, thus, exclusive traits of those in these professions. In attributing these adjectives to Lucilla, Oliphant is not merely making her the object of witty satire or creating a narrative in the "mock heroic" tradition, she is engaging in positive inflationary strategy of a consciousness-raising kind: that is, she is inflating--"increasing or raising beyond what is normal"--and thus expanding readers' awareness of what can also be "natural" to women.

Oliphant's inflationary strategy works in another way. Normally, terms denoting power are not used to describe the activities and minds of those who remain in the domestic sphere. Perhaps on one level, then, Oliphant's humor and satire works well because she taps many readers' ready expectations that nothing in the domestic realm could be considered a great mission, a victory or a triumph, something requiring great energy, resourcefulness or power. Certainly, criticism is replete with references to the "meaningless" existence of

the bourgeois woman of the nineteenth century. (Also, remember O'Mealy's reference to no "real" outlet, no "real" power). Through Oliphant's association of female-oriented experiences with powerful, positive abstractions that are generally attributed to male-oriented experiences, the domestic, social realm is "elevated," or inflated in a positive sense.

Considering that social, interpersonal and domestic aspects occupy at least half of our lives, we can acknowledge the importance of Oliphant's directing her readers to consider the possibility that the great, the noble and the powerful exist in this private realm. Oliphant is subtly registering here what many twentieth-century female artists declare overtly and assertively: the domestic realm, as well as those involved in the structuring, maintaining and monitoring of it, is an area of meaningful, worthy activity. By showing that the strategies and abilities needed to function in this sphere are no different from those required in the public sphere, Oliphant closes the gap between the two while demonstrating how ridiculous is the belief that woman can function only in one.

Oliphant is closing the gap between the two spheres in another way. She seems to recognize that just as the public lives of women have been "left out" of representation in fiction, so have the domestic and social lives of men. In Miss Marjoribanks, Oliphant attempts a correction of this imbalance as well. While her male characters are representatives from the public, professional realms--

they are doctors, politicians, church and military leaders--they are placed in social and domestic settings: they attend to wives (Colonel Chiley), are tended to and directed by imperious daughters (Dr. Marjoribanks), attend dinner parties and discuss social decorum (Archdeacon Beverley) and rely on social connections and domestic manoeuvres to advance professionally (Mr. Ashburton). Essentially, what Oliphant is attempting is a realignment of the metaphors by which the two genders have been defined.

There is, therefore, a reversal operating within the linguistic play of Oliphant's text: just as she elevates the "low" by associating it with what is usually considered the to be "high," she equalizes the "high" by associating it with what is generally considered the low. This mixing of the public and the private realms does not highlight one specific gendered class. Considering that the only bona fide representative of the military in the text is Colonel Chiley, "who had not received a new idea into his mind since the battle of Waterloo" (206), we can assume that the mixing of the high with the low is not just for specific criticism of Lucilla; it is, by extension, an exposure of the ignoble nature of some military and political manoeuvres and their practitioners. Thus, Oliphant is exposing the underbelly of many of the sacred cows of the Victorian age--duty, sacrifice, devotion, decorum--and is showing how these ideological postures can provide convenient masks for self-serving, manipulative, power tactics--in both the public and the domestic realms.

Through a shuffling of imagery from the various spheres, all the human foibles exposed in Lucilla and people in her domestic and social circles are attributed to those who inhabit the public realms; as well, some of the images serve to deconstruct the hierarchical positioning of the spheres. For example, when the narrator observes, "Such happy accidents rarely happen except to great generals or heroes of romance" (238), the juxtaposition of generals and romance heroes excites a host of comparisons and musings, in that one term comments on the other, and the joining of the two evokes similarities that do not generally occur to us. The result is a mutual deconstruction of both terms and a resistance to hierarchical ordering: the conjunction "or" deconstructs the privileging of the first term, and we are left with two equal images and considerations of all the ways that generals are like heroes of romances (romanticized, idealized) and all the ways that the strategies of historians--chroniclers of the public realm--and novelists--chroniclers of the private realm--are similar.

* * * * *

What the inflationary and deflationary tactics ultimately lead to, then, is a conflation of the two spheres, private and public, and a resting of focus on what can be identified as the subject matter for the third-tier feminist thought--"common humanity." Here, significantly, the shared reality on which Oliphant most consistently focuses is the will to power, which according to Michael

Foucault, is "dominant over any search for truth" (Richter 952). Repeatedly, Oliphant uses imagery and situation that give us insights into this most basic of human drives.

In a prototypic scene in her drawing-room with Archdeacon Beverley, discussing the affairs of Mrs. Mortimer whom the Archdeacon secretly loves, Lucilla is confronted by him standing "lowering and menacing" over her: "His shadow was so big and strong, and stood so directly between her and the window"(235). The Archdeacon, a beacon of the church and a pillar of a male power structure, stands between a woman and a window, symbolic of an outlet to the air and light of authority and validation. Certainly, we could, with some justification, read this scene as an indication of the shadow of patriarchy blocking the potential and freedom of nineteenth-century women. But when we examine the text more closely, we recognize that other issues are being stressed: Lucilla has entered the encounter with "just faith in her instincts"(230), and the reader has entered equipped with the narrative directive that the Archdeacon "was not the first man whom Miss Marjoribanks had reduced to his proper place" (234). Through clever use of suggestion and manipulation of circumstances, Lucilla is able to reduce the tall, imposing man to a creature who was "flabby and ghastly in his white tie." Lucilla uses the suggestion that Mrs. Mortimer should marry another man as an "arrow to rankle in her opponent's heart" (235), while knowing that "no such idea of marrying her uncle's heir

would ever present itself to Mrs. Mortimer" (239). Are we witnessing the endorsement of women using deceit and invisible weapons in their stand against male power, or have we witnessed an uncovering of the inherent nature of power? I believe it is the latter.

Although Oliphant's tone is one of amusement and mild ridicule at this display of the manipulations of a vain, young woman with "a mission" (40), there is a registered recognition that goes beyond gender, beyond the specific circumstances described. Oliphant's words are lighting our way into a "mind made to rule." In view of the narrative inflation and deflation of the spheres of activity involved, the comparison of Lucilla's strategies in these circumstance to those of "the greatest military genius" leaves us aware that what is being described is a generic example of a cool, calculated power move, or as Oliphant euphemistically terms it, "the pleasure of exercising a great faculty, and the natural confidence of genius in its own powers" (239). Given that this statement closes the chapter, it functions as a point of emphasis in the narrative.

What Oliphant also emphasizes is that militancy and intolerance of the other cuts across genders. For example, when speaking of males, she often refers to "Them," implying that the them-against-us world view is a given for women too. Frequently and pointedly, Oliphant draws our attention to this oppositional mode of thought. One exemplary passage has Lucilla speaking to Mrs. Mortimer about Archdeacon Beverley:

"I am very glad the Archdeacon did not come until you had got back your looks. It makes such a difference to a man," Miss Marjoribanks added with that almost imperceptible tone of contempt which she was sometimes known to use when speaking of their absurd perceptions. (222)

Interestingly enough, the them-against-us attitude seems to be as much a part of the narrative voice as it is of the society within the text. Comments such as natural obtuseness being "so general among the gentlemen" (176) situate some of the derision as part of the controlling mind behind the narrative, and suggest that Oliphant envisions a female readership. At the same time, however, neither sex is exempt from the scrutiny of her satirical gaze (or her human understanding). While she may scoff at the peculiarities of men, she gives ample evidence of the ludicrous inclinations of females, not all of which are related to frenzy over one hostess having a superior sauce recipe! She shows women to be as self-serving and manipulative with the power they hold as men are.

Not only males insist on an observance of hierarchy; Lucilla also insists on adherence to this social categorization: "so long as her superiority was duly acknowledged, she was ready to do anything for anybody"(39). Personal expediency to the point of cruelty is fair play to Lucilla: "she had not hesitated to sacrifice this poor woman [Mrs. Mortimer] when she needed a victim"(97). Lucilla also engages in a most insidious type of control--passive aggression. She rose to her reign, "not upon the ruins of other thrones, but with the

goodwill and co-operation of the lesser powers; who were, to be sure, too feeble to resist her advance”(101).

In the same way, Oliphant's portrait of Dr. Marjoribanks counteracts easy scapegoating of the male. Initially, Dr. Marjoribanks seems to fit the stereotypical image of the privileged patriarch given to single-minded devotion to his profession, to emotional distance from his family, to a preference for male company and to an intolerance for any female interference with his life. His belief in the inherent superiority of men is emphasized: he finds fault with Providence for "not giving him a son instead of a daughter”(69). The status quo is a refuge to a man such as Dr. Marjoribanks; any disruption of it is a bane. In one sense, then, Lucilla's father seems to be a justification for men being referred to as one of the "less interesting members of the human family”(83), the "Them” who are objects of scorn and derision. And yet, the most powerful, poignant prose of the whole text is reserved for the foreshadowing of his death and the tender eulogizing that follows it. As well, some of his insights represent an angle of vision that Oliphant is leading the reader to adopt. He has a "keen perception of the ridiculous” (51) and is the only character who can see through his daughter's facades. In this way Oliphant keeps us from resting easily with any blanket intolerance for men in positions of authority and prominence. Just as Lucilla sees through the falseness and vanities of a male, so Dr. Marjoribanks gives us a critical lens through which to view the vanities

and manipulations of a female.

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In assessing Oliphant's feminist stance, then, perhaps, instead of faulting her for not using her fiction to focus on raising the suppressed "other" or to heap scorn on the male oppressors--views O'Mealy credits to Gilbert and Gubar (Victorian Canon 46)--we can credit her with a feminist consciousness that is similar to Naomi Wolf's, a voice for the 1990s, who cautions against assuming that all women are fair-minded, egalitarian and incapable of acting in self-serving, coercive ways. Arguing that women must "understand the nature of power" and "acknowledge [their] own will to power" (14) in order to work effectively toward a gender-fair society, Wolf observes:

The civil war of gender does not involve "men against women" on two distinct sides. The patriarchalists world view, shared by women as well as men, is battling the emerging egalitarian world view, which is also shared by people of both sexes. (23)

In Miss Marjoribanks one finds an early awareness of this kind of militarism and of the subtle tactics needed to wage it: both a realistic depiction of the status quo and a good-humored critique of it.

In 1852, George Henry Lewes, generally a spokesman for women's rights showed himself to be well-intended but condescending in his analysis of what he saw as a compensatory impulse behind female literary creativity:

If the accidents of her position make her solitary and inactive, or if her thwarted affections shut her somewhat from that sweet domestic and

maternal sphere to which her whole being spontaneously moves, she turns to literature as to another sphere. (qtd. in Showalter, Literature 85)

Notwithstanding the fact that Oliphant wrote to support her family and also because "it gave [her] pleasure, because it came natural to [her]" (Colby 5), Lewes's comments, inadvertently, do seem to accord with Margaret Oliphant's art. She did turn to literature "as to another sphere," but in a manner not implied by Lewes. For Oliphant, literature provided an imaginary participation in the sphere closed to her--the one of public and political activity. She did not aim an historian's eye at the public realm, viewing and recording the manoeuvres of war or the workings of government: however, she did aim a creative analyst's eye at some of the similarities of the human impulses behind the manoeuvres and workings within this other realm and those in the domestic sphere. In doing so, she exhibits ample evidence of third-tier feminist consciousness: the differences between men and women are seen as a metaphysical construct and not as something "natural." Her works, then, can be seen as a resistance not only to the notion of "male as norm" but also to the notion that any norm based on gender can be valid. In deconstructing the idea that wielding power and marshalling forces are exclusively male activities, Oliphant makes room for women to be considered powerful and resourceful, as well as ruthless. Conversely, by exposing the petty, manipulative, self-serving motives that often lie behind activities that establish the norm for greatness,

truth and right, Oliphant dislodges the association between these abstractions and the male mode of conduct.

Critical focus on Oliphant has often been on her deficiencies as a writer and as a feminist thinker. Ironically, Elaine Showalter, who works at uncovering the lost Atlantis of a female literary tradition and "the lost sight of minor novelists who were the links in the chain that bound one generation to the next" (Literature 7), discredits Oliphant doubly. First, she does so by calling her minor and by placing her in that familiar shadow--that of George Eliot--thus identifying her as one of the second generation of Victorian writers who "followed in the footsteps of the great" and "were less dedicated and original" (20). Second, she reads in the novels of writers such as Oliphant: "a persistent self-deprecation of themselves as women, sometimes expressed as humility, sometimes as coy assurance-seeking, and sometimes as the purest self-hatred" (211). For evidence, she cites a letter to John Blackwood, in which Oliphant queried "whether in your most manly and masculine of magazines a womanish story-teller like myself may not become wearisome" (21). In light of the way that Oliphant presents Lucilla's submission to male domination as a clever pose, one might be less inclined to agree with Showalter. Similarly, one might note that Oliphant was published in Blackwoods--frequently--just as Lucilla did manage to achieve her own ends by overt compliance and covert challenge. What Showalter seems also to have overlooked is that while Oliphant overtly

focuses on the separate spheres of the "manly" and the "womanish," she covertly attempts to deconstruct the idea of this being a natural separation and to chart a way beyond stultifying adherence to rigid, sex-role modes of thought.

Miss Marjoribanks provides evidence that we need to consider a writer's "feminist" insights in terms other than that of linear progression; Oliphant's work cannot be dealt with justly if we classify it, as Showalter does, as belonging to one specific mode of feminist thought ("feminine" for Showalter) that is "lesser" than a "later" mode. There is evidence of a mixture of modes, tiers, phases of feminist insights in Oliphant's writings. In her texts, she manifests a consciousness that recognizes and resists the fact that women were not equal in opportunity and regard. She identifies and relishes women's individuality and difference, and she also sees beyond women's gendered identity to the heart of human impulse and needs. She clothes her insights in garments suited to her personal circumstances and particular talent. Because some of these insights may have poured out of a pen scribbling in white hot heat to feed her family, they may not be as finely tuned as those of another writer who had the privilege of more time and money, but this does not necessarily mean they are intellectually poorer insights. In fact, I suggest that Oliphant's reading of the relationships between the sexes is as relevant and insightful as any that have been devised since.

Chapter III: George Eliot (Daniel Deronda)

In the introduction to her biography of George Eliot, A Woman of Contradictions, Ina Taylor contends that while critical acclaim has established Eliot as "the greatest novelist of [her] day," the woman behind George Eliot "has successfully eluded biographers for so long it is hard to discover the reality" (xiii, xiv). The "reality" that seems to be desired is a consistent and unifying core to her personality, instead of which all that has been found are disturbing contradictions. Taylor then gives evidence of contradictory accounts of Eliot in memoirs of her contemporaries.

There is the woman who found herself the object of lesbian affection, yet loved men and experienced several love affairs before she finally married; the woman whose "immoral" behaviour meant she was cast out of society, yet was fêted by intellectuals, aristocrats and even royalty; the woman who flouted the rules, yet was desperately concerned to be respectable; the woman who claimed her writing as an art form, yet approached it from a mercenary angle; the woman who was the best advertisement the Women's Movement had ever had, yet refused to help them. The life of George Eliot raises so many questions and as many contradictions. (xv)

The same recognition of Eliot's "greatness" as an artist has led feminist scholars to look for an equivalent "greatness" in her feminist vision, and here too the result is frequent disappointment. According to Ellen Ringler, "George Eliot occupies a profoundly uneasy position among feminist critics" (55). Kathleen McCormack identifies this unease as arising from the sense that she was a writer who produced works of "inarguable greatness" but who espouses in her

texts "a lukewarm feminism" (62). In a like manner, Nancy L. Paxton articulates these contradictory impulses when, along with censuring Eliot for espousing "what has seemed to most modern readers [as] an ambivalent feminisim at best," she offers a counter defense: "[her] intellectualism and her contribution to the Victorian novel and to Victorian thought no longer need to be defended" (6, 8).

The arguments used to identify Eliot's deficiencies as an author of feminist sensibilities cover an interesting range. Sometimes she is judged to be more cautious about gender politics than her contemporaries: according to John Goode, she is "much less radical, much less open to [feminist] interpretation than Charlotte Brontë" (38). Another critic, George Cooke, who does not require that Eliot be as radical in her politics as her contemporaries were, acknowledges that she does "deal centrally with sexual politics," but then hastens to add--as though "feminist" were a pejorative term--"which is not to claim George Eliot as a feminist, but rather to argue that the issue of sexual politics and its place in the larger politics of nineteenth-century society remain central" (41). Frequently biographical information is introduced to evidence of Eliot's limitations as a feminist. Ringler bases her sense of Eliot's "ambivalence" toward what the Victorians termed the Woman Question by extrapolating from the fact that "she was at best indifferent, at worst hostile to the cause of woman's suffrage" (55). Similarly, Eliot's scorn for inept female

writers, evident in her essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," is invoked by Nancy L. Paxton to indicate that she was deficient in her sense of sisterhood (11). Conversely, some of Eliot's critics fault her for having lived as a liberated, autonomous female but not allowing her female characters an equivalent amount of self-actualization and autonomy. In an article in Ms magazine Gail Goodwin claims that Eliot's female protagonists "did not fare so well during their life times....Not one of them was happy 'in the highest blessing' of love and work as Eliot was" (88). Closures in Eliot's novels are referred to as another indicator of her ambivalence. Often quoted as an indisputable authority regarding Eliot's signature on the convention of closing, Virginia Woolf, in an article in the Times Literary Supplement, laments that Eliot's female characters do not achieve "the great liberation which had come to her with personal happiness"; their stories "end in tragedy, or a compromise that is even more melancholy...an incomplete version of George Eliot herself."

What adds even more interest to an already fascinating field is that these voices of critical censure are often mixed with expressions of approval, sometimes in relation to an individual novel. For example, as Ringler notes, critical assessments of Middlemarch range from naming it "a betrayal of feminism," to "an ambivalent, uncertain feminism," to "a profoundly feminist work" (56). Since the 1970s, however, with the tools of psychological and post-structuralist criticism in hand, feminist critics have been more consistently

approving and, as McCormack notes, have tended to give Eliot and her characters "a squarer deal than critics traditionally allow them" (602).

The defenses of Eliot as a force in the development of feminism take myriad forms. Some of the time her credentials are established by association: "Point for point, Eliot's novels illustrate Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments" (McCormack 603); or she is credited with resisting forces of anti-feminism: "The primary objective of this study is to disclose Eliot's dialogue with [Herbert] Spencer throughout her career, and to demonstrate her resolute feminist resistance to many aspects of Spencer's biological determinism" (Paxton 5). Other feminist critics take a psychoanalytic approach to Eliot's work and see her enacting in art that which lacked an outlet in her life. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar cite the death of her fictional patriarchs such as Casaubon and Grandcourt as evidence of the author's suppressed rage at the patriarchy of the nineteenth-century. Ringler locates the evidence of Eliot's feminism in her antipathy toward men. In response to those critics who pointed to Eliot's "lukewarm" feminist in Middlemarch, Ringler "proves" Eliot's strong feminist consciousness by demonstrating that all her female characters are really "more powerful than the men," and all her men characters in possession of "a virulent and weakening form of 'moral stupidity'" (58).

Despite their differences, however, critics who endorse and those who question Eliot's feminism base their positions on similar problematic grounds.

First, there is a tendency to assume that feminist consciousness has definable features, and that there is collective agreement on a set of criteria by which one can assess the "feminist factor" of a literary text or writer. In addition, individual attempts to set up some criteria frequently repeat rather than challenge patriarchal assumptions. For example, the critical act of weighing a writer's feminist consciousness by the degree to which she endorses female dominance and exposes male inferiority in her texts implies a simplistic reversal of hierarchy. A related problem is the tendency to demand an all-encompassing pro-feminist stance, without which a work is to be judged anti-feminist: a narrative must have all circumstances arranged to highlight the evils of the patriarchal system and all characters must be either condemned or redeemed according to how they represent feminist ideals. Such criteria, in short, reflects an ideology that is frequently as monolithic as that which has been rejected as patriarchal.

As well, in many of the assessments of Eliot, there is a lack of discrimination between the rhetoric and aims of nineteenth-century feminism and those of twentieth-century feminism. Perhaps what is seen as Eliot's "failure of vision" may be merely her failure to engage in all of the rhetoric or outward manifestations of modern-day feminist concerns. Nineteenth-century writers' feminist insights will seem deficient if taken out of context, for they almost never do reflect, in life or in art, all of the concerns of a particular,

modern-day feminist critic. For example, if a writer's inscription of female sexuality is seen as one necessary criterion of a valid artistic feminist consciousness, then most Victorian writers are wanting. Those rights we women assume now--to vote, to be considered free sexual beings, and to work in the public realm--were not part of the lives of mid-Victorian, middle-class women, and, thus, these activities were not givens that nineteenth-century authors could draw on in their depiction of women of their time. Restricted by rigid ideals of female purity and legislated into silence by censorship laws, writers such as Eliot had to skirt the sexual aspect of the Woman Question if they wanted to be published and read.

My final concern with these readings is the problematic focus on Eliot's handling of the "heroine" of the work as an index to feminist sympathies. The use of the word itself, a feminization of the male term "hero," carries with it a reliance on the male as norm and a hidden but assumed standard of greatness or nobility that is neither acknowledged or questioned. As well, these readings assume that only in the creation of female characters can a writer manifest her resistance to female subordination.

What these readings register, then, is a yearning to find a unified, totalized vision of pro-feminism within Eliot's texts. Ellen B. Rosenman offers an instructive commentary on this impulse: "Unity is not the innate property of a story or of experience itself, but is achieved, even coerced, by a privileged

point of view" (238). As Rosenman implies, in seeing the resistance to the privileged point of view of patriarchy as a main impetus of feminism, feminist scholars need to be wary of establishing one of their own or of faulting a writer for not providing one. Eliot's fiction can be instructive in this regard, for in it there is evidence that she resists all hierarchical, binary-oppositional and totalized modes of thought, not only because they have been shown to be manifestations of the privileged point of view of patriarchy but because they are human mindsets that she sees as anathema to any alternative system of gender fairness. In this resistance, she does not show a lack of feminist insights but manifests a type of feminist consciousness that is remarkable for a nineteenth-century woman and is also suggestive of the third mental space of feminist awareness.

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Daniel Deronda stands out in Eliot's *oeuvre* as Miss Marjoribanks does in Oliphant's, as a locus for examining how a writer articulates her position on feminist issues. While it has repeatedly been judged a "lesser" work than Middlemarch, even by some critics who resist the interpretive assumptions that lie behind that epithet, it is Eliot's final work and as such gives us her last exploration of and perspective on what she termed "the promise of a better after which we may strive" (qtd. in Hardy, "Introduction" 30). Daniel Deronda contains a concrete expression of Eliot's position on nineteenth-century gender

politics, and provides instructive insights into the way that Eliot the woman and Eliot the visionary artist, and the text as political statement and the text as artistic expression, can be conjoined.

The title of this novel is, ironically, a declaration and a concealment-- something very *a propos* for Victorian fiction, which often deals with the discrepancy between the overt and the covert. The title alerts us to one of the stories in the text, that of Daniel Deronda, but does not indicate the other parallel plot of equal weight--that of Gwendolyn Harleth. The story of Daniel, ward of an English gentleman, is one of a search for origins, for relationships, and, finally for a constructive role in the foundation of a new Jewish nation. Gwendolyn's story is one of a young Victorian woman's attempts to exercise her "will to lead" in family, marriage, and the social world--all of which lead to outward failure, but forcibly promote inward personal growth. The intersection of the two plots occurs immediately in the narrative. Gwendolyn is gambling at Leubrann, France, when she is spied by Daniel who immediately sets himself up as her moral guide. From this point on the parallel plots are given equal weight and periodic intersections.

Daniel Deronda lives as ward of devoted, benevolent Sir Hugo Mallinger, who had never told Daniel of his parents or why they are absent. Although Daniel is extremely fond of Sir Hugo and is treated well, he is not the English gentleman's heir and is left with a strong yearning for knowledge of his origins.

Sir Hugo has a family of "only" daughters; therefore, his property is to go to his nephew Mallinger Grandcourt. Through Grandcourt, one of the intersections with the Gwendolyn plot is set up.

Gwendolyn's first sanctioned prospect is this heir to Sir Hugo's properties. Grandcourt's controlled, courteous nature matches Gwendolyn's mixture of aloofness and coquettishness. Just when it seems that a proposal and acceptance are imminent, Gwendolyn learns of Mrs. Lydia Glasher, Grandcourt's mistress and mother of his four illegitimate children. Her sense of moral indignation leads her to withdraw from the liaison midst much public puzzlement and to retreat to Leubroun to join friends.

Meanwhile, Daniel's life is unfolding according to acts of benevolence and rescue. He aborts his own chances of winning and aids a Cambridge classmate, Hans Meyrick, in winning a scholarship. Later, while in a boat on the river Cam, he rescues a frail young woman, Mirah Lapidoth, on the verge of committing suicide and takes her to Hans Meyrick's family for refuge, where she is nursed back to health by Mrs. Meyrick and her daughters. Mirah is a Jewess who has ventured to London on a quest to find her mother and brother from whom she had been forcibly separated by an abusive father. Through his association with Mirah and as a consequence of helping her trace her family, Daniel is brought into contact with the Jewish culture, which, when his mother suddenly surfaces and summons him to Italy, he learns is his heritage. His

affinity for his new Jewish identity is cemented when Mordecai Lapidot, Mirah's brother, is found and the two men are bonded by their passionate Zionist desires. Daniel ends up marrying Mirah, and at the end of the novel sets off on the noble quest of helping establish a Jewish homeland.

Gwendolyn's fate is less overtly messianic. When her family suffers financial collapse and her only choice seems to be becoming a governess, she panics, goes against her former impulse and marries Grandcourt to secure a stable financial future for herself and her mother. On the night of the wedding, to make sure that Gwendolyn suffers for her transgression, Lydia, Grandcourt's mistress, sends an accusatory note and returns a necklace that Grandcourt had given to her, but which he now wants to give to his wife. Gwendolyn's response to this missive from the woman she believes she has wronged is shrieking hysteria--a fitting launch for a disastrous marriage. Grandcourt is a cruel, domineering spouse, a "boa constrictor," who squeezes the life spirit and will to rule out of Gwendolyn. She plummets to deeper and deeper levels of guilt, despair and loathing. Her only relief occurs when she meets Daniel Deronda socially. Gwendolyn is drawn by his sympathetic nature, confesses the cause for her guilt and misery and clings to him for moral guidance. When Grandcourt drowns during a sailing jaunt, on which she has been forced to accompany him, Gwendolyn is driven to despair, thinking that she may have caused his death by the sheer force of her wanting desperately to be free of him.

Daniel comes to her mental rescue, assures her she is blameless but advocates that she live a selfless life of devotion to others to regain her sense of moral worth. Gwendolyn's dependency on and love for Daniel grows increasingly. She is oblivious to his emotional engagement elsewhere for, as the narrator points out, "in Gwendolyn's small life" and with her sense of "supremacy in her own world" she assumed that "whatever surrounded her was somehow specially for her" (876). When Daniel finally tells Gwendolyn of his future plans and sets off to the East on his Zionist mission with his angel wife by his side, she is left thunderstruck and bereft, but, we notice, free to forge out a meaningful existence on her own terms, without benefit or hindrance of an intimate male authority figure.

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It is the ending of the Gwendolyn plot that is most problematic for critics. Roslyn Belkin terms the closure "curiously incomplete" with "the important problems remain[ing] unsolved." She wonders if Gwendolyn's "complete destruction" is being intimated and why "she and her mentor Deronda (and Eliot herself) are so little concerned with the formidable economic and social problems which loom in [Gwendolyn's] future as a single woman of small fortune" (482).

Although some of Belkin's points are debatable, especially that of Eliot being "little concerned," her assessment does identify facets of the novel that

are especially fruitful for a consideration of her feminist vision. In particular, her charge that Eliot's ending is "incomplete" and that the narrative's important problems are "unresolved" prompts us to question the implication of Eliot's deviations from fixed standards for artistic closure and content. I would like to argue that Eliot's purpose is to register a strong feminist resistance to that which demands artistic compliance, and by extension to provide a critique of confinement in rigid gender roles that seems to be the plight of her characters. In turn, I hope to suggest that these artistic "ruptures" initiate a pattern of other ruptures that carry with them profound philosophical, social and cultural commentary. Eliot not only refuses the happy-ever-after marriage ending for her principal female character, but also she includes other structural and thematic deviancies that make this work stand out as one that "touch[es] the limits of Victorian fiction" (Boone 173): the parallel, equally weighed plots, one male-centered and the other female-centered; the inclusion of the Jewish cultural question; and the reliance on a multivocal rather than a univocal narrative voice. When we examine these narrative strategies, we discover that encoded in Eliot's nineteenth-century view of gender relations is an anticipation of many of the prime concerns for feminists of the twentieth century.

* * * * *

In Sexual Politics (1970) Kate Millet turned her doctoral thesis into a piercing scrutiny of the power relationships between men and women. She

named the system of sexual dominance by males as the most pervasive ideology of our culture and as one that obtains consent through the socialization of the sexes. She saw the family as patriarchy's chief institution, effecting control and conformity beyond the boundaries of political and other authorities. Its chief "weapons" she exposed to be its longevity, universality and tendency to present itself as natural. She also recognized that "when a system of power is thoroughly in command, it scarcely needs to speak itself aloud" (17).

According to Millet, then, one of the fundamental weapons of feminists was the naming of the oppressive system that surrounded them, affected them and seeped into their beings as much as the air they breathed.

Daniel Deronda manifests a political awareness that equals Millet's in magnitude, for Eliot definitely does "name" the system in command. Her characters expose the ideological constructs behind the patriarchal system by voicing its justifications, living its dictates, endorsing its restrictions or naming and rebelling against its injustices. To do this, Eliot includes in her narrative an examination of the institutions of marriage, family and parenthood as sites for the prime promotion and transmission of the patriarchal values woven through the fabric of society.

In its presentation of parenthood, Daniel Deronda is an uncharacteristic nineteenth-century text in that mothers' voices are present. After encountering the absent-mother syndrome in many of the Austen, Brontë and Oliphant texts,

the centrality of mothers in this Eliot text is noteworthy. They are the focus for the quest for identities and origins: Mirah is in retreat from her father and in search of her mother, who was a powerful, positive force in the lives of her and her brother; as well, Daniel Deronda's most poignant yearning is for knowledge of his mother and his heritage. Thus, the foregrounding of the maternal element is significant in that it situates women in the context of the quest motif that is traditionally associated with the male; but what is more significant, it situates women as instruments in and agents for patriarchy, a system that is most often attributed solely to the male. The traditional mothers, Mrs. Meyrick and Mrs. Davilow, offer evidence of women well suited to and pleased with the social and domestic roles to which they are confined. They are bound by commitment and circumstance to the ideology of a woman's true and proper sphere--marriage and mothering--and they are complicit in promoting male privilege and superiority. Kate Meyrick observes the commonality between mothers and society in general: "I notice mothers are like the people I deal with--the girl's doings are always priced low" (545).

In the patriarchal system, as Millet declares, there are rewards and security for those who live by its dictates. Eliot dramatizes this issue by depicting many "traditional" couples in affectionate, harmonious lives. Mrs. Davilow's desperate state of dependency on her daughter making a financial expedient marriage, however, shows that built into the narrative is a first-tier

feminist recognition of the precarious nature of the security of women whose social and financial well-being is determined by their alliances to men.

The role women play in propping up a system in which their personal worth, social status and financial security are dependent on men is underscored in the characterization of these traditional women. In her off-hand, instructive comment to her daughter Kate, Mrs. Meyrick offers an acknowledgement of male privilege, with a not-so-subtle reference to the female compliance that must lie behind it: "My dear child, the boys are such a trouble. We could never put up with them if we didn't make believe they were worth more" (545).

Gwendolyn's aunt is obviously content and secure in her traditional role and considers it her duty to offer instructions to her daughters on how to function in an overtly submissive manner. Gwendolyn's mother, too, is a chief advocate of the status quo for women and instructs Gwendolyn that "marriage is the only happy state for a woman" (58).

The narrative voice establishes a distance between itself and these women who adopt, uncritically and without reservations, the role carved out for them as wives and mothers. There is no doubt of the cutting underbite in the narrator's description of Gwendolyn's mother and her equally indoctrinated sister, Mrs. Gascoigne, as "non-resistant disposition[s] inclined to imitation and obedience" (59). Obviously, such authorial commentary is designed to direct the way we respond to these women and to register an awareness that some people,

including women, cannot envision a reality other than one based on distinct separate spheres.

In her handling of the theme of motherhood Eliot evidences not just a first-tier awareness that anticipates that of Kate Millet's, but also second-tier concerns that are remarkably similar to those expressed by another powerful feminist voice of the twentieth century, Adrienne Rich. In Of Woman Born Rich analyzes and articulates an insistence on female specificity and difference, which is not allowed for under patriarchy. Initially Rich claims that she wants to:

distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential--and all women--shall remain under male control. (13)

Rich identifies the ideology of motherhood--as Millet did the traditional family unit--as one of the chief tools of patriarchy: "Patriarchy could not survive without motherhood...in [its] institutional form" (43). She goes on, in an expository fashion, to articulate what Eliot demonstrates, artistically, in her handling of the relationships between mothers and children:

[E]very mother must deliver her children over within a few years of their birth to the patriarchal system of education, of law, of religion, of sexual codes; she is, in fact, *expected* to prepare them to enter that system without rebelliousness or "maladjustment" and to perpetuate it in their own lives. Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence, imprinting future adults with patriarchal values. (61)

Thus, we can see that Eliot's authorial comments regarding the role of mothers

carry with them the same level of feminist awareness that is considered "modern." Where Eliot's vision differs from these modern feminists, though, is in her view of fatherhood as an institution of patriarchy that is equally at odds with the individual inclinations and needs of men.

Sometimes this critical viewpoint is underscored with directed narrative comment, sometimes by the wordless commentary of a parallel situation, but, subtly and surely, a not-so-obvious face of patriarchal ideology is uncovered, as well as the hidden assumptions that allow for its existence. Indeed, benevolent patriarchy is well intact with paternal figures such as Gwendolyn's uncle, Mr. Gascoigne, and Catherine's father, Mr. Arrowpoint. These men are shown, as are the traditional mothers, to be caring, conscientious parents who want the "best" for the young women in their care. But the assumptions behind their concepts of "best" are what Eliot questions, and in doing so she exposes the part played by language in controlling the social and cultural order.

These fathers are, and require others to be, bound by strict observance of conventional gender roles. All of the advice and guidance that Mr. Gascoigne offers his niece is imbued with restrictions regarding women's proper place. He is alarmed at her free-spirited nature and sees marriage as a way of taming her: "the point is to get her well married" for she has "a little too much fire in her" (111). He sees the role of women as that of hero maker: to encourage and promote the prominence of the male. (Virginia Woolf was to term this function

of a woman as that of being a mirror, reflecting back to a man an image twice his size). He urges Gwendolyn to encourage her husband to go into politics: "A wife has great influence with her husband. Use yours in that direction, my dear" (611). His comment on marriage as "the only true and satisfactory sphere for women" (180) establishes him, unmistakably, as a devotee of the status quo for women.

Mr. Arrowpoint also holds forth as the quintessential paternal authority on the proper role for young women when he lectures his daughter Catherine on her duty to marry according to social status: "It will never do to argue about marriage....We must do as other people do. We must think of the nation and the public good" (290). The effect of such globalizing pronouns and recourses to conformity is that the reader's attention is directed away from considering the traits of these fathers as idiosyncratic and towards understanding them as a social phenomenon. Once again, the mediating narrative voice breaks through, and we are asked in reference to the Rector's views, "why should he be expected to differ from his contemporaries in this matter and wish his niece a worse end of her charming maidenhood than they would approve as the best possible?" (68).

That some people live comfortably and contentedly within the social and political realities is acknowledged, that their intentions are often benevolently directed is displayed but that their tendencies and opinions have become

institutionalized, codified into an "inevitable law" of duty is repeatedly underscored. Thus, we must wonder if Catherine Arrowpoint's resistance to the law of her father is not a generic cry that the narrative is transmitting from the heart of all subordinates: "People can easily take the sacred word duty as a name for what they desire anyone else to do" (289).

* * * * *

In its concern for what hides behind language, Eliot's narrative also anticipates other twentieth-century feminist voices and one of their major deconstructive tactics. Armed with the linguistic, psychological and philosophical insights of Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, feminists have declared language to be an ideological construct that serves the purposes of the patriarchal system. Seeing that language is the symbolic code through which we learn and teach others a view of the world, our initiation into language becomes our entrapment in The Law of the Father (Lacan's term). In order to challenge and disband the Law, then, feminists aim their dismantling energies at the assumptions embedded in the constructs of language. As well as the unmasking of the male bias (sexism) that is built into our language, feminists have gone on to show that the major modes of conceptual thought are anti-female. French feminist Hélène Cixous calls attention to the series of binary oppositional terms that characterize human thought patterns (culture/nature, active/passive, self/other, and so on). Each pair

is a hierarchy in which the first term is the privileged, the positive, the masculine and the second term is the other, the negative, the feminine. Therefore, argues Cixous, all binary oppositional terms have their basis in the man/woman dichotomy, and all of these terms create hierarchies in which the privileged is always male-associated, male-defined. Words such as "best" and "duty," which are privileged terms, therefore, will reflect that which is associated with and defined by the masculine. Taking these insights back to Eliot's fiction, we can recognize that the wry narrative voice, as well as the forceful words attributed to Catherine Arrowpoint, present "duty" and "the best" for scrutiny and show them to be terms in a symbolic code that serve male privilege and dominance.

Eliot's narrative also exposes, as does Oliphant's Miss Marjoribanks, how that which is linguistically and, therefore, socially constructed takes on the guise of the natural. To rebel against duty would be actually to question cultural and social definitions, but to those who cannot see or refuse to acknowledge the political nature of language it would be seen as defying the laws of nature. The ultimate force of Eliot's deconstruction of marriage and motherhood as the "natural," as the "best" comes when her analysis expands into what Joseph Allen Boone identifies as "an indictment of the power structure of Victorian life itself" (173). This indictment starts with an exposure of male complicity but expands to include a non-gendered view of what Adrienne Rich terms "women's

own human will to power, their need to return upon the world what it has visited on them" (38). What Eliot provides is an examination of the *human* drive to have dominance over others, and it is here that we find unmistakable evidence of a brand of feminist awareness that goes beyond first- and second-tier insights.

* * * * *

Eliot's questioning of the patriarchal is focused in her depiction of Daniel Deronda and Mallinger Grandcourt, two decidedly different personalities, who reflect, Janus-like, the two faces of this system of social and political oppression and leave us with a chilling sense not only of its overt debilitating power but also of the correlative system of internalization and rationalization that keeps it masked as the natural and the right.

Just as Mirah Lapidoth is an embodiment of compliance and submissiveness, so Grandcourt is the epitome of domination and abusiveness. His motives, tactics and status advantage in the psychologically debilitating war for sexual power with his wife are presented directly and nakedly. His "strongest wish was to be completely master of this creature" (346). He gloats over the fact that his wife, "whose pride and spirit were suited to command everyone but himself," had been "brought to kneel down like a horse" (365). That his mastery over his wife is characterized in terms of breaking the spirit of an animal exposes not only the dehumanizing nature of the dominance-

submissive polarity in conventional gender relationships but also highlights more dramatically and horrifically the room for abuse that lies within the socially sanctioned institution of marriage. Once Gwendolyn has become "yoked" and in the marital harness, all Grandcourt has to do is invoke the word "married" to elicit an automatic response in the manner of Pavlov's dogs. Grandcourt's declaration that "You have married *me* and must be guided by my opinion," leaves Gwendolyn "helpless against the argument that lay in [those words]" (655). In the same way, ironically, although she is outside of marriage and thus impervious to the codes of conduct that govern husbands and wives, Lydia Glasher is able to leave Grandcourt with only "a sense of imperfect mastery."

The repeated reference to the term "mastery" in reference to marriage exposes this institution as an arena for the clash of power motives. But Grandcourt is not the only person aligned with this recurrent word. Gwendolyn, who feels "well equipped for mastery" (69), sees marriage as an arena in which "she was going to exercise her power" (344). The fact that her "illusions," which had "turned on her power of using [Grandcourt] as she liked" are shattered by his "using her as he liked" (659), is more than merely ironic. Eliot is pressing the point that while there is "a difference sometimes as to the way in which the supremacy is attainable" (344), the will to power is a raw, human drive and not just a perverse, male drive. This exposure of the human will to dominate, to which Oliphant made implicit reference in her narrative, is given

more explicit exposure in Eliot's. In the scenes in which Mallinger Grandcourt and Gwendolyn Harleth agree and prepare to marry, we can find pointed authorial directives on the drive for power that motivates this bonding:

At that moment his strongest wish was to be completely master of this creature....and she--ah piteous equality in the need to dominate--she was overcome like the thirsty one who is drawn towards the seeming water in the desert....She was thinking of him, whatever he might be, as a man over whom she was going to have indefinite power. (346-59)

Thus, while marriage may be an institution that is governed by codes that privilege and enact the male hunger for supremacy, this hunger is also known to women. By showing, through Gwendolyn's lust for power, a female will to domination, Eliot's narrative registers with some insistence the idea that the systems governing dominant-submissive relationships are a response to a fundamental human drive that resides in all humans and has the potential for negative expression, regardless of who is "in charge." The way out of destructive power relations, then, seems to reside in going beyond the privileging of one gender over the other. Thus, Eliot registers her resistance to a simple reversal of hierarchy in favor of women, and leads her reader on to a consideration of third-tier feminist concerns.

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In the depiction of Daniel Deronda we also encounter Eliot's refusal to characterize patriarchy in simplistic terms. In one way, he is offered as a strong counterpart to Grandcourt. He is as full of the milk of human kindness and

compassion as Grandcourt is of the gall of human cruelty and arrogance. He is the saviour, Grandcourt the devil. Daniel is cast in the role of "Messiah" for Gwendolyn, Hans, Mirah and Mordecai; he is their "ministering angel," "deliverer." His Christ-like qualities are repeatedly emphasized: he thought that "he should meet rather than resist any claim on him in the shape of another's need" (551); as well, he promotes the "higher, the religious life" as a way to live beyond "our own appetites and vanities" (308). While the Grandcourt portrait relies on sharp gender distinctions, in Daniel's there is often a deliberate blurring of gender categories. He is shown to incorporate both of what has been traditionally accepted as masculine and feminine traits. He possesses "an affectionateness such as we are apt to call feminine" as well as a brand of judgement and independence that were "held to be rightfully masculine" (367). The deliberate emphasis on his "feminine" nature is read by Ellen B. Rosenman as an authorial formula for the cure of patriarchy: "Deronda's temporary marginality nurtures sympathy and compassion in him and realizes the conventional Victorian hope that men could be improved by adopting some feminine virtues, a hope George Eliot shared" (252). The point is valid, but Eliot's *Deronda* is not a one-dimensional creation. To keep to the spirit of feminist enquiry that calls for us to release the "plurality" of each text (Furman 24), we need to examine Eliot's portrayal of Daniel's darker side, one that often goes without critical comment. For, while it is valid to read this

character's sympathetic, compassionate nature as a registration of the absence within patriarchy, we must also acknowledge that Eliot names other qualities of his that represent the most powerful and debilitating aspects of the system of male domination. His choice of Mirah as a wife and his ultimate position regarding Gwendolyn reveal him to be an ideologue who accepts without question or critical evaluation the hidden assumptions of a system that is, ironically, anathema to his compassionate nature.

Basic to Daniel's relationship with both Mirah and Gwendolyn is the paradigm of man as redeemer, woman as victim. Granted, he is led into this role because of his ability "to [think] himself imaginatively into the experience of others" (570), but he is, conversely, unable to think himself *out of* accepting patterns of male domination and privilege and female subordination as natural. His marriage to Mirah is presented by Eliot not so much as Rosenman views it-- "an affirmation of authority" (252)--but as a recognition of how codes of the most debilitating social contract can become internalized, even in benevolent minds.

In his role as counsellor and moral mentor for Gwendolyn, he is unaware of the sexist assumptions behind his advice that she "live to be one of the best of women" through service to others (882). He and she accept the role of repentant woman even though her only crimes were marrying for financial security and imaginatively anticipating her husband's death as an end to an

abusive relationship. Daniel cannot conceive of a role for Gwendolyn other than one of repentance. He prescribes for her a life bereft of self-assertion, self-exploration or self-actualization. Our last glimpse of Gwendolyn comes via her letter to Daniel; in it she is clothed in one man's name (Gwendolyn Grandcourt) and is clinging to another man's words, offering Daniel assurance that her sense of worth has been realized through him ("it shall be better with me because I have known you"). Her reaffirmation of his redeemer position and her dependent one is a gift to him, implies the narrator, "more precious than gold and gems" (881). The implication here is that, for Daniel, Gwendolyn's submission to his superior wisdom and morality is an acceptance of the right and the natural. She has, therefore, redeemed herself after the "rebellious" act of resisting authority and her moral duty.

In another sense, then, Grandcourt and Deronda are not contrapuntal, but two different manifestations of the same worldview. Both men advocate a position of submissiveness for Gwendolyn, one through forced domination, one through sympathetic compliance to a code that allows women to be only submissive or penitent. Grandcourt's type of domination is visible, obviously brutal and could be resisted with some justification. Because Deronda's is insidious and unrecognized by both perpetrator and victim, it is, in a way, more debilitating and more difficult to name and resist. No wonder Grandcourt is "killed off" at the end, for he symbolizes that part of a hegemonic force that

might be more easily defeated than that which masks itself as the benevolent, the right and the natural. It is interesting that Eliot has Deronda, embodiment of the "hidden" force of patriarchy, go off to be agent of an orthodox religion--one of the bastions of male privilege and authority that was to fall under feminist questioning and deconstruction in the twentieth century. Perhaps Eliot envisioned, very clearly, the next stage of feminist scrutiny.

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As with her depiction of men in this novel, so in her characterization of women, Eliot resists easy categorical thinking along gender lines. In Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920, Patricia Stubbs offers insights on the politics behind the fictional presentation of women that aid us in assessing Eliot's ability to skirt these politics and offer alternative images of women.

Stubbs begins by identifying the novel as a significant genre for the woman's movement: "It is through literature, and particularly through the novel, that the dominant images of women and their experience in our culture have been most easily and, until recently, most widely elaborated" (ix). She then continues with a lament that the novel is also characterized by a celebration of private experience and relationships that are "particularly damaging to women" in that women represented in the novel are locked into a representation resembling that of its first heroine: "Women in fiction are still 'Pamela's

daughters' and are likely to remain so until they are defined through their contacts with the 'outer' as well as their inner 'worlds'" (xv). In her examination of nineteenth-century fiction, Stubbs credits Eliot with "some degree of feminist consciousness," but she claims that Eliot does not "repudiate or, at a fundamental level even question the system of personal and sexual relations which give rise to unhappiness and frustrations" (27). An examination of Eliot's female characters in Daniel Deronda reveals both why Stubbs makes this claim as well as why such a claim can be only partially substantiated. For, while Mirah Lapidoth presents the voice and story of a morally pure, sphere-bound heroine like Richardson's Pamela, there are other female voices, other stories, that press upon our consciousness. Gwendolyn Harleth is the voice of a woman whose "unhappiness and frustrations" come from an inability to get beyond a patriarchal trap of "inner" experience, and Princess Halm Eberstein is the powerful voice of a woman who insists on her place in the outer world. Therefore, while Miss Lapidoth presents the picture of a Victorian ideal of womanhood, the portraits of the other two women manifest realities that cast large shadows over the supposed "ideal."

Mirah Lapidoth, the quintessential female Victorian victim who declares, "I set myself to obey and suffer" (255), is presented primarily in her relationship with men. She appears first as a run-away victim of her father, is rescued from suicide by a male saviour, is later caretaker of her newly

discovered brother Mordecai and exits the novel in the role of Daniel's wife and helpmate in his quest. Where she is and what she does is totally male-determined.

Mirah, however, is in some ways designed to critique what she represents. She is undoubtedly an "angel in the house," a female creature inclined towards submissiveness, selflessness and, as Daniel describes her to Gwendolyn, "full of piety and...capable of submitting to anything when it takes the form of duty" (494). Yet some two hundred pages earlier, the narrator jostled the reader's sensibilities with the force of Catherine Arrowpoint's insight that "people can easily take the sacred word duty as a name for what they desire any one else to do" (289). As a result, we cannot but read irony into Daniel's description of Mirah and see her as an example not of what was noble in women, but what was false in human conduct. Mindless submission to that which takes the "form of duty" is alarming evidence of a capitulation to a type of social mind control that almost everything else in Eliot's fiction militates against.

These images associated with Mirah also urge an ironic reading of her glorious "end" in marriage to Daniel. First, she is presented as a romantic heroine: Daniel initially sees her as a character in a "romance," a "protagonist of girl tragedies" (228), and the marriage of these two morally pure souls is said to have "crowned a romance" (881). This recourse to formulaic fiction in a text

with such a strong core of social realism demands examination. Also Mirah is aligned with the traditional, patriarchal view of woman as accessory. Jewels and jewellery figure predominantly in the symbolic representation of women's roles. The diamond necklace that Grandcourt attaches to his prize possession of the time, sets up the equation of women as commodity that reverberates when Daniel refers to Mirah as an "onyx cameo" (228). As well, the language of diminution used to characterize her signals an arrested psychological development. She is "dear child" to Ezra. Reference is made to her "little hands" clasped in a posture of supplication while she is "meekly waiting judgement" (541) or clasped in a position of adoration around Daniel's neck while she kisses him with "childlike lavishness" (643).

Imagistically, Mirah reflects the concept of woman as moral paragon; of woman as commodity, possession; of woman as childlike in her innocence and dependence; of woman as, in terms of the epigraph constructed by Eliot, a "realization of men's wishes" (132). Woman as "type," however, masks woman as individual, and Mirah Lapidoth is never presented as anything more than a symbol in a fictive pattern. She is so close to our concept of the Victorian image of ideal womanhood that she eludes the extrapolation into humanness that accompanies most reader's active engagements with characters in fiction. Furthermore, the strong identification of Mirah with stereotypes affects our reading of the actions of other characters in regard to her. Thus, in Daniel's

marriage to Mirah, we can also read his compliance with the system of dominance and subordination that governs gender relationships.

As counterpoints to this "model" woman who reflects a stereotypical view, the narrative offers two women, Gwendolyn Harleth and Princess Halm-Eberstein, who stretch the boundaries, yearn to escape and do escape the norm for Victorian women--the dependency on a male. Inscribed within their stories are ways around and beyond debilitating gender expectations as well as pitfalls inherent in any resistance to hegemonic forces. Also, in the debilitating circumstances of the one and the resounding words of the other, we can, once again, recognize feminist concerns that resemble those of Adrienne Rich and Kate Millet in our century.

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With Gwendolyn, Eliot chose a plot structure that was markedly different from the parallel male plot within the text and from the conventional plot of "heroines" in fiction at that time. Daniel's trajectory is characterized by the traditional signposts of conflict, rising action, climax and *dénouement*. He is hero material in that he overcomes obstacles and triumphs at the end with a proper mixture of marriage and mission. Gwendolyn's fate is not presented, overtly, as one of triumph, for she has neither mission nor marriage at the end. The lack of the former has been read by critics as a registration of the restrictions on female lives in the nineteenth century; the lack of the latter has

been read as a "subversion of the traditional authority of marriage and marriage plots" (Boone 173). I suggest that Gwendolyn's circumstances at the end of the novel can be read more positively, for within them are the "seeds" of a type of existence that Eliot presents as essential for women, and for all human beings to achieve: one that resides beyond having the male as norm.

Gwendolyn, unlike Mirah, has impulses and needs that force her beyond the range of possibilities dictated by gender. Her blanket imperative that she was "not going to do as other women did" (168) causes her to stretch imaginatively into areas in which she envisions for herself a life of autonomy. In contrast to her mother's "domestic fetters" in the "rather dreary state" of matrimony and motherhood, she imagines herself, if married, as able to enter "a gateway into power and freedom," where "she meant to rule" (69) and where everything was "to be as [she] like[d]" (350). While we are reminded that Gwendolyn's sense of a distinguished destiny comes primarily from the effects of an indulgent childhood in which "no one had disputed her power or her general superiority" (70), directives from the narrative voice draw our attention to social reality as a powerful mitigating factor:

Here is a restraint which nature and society have provided on the pursuit of striking adventure; so that a soul burning with a sense of what the universe is not and ready to take all existence as fuel, is nevertheless held captive by the ordinary wirework of social forms and does nothing particular. (83)

Gwendolyn's abortive attempts at launching herself into a career as a

singer or an actress highlight the inadequacy of the education and training available to young Victorian women. While it is Herr Klesmer who, when petitioned to assess her suitability for a professional, artistic career names Gwendolyn's lack of qualifications and preparations, we get a sense that it is Eliot who stands behind the observation that women are "held captive by the ordinary wirework of social forms." Eliot's narrative does allow Gwendolyn-- and us--some consciousness of the flaws in the upbringing and education of young Victorian women. Gwendolyn explains "rather nervously" to Grandcourt: "Women can't go on adventures, we must stay where we grow...we are brought up like flowers, to look pretty as we can and to be dull without complaining" (171). Contained within this wash of insight is evidence of Gwendolyn's greatest obstacle in that, ultimately, she never fully understands the extent of the restrictive "wirework" that props up gender roles or the degree to which she herself has internalized the norms for these roles. Her compliance, evident in the terms "can't" and "must" call to mind a similar brand of rationalization that her uncle used when he justified his insistence that she marry Grandcourt: "We must do what other people do. We must think of the nation and the public good" (290).

Gwendolyn's lack of insight into the offending matrix of both her own nature and that of society has been identified by critics as Eliot's. I suggest that Eliot's perception goes beyond her character's. Gwendolyn's desperate need to

rely upon a male authority--"you must not forsake me" she says to Daniel--is shown to be a bootless cry. Eliot arranges the narrative so that Gwendolyn is stripped of that which she thought essential to a sense of self-worth:

dependency on a male. She must now "construct" her sense of self according to a new set of criteria. What these criteria are is not overtly specified by Eliot, almost as if she deliberately left this for later writers to articulate. Eliot was not trying to write Gwendolyn into a new system; instead, she wrote her out of one that she would have to shed in order to grow. What Gwendolyn could not do for herself--free herself from debilitating male dependency--Eliot did for her. In leaving this female character's fate open for speculation, beyond the usual resolution of marriage and motherhood, Eliot is implying that there is a place for women outside of these biologically determined roles.

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In turn, it is through the words and story of Princess Halm-Eberstein, Daniel's mother, that the narrative gives some form to the empty space into which Gwendolyn is propelled. The Princess offers the strongest indictment of the strictures on female experience and the most powerful endorsement for woman's place in the world of outer experience. As readers, we experience a collapse of distance between the textual and empirical worlds, between character and narrative comment, when this woman moves from background to centre stage of the narrative to give her powerful, unmediated discourse. Critics who

identify "lukewarm feminism" in Eliot's texts must have skipped Daniel's encounter with his mother. Her declarations are rendered in a straightforward non-ironic fashion, and it is difficult not to hear the naked voice of Mary Ann Evans, the iconoclast, resounding in her words. It is also as if this character is the embodied voice of all those absent mothers from Victorian fiction, thundering out rage, injury and a heated condemnation of patriarchal oppression and silencing.

Announcing herself in a letter to Daniel as his "unknown mother," she summons him to Italy to receive articles from his grandfather's life and, thereby, to receive his religious and cultural inheritance. The meeting of mother and son results in the shattering of a "sacred image" for Daniel, for the Princess is unrepentant at palming him off on Sir Hugo, and she also remains at a "royal" distance throughout the whole encounter. She rejects motherhood as an enforced institution: "I did not feel about you...as other women say they feel about their children"; she dismisses the rhetoric of the Jewish faith as "a thunder without meaning in [her] ear"; she cuts to the heart of sexual domination: "Men would rule the world if they could; but not ruling the world, they throw all the weight of their will on the necks and souls of women"; she names the restraint on a woman: "her happiness is to be made as cakes are, by a fixed recipe"; and finally she utters the ultimate defense against socially constructed roles: "My nature gave me a charter" (693, 694, 728). Thus, the

Princess can be viewed as a testimony to the specificity and difference of women that lie outside and "beyond" the stereotype. Just as Mirah is the embodiment of "men's taste" for what woman should be (132), the Princess is the embodiment of the rejection of that formula. In one of the symbolic exchanges of jewellery with which this text is replete, the Princess, in an uncharacteristic gesture of warmth, sends a tiny portrait of herself to Mirah, via Daniel. Her picture (reality, identity) is symbolically joined to the traditional representation of "ideal womanhood," and as a result a fundamental stereotype of the feminine is unmasked.

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Was the creator of these female characters, then, aware of the societal restrictions on and subordination of women? Any answer other than "yes" would crumble beneath the pathos of Mirah's compliant submissiveness, the sense of waste inherent in Gwendolyn's ambitious desires and the blast of injustice and rage issuing forth from the Princess Halm-Eberstein. And yet, there is no critical consensus on the degree of Eliot's feminist sympathies. The reason may well be that despite the obvious indictment of a social contract that supports male dominance and requires female subordination, Eliot's narrative provides no record of her characters living beyond restriction and rage or compliance and blindness. As I see it, however, Eliot had a very specific purpose for not doing so.

In one of the naked interjections of the narrative voice in Daniel Deronda, the reader is cautioned, "But beware of arriving at conclusions without comparisons" (71). This is a strategically placed directive, because both structurally and thematically the whole text militates against "conclusions" that are fixed and closed by initiating a continuous play of patterns, voices and impressions that urge us on to comparisons, to other considerations. This strategy emerges in the first scene of the narrative and offers us a way into reading this complex novel, as well as a way out of some debilitating modes of reading the world.

Continually, the narrative moves from a consideration of a trait or reaction of one of the characters to the human impulses that lie behind. Thus, the focus of the critique is directed beyond individuals to patterns of perceiving and knowing. This method of presenting ongoing comparisons is first used to explore what we in the twentieth century term the "male gaze." The text opens with Gwendolyn being constructed through the eyes of a male observer. Daniel Deronda's gaze not only brings her to view but also dictates the parameters for perception--beauty and morality: "Was she beautiful or not beautiful...was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams?" (35) The temptation for a critic hunting for the sins and errors of patriarchy would be to stop here, with evidence of the social construction of woman. Eliot, however, does not stop here. She has Gwendolyn turn "resolutely," look at Daniel and assess him as

"young, handsome, and distinguished in appearance." Next, as if to press the reader further, the narrative voice focuses beyond gender by emphasizing what can be read as a basic human response to being eyed critically: "When any of Vanity's large family, male or female, find their performance received coldly, they are apt to believe that a little more of it will win over the unaccountable dissident" (40). Finally, in a move that seems calculated to arrest the reader's focus in a particular spot, the narrator gives evidence of the human impulse to gaze at and to judge others. After the comment that "Gwendolyn was much observed by the seated groups," Eliot's narrative includes a full page of random observations on both characters from people whose sex is not known. We have gone from a gender-specific construct to the human impulse that lies behind--a movement that is ubiquitous in Daniel Deronda.

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This pattern of offering an alternative view with which we can make comparisons is evident not only in the initial scene between Gwendolyn and Daniel, but throughout the development of their plots and the development of the themes of the Jewish and the dominant British cultures. Moreover, by virtue of the fact that these narrative elements are presented in parallel fashion, comparisons are explicitly invited, which calls into question readings of the novel as a privileging of one culture over the other.

After the publication of Daniel Deronda in 1876, there was a response in

The Tablet lamenting that the author committed a "literary error" when "she makes Deronda abandon, on learning the fact of his Jewish birth, all that a modern English education weaves of Christianity and the result of Christianity into an English gentleman's life" (ctd. in Hardy, "Introduction" 14). Evident in this response is an overt expectation that art should reinforce the predominant ideologies of the day. An English education, Christian instruction and the "superior" status of all things that reflected both were the ideological norms. And, of course, behind any norm is an assumption of centrality and an impulse to marginalize that which is "the other." Eliot appears to have wanted to challenge the British/Christian assumption of centrality and to resist the marginalization and pejorative assessment of the Jewish culture. Because her correspondence gives evidence of her personal sympathies for the Jewish culture, critics like Hardy have argued that these feelings have been magnified in Daniel Deronda, in that "the portrayal of Jewish society is entirely approving" and "the whole English social scene is satirized." Thus, Hardy faults Eliot for her "anti-English bias" and her "simplified and idealized" Jewish characters ("Introduction"16).

To assume such a one-to-one relationship between the textual world and the author's empirical world or the author's personal biases and her artistic vision is a type of comparison that is at odds with what Eliot seems to recommend. More specifically, in playing one voice off others, this narrative

has built into it a strong resistance to our seeing a "Jewish bias" or reading it as a mere satire on and replacement for a British bias. Daniel's mother, Princess Halm-Eberstein, a Jew in self-imposed exile from her heritage, offers the criticism necessary to keep all things Jewish from replacing all things British/Christian as the standard, the norm, the superior. She is the decentering vehicle for anything that seems to have a favoured bias. Significantly, Hardy's analysis of Eliot's handling of the "Jewish problem" ("Introduction"10) ends with an exposure of her use of idealized schematic characters in which the Princess is not ever mentioned and in which the conclusions are made without recourse to comparison.

If we take note of what is being presented regarding the Princess's experience with the Jewish heritage, we can identify a different and a more selective narrative endorsement of the "Jewish factor." The Princess's indictment of the Jewish culture offers an antidote to what the critics note as idealization in the stories of Mirah, Mordecai, Ezra and Daniel. What Princess Halm-Eberstein rebels against are the patriarchal dictates regarding her duties as prescribed by Jewish law. She explains to Daniel that her father, Daniel Charise, thought of his daughter only as "an instrument" to enact religious law. Her individual talents, her artistic ambitions were "nothing to him; he meant that I should obey his will." Her experience of being a Jewish woman was "a fettering into obedience," and Mr. Charise's insistent claims of the religious

destiny of his people was "a thunder without meaning in [her] ear" (696).

These words of one who was expected to be part of the Zionist mission serve to temper the endorsement of this cause and put under erasure the universal privileging of any "cause" other than the most fundamental human one that can genuinely offer what Eliot called the "promise of a better after which we may strive" (qtd. in Hardy, "Introduction" 30). As well, this placement of an "alien" theme alongside a "familiar" one leads us to an examination of the constitution of the alien, the other, and to an examination of the "spirit" that fuels the resistance to any departure from conventions.

In a final authorial emphasis on other considerations in this textual pattern, the Princess is revealed to have as strong a will to dominate as her father and to be mentally committed to that which she has raged and rebelled against--the dominant-submissive mode of human relations: "I was never willingly subject to any man. Men have been subject to me" (730). What is common to all these voices, all these fictive patterns is the identification of the common impulse to coerce and rule others, or, as the narrative names it, "the hunger of the inner self for supremacy" (206). This hunger is evident in cultures, in religions, in men and in women. The ultimate object of this identification is not, then, a particular system of belief or a specifically gendered person--the identification is of a human mode of thought and action.

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Comparisons in the parallel plots of Daniel and Gwendolyn also urge the reader beyond gender-specific concerns. Eliot's narrative does not characterize the difference between people in gender-specific terms as much as she does in terms of feelings. Daniel is less a representative of men than of those who are full of "fellow-feeling"; Gwendolyn is less representative of women than she is of those egotistical people who are convinced of their "general superiority" (53). Gwendolyn's excessive self-absorption is an excellent contrast to Daniel's ease at going beyond the boundary of the self. For example, when Daniel makes his communalist observation on the wealth that lies outside the self--"I can bear to think my own music not good for much, but the world would be more dismal if I thought music itself not good for much. Excellence encourages one about life generally; it shows the spiritual wealth of the world"--Gwendolyn reacts in a characteristically emotionally myopic fashion: "But then if we can't imagine it?--it only makes our own life seem the tamer," said Gwendolyn in a mood to resent encouragement founded on her own insignificance." Deronda then responds with an insight that is fundamental to the narrative: "That depends on the point of view....We should have a poor life of it if we were reduced for all our pleasure to our own performances" (491).

The force of the critique here is aimed at the human tendency to be closed to any point of view that does not accord with personal expediency or ego protectiveness. Gwendolyn's actions and thoughts up to this point and her

words here reveal her as a quintessential egoist. In using Daniel as a comparison, the narrative offers the reader an example of an alternative to excessive human selfishness. That Daniel has interests in "the world beyond the drama of personal desires" shows a way beyond a very debilitating human propensity. Part of Gwendolyn's personal growth is her learning to incorporate Daniel's philosophies without owning him.

References to Daniel's positive sensibilities are frequent and marked with a lack of ironic distancing by the narrative voice. In this representation of Daniel as a type of consciousness, Eliot registers what is needed to go beyond a focus on stereotypes. In revealing Daniel's ability to "think himself imaginatively into the experience of others" (570), her narrative brings the "other" into central significance. This ability to have sympathetic identification with others--other people, other lives, other religions, other cultures, the other gender--allows us, according to Eliot's narrative, to enter "the world beyond the small drama of desires" (507). The impression of profound human solipsism, or the "drama" of personal desires, is magnified and underscored in the presentation of a striking tableau of Gwendolyn and friends who are dining after an archery meeting. The narrative voice breaks forth and declares: "I am not concerned to tell of the food that was eaten...being just now bound to tell a story of...a small social drama almost as little penetrated by a feeling of wider relations as if it had been a puppet show"(185-86). Eliot's reference to being

"bound" may reflect her recognition of the restrictions of social and artistic dictates; in her allusion to "a feeling of wider relations," she may also be naming her achievements despite these restrictions.

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My contention, in short, is that Daniel Deronda is a novel that demonstrates Eliot's profound insights into sexual politics as well as her refusal to rest with a gender-specific focus. Repeatedly, she explores the relations between men and women and their confinement in separate spheres as a springboard from which to launch her investigation into what lies behind any system of domination and submission. It is Eliot's ultimate focus on what she terms the "formulas for thinking" behind hierarchical, codified systems of human oppression that may justify calling Daniel Deronda "inarguably great," as well as explain why it has been viewed as "lukewarm" in feminist content. The resistance to clothing "solutions" to gender inequity in the depiction of women achieving untrammelled autonomy and self-determination calls our attention to the fact that this would only be part of the gender-fair equation, and is something that can be achieved only when human minds can go beyond the confines of gender-dictated perceptions.

In resisting gender-specific concerns as her final resting focus, Eliot does not "retreat into mystified concepts of the 'general life' and humanity," as John Goode charges (49). A "retreat" indicates a refusal to engage in an exploration

of the dynamics of sexual politics which is definitely not registered in this Eliot text. She does not go beyond the darkness of the systemic patriarchal oppression of women by going around it; she takes us through an examination of patriarchy and many of its major manifestations in the nineteenth-century to a consideration of the cultural and human assumptions and actions that are needed to prop up this system. In doing so, she constantly underscores the point that what has become a system is really a manifestation of a philosophical world view and that until the attitude is changed, the system will keep repeating itself, with only a change as to whom its victims are.

In the vision beyond gender politics that Eliot offers her readers, therefore, what one finds is not an "ambivalent" feminist, but a remarkably prescient one; her "holistic" view of her society has very much in common with Kristeva's call for "metaphysical" deconstruction. As well, we often hear "echoes" of twentieth-century feminist voices such as Adrienne Rich or Kate Millet; or, could it be that in the voices of these modern feminists we hear echoes of Mary Ann Evans? Perhaps, then, present-day feminists and scholars can read earlier writers like Eliot not only to discover how feminist consciousness has evolved, but also to learn where it should progress in the future.

Chapter IV: Margaret Drabble (The Needle's Eye and The Realms of Gold)

Margaret Drabble's works in many ways form a "bridge" between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a writer who admits that she looks to the nineteenth century for tradition and continuity and who is a self-confessed "moralist" with an "old fashioned social conscience" (Sadler 132), Drabble seems to ally herself with the form of conventional, realistic mimesis in which fiction is taken to be a recreation or representation of a knowable, fixed reality. At the same time, she displays a modern feminist consciousness in that she is equally committed to challenging the notions of both reality and literary representations as constructs that contribute to and reinforce sexual asymmetry.

Because of this "split" in Drabble's creative consciousness, critical response to her work also evidences an interesting "mix." Some critics focus on her George Eliot-like "holistic picture of society" (Moran 5), while others praise her analysis of "truths about the women similar or identical to those analyzed by de Beauvoir, Millet and Greer" (Boch 267); others try to show how the two concerns are related. Those who try to establish her as a "woman's writer" tend to focus on her first five novels, which are narrated from the perspective of female protagonists who are caught in a maze of conflicting impulses and interests in a male dominated society. Written at a time when Drabble was turning from an acting career because of parental responsibilities, starting as a writer, producing and rearing three children, and living in what

turned out to be an unsatisfactory marriage, these early novels are also viewed by critics and the author alike as semi-autobiographical. In an interview with Nancy Poland, Drabble confessed, "It's true that in my earlier novels I wrote about the situation of being a woman--being stuck with a baby...or being stuck with a marriage where you couldn't have a job" (262).

Because Drabble focuses closely on issues of female identity, these early works attract primarily a female readership for whom they provide "recognition, identification, and comforting entertainment" (Boch 265). What seems to be particularly appealing to women is that they can recognize in Drabble's portrayal of her woman characters a reflection of their own struggles for validity and equality in a male dominated society, as well as a reflection of some of their profound joys in motherhood, domestic experience, and intimacy with men. The joys of motherhood, for example, are often a central experience for her female characters and win for the author "delighted recognition" (Myer 14) from female readers who have had the same experience.

Feminist critics react to these first five books with a similar delight. Drabble is hailed as a writer who was able to show a sensitivity to female needs and female restraints "long before the women's lib movement really got going" (Myer 14). As a writer who is generous with her time for interviews and responses to critics, she also seems to inspire a sense of sisterhood with those who work with her texts. An indication of this "family feeling" is that often

there is reference to all five of her early works in any one analysis, almost as though these texts were Drabble's children, none of whom should be left out of mention.

The 1970s, however, marked a shift toward an expanded, more complex view of Drabble's work, as a result of her publication of The Needle's Eye (1972) and The Realms of Gold (1975). These works are perceived as watershed novels that mark a departure from her usual techniques and subjects. No longer limiting her perspective to an inner view of a female protagonist, Drabble includes "men, society, and civilization" (Beards 28). In The Needle's Eye there is a male as well as a female protagonist, and in The Realms of Gold there is a wide range of characters, both male and female, an expansion in setting and subject matter and a move from psychological to socio-psychological penetration. Mary Hurley Moran notes that these novels mark "a widening of the protagonists occupations and interests," which enables Drabble to examine "the various social, political, economical, and legal issues which affect and inform the existence of contemporary people" (5).

The 1970s also marked an increase in Drabble's popularity in America, partly because her insights into the conditions of modern women "caught the crest of the neofeminist wave" (Firchow 93). As Ellen Cronan Rose notes, a related reason was the endorsement and praise she received from Joyce Carol Oates, "the academically respected American novelist." In a New York Times

Book Review, Oates declared The Needle's Eye an "extraordinary" novel that would "truly change us for the better," and declared Drabble an important artist who had "taken upon herself the task, largely ignored today, of attempting the active, vital, energetic, mysterious re-creation of a set of values by which human beings can live" (ctd. in Rose, Critical Essays 1). This new emphasis on Drabble as a novelist whose philosophical and social concerns went beyond specific gender concerns was heightened by Drabble herself when, in what Rose identifies as an "extremely influential" interview with Nancy Hardin, she demonstrated that she "preferred to discuss philosophical questions apparently unrelated to gender" (Critical Essays 4).

After the publication of the two "watershed" books and Drabble's new critical acclaim as an author of broadening scope, critics directed their attention to themes and issues other than ones that were specifically female related. Some pointed to her handling of "problems of a general moral or psychological nature such as the quest for identity" (Mannheimer 24); others declared that she wrote with "perceptive insight" about "the influence of early conditioning" especially that of "the English puritan tradition" (Myer 15). In relation to those critical perspectives, Drabble is likened to Thomas Hardy in her preoccupation with the question of fatalism and free will, to George Eliot in her piercing intellectual analysis, and to Wordsworth in her positing of a philosophical mindset as compensatory for a lost vision of childhood.

Drabble's expansion of concerns and techniques have continued in her three continuous "Thatcher England" novels of the last two decades: The Radiant Way (1987), A Natural Curiosity (1989), and The Gates of Ivory (1991). In these texts she deviates from her earlier novels by including an analysis of at-home and foreign politics, an examination of psychopathology, and an international settings--all elements that win her praise as a writer of broadening scope.

Indeed, Drabble herself acknowledges that her later texts go beyond specific gender concerns and sees the change as a natural progression. In an interview with Nancy Poland she acknowledged that "one's life becomes wider as one grows older" and "books reflect one's life" (qtd. in Rose, "Critical Essays" 5). Eleanor Honig Skoller applauds the new content and hopes that it will encourage critics to turn away from what she sees as "a narrowing of the feminist purview" in which there is "an insistence...on evaluating themes and portrayals according to their usefulness (or lack of it) to the ideology of feminism" (120).

Drabble thus poses the same kind of challenge as her nineteenth-century predecessors, George Eliot and Margaret Oliphant: how to deal fairly with her general philosophical concerns while acknowledging her contribution as a woman writer to the history of feminist consciousness. Drabble criticism is replete with attempts of critics to handle this tension by aligning the two

concerns. For example, Marion Vlastos Libby registers this effort in the title of her study: "Fate and Feminism in the Novels of Margaret Drabble." Libby acknowledges that "the primary theme in Drabble's fiction is her intense preoccupation with questions of fatalism and will," but reminds us that because Drabble's central protagonist "is always a woman and the society in which she lives is always depicted accurately as deeply patriarchal and class bound, the problem of the individual's capacity of self-determination is inevitably tied to the feminist perspective" (176).

These critical attempts to applaud Drabble's wider concerns without losing sight of her feminist perspectives assure us that her voice will not be one that is neglected in the documentation of the history of feminist consciousness. They do not, however, assure us that her full contribution will be acknowledged. Considering that the "watershed novels" marked a shift in critical perspectives--in that critics focused on the "wider field" rather than the feminist subject matter--we need to consider the possibility that these novels have not been probed fully for the depth of feminist insights contained therein. In addition, while there seems to be a general consensus that Drabble offers a feminist perspective in her fiction, some feminist critics are uneasy about her reluctance to make a feminist statement that is unequivocal.

Drabble's political elusiveness has occasioned a mixed range of responses. Some critics see her attempting a balancing act in the depiction of the lives of

her female characters. According to Mary Hurley Moran, "while her novels delineate the bitterness and sense of injustice felt by many women living in a patriarchal society, they at the same time dwell on the joys of motherhood, family life and romantic love" (8). Some see her female characters' compliance with patriarchal models as a strategy for condemnation of that system. Virginia K. Beards reads "fatalistic compliance" in her characters' acceptance of their domestic or maternal roles and judges the acquiescence as a strategy of Drabble's to expose "patriarchy's pernicious conditioning of women" (27). As Moran notes, however, Beards skirts over Drabble's "very real attraction to certain traditional aspects of the female role" (8), just as Elaine Showalter feels that Drabble is "an ardent traditionalist" in that her characters experience "a kind of peace in the acknowledgement of, and submission to female limitations" (Literature 304). Even those characters who are acknowledged to be models of liberated women give rise to some critical concern; some critics feel that Drabble is reluctant to provide a radical voice of feminist resistance via these characters. For example, Moran feels that Drabble does not go far enough, for her female protagonists live outwardly liberated lives while inwardly they are still "subject to certain unliberated female attitudes"--such as continuing to long for romantic love and finding "their greatest fulfilment and sense of purpose in the maternal role" (11). As well, Ellen Cronan Rose, in her early study, The Novels of Margaret Drabble: Equivocal Figures (1980), calls on Drabble to be

more forthright with her "hidden" feminist agenda and encode in her texts "an unequivocal feminist blueprint" (129).

The term "blueprint" is a very apt one to use in reference to Drabble's fiction and is one that she uses herself. As Ellen Cronan Rose notes, in "A Woman Writer" Drabble acknowledges that novels can provide readers with "patterns or images for a possible future." She explains: "We live in an uncharted world....there are whole new patterns to create....women writers...are actively engaged in creating a new pattern, a new blueprint" (qtd. in Critical Essays 3).

In examining Drabble's blueprint, however, we must not neglect to enlarge our understanding of what can be contained in a feminist perspective: namely, new patterns for men as well as women. For, while Drabble's insistence on the equality, specificity and individuality of women is readily evident in the type of characters and situations she presents, her focus does not rest with these first- and second-tier feminist concerns. Like other present-day writers, who live in a world that has been largely altered by the social, political and legal advancements of the women's movement during the 1960s and 1970s, Drabble writes more from a consciousness of how to ensure that the gains of the women's movement stay and are accessible to all. Thus, her agenda seems to be, deliberately, to endorse the work that feminists have done to correct one brand of imbalance in historical and fictional representation but also to ensure

that it is not replaced by another.

In her powerfully insightful revisionist text, The Woman's History of the World, Rosalind Miles examines the lack of historical representation of women in a manner that can help us understand Drabble's position on this topic. Arguing that "our view of history concentrates on men only, claiming a universal validity for the actions of less than half the human race" (12), Miles begins by asserting woman's central role in the evolution of the species: the dominant X chromosome and the woman's egg, "several hundred times bigger than the sperm," carry "all the genetic messages the child will ever receive." She goes on to claim that women are the first sex, the biological norm from which males are a deviation, but that instead of acknowledging woman's role in evolution and formation of society, traditional recorded history with its fiction of impartiality has situated the male as norm. There has been a glorification of the "symbols of worshipful masculinity" for the purpose of elevating "what men most valued about themselves," and what has been ignored is "the reality of the majority of women's lives who had neither the opportunity nor the appetite for such activities" (12). As a writer of women's history, Miles sets herself the task of filling in the "historical" blanks and omissions, exposing the half-truths, of "listening to the silences and making them cry out" (13).

Drabble is also attempting to fill in the gaps by writing the stories of those who have not been documented; she focuses on the "uncharted" areas of

human existence, and sees this as the role of the novel: "to explore new territory" (qtd. in Rose, Critical Essays 9). She is aware that there have been "silences" in historical representation and states that women writers are engaged in attempts to correct this imbalance:

One of the reasons the women's novels are particularly interesting at the moment is that women are charting this ground where the rules have changed, the balance of power has shifted and women are writing about what happens next. (qtd. in Cooper-Clark 22)

Drabble contends that the history of observable life should include the "new ground" of the stories of those people who do not occupy front line or dominant positions. She sees the need for the stories of the ordinary person who isn't "doing," but is "being," and while she confesses that "she finds it easier to write about [her] own sex for fairly obvious reasons," she acknowledges that "exactly the same problems confront men" (qtd. in Cooper-Clark 20). Thus, Drabble's vision of the "uncharted" includes those gaps and silences in the history of men as well as the history of women. In patriarchy's insistence on male power, dominance and activity ("doing"), those aspects of the male that do not "fit" the image have gone, to a large extent, uncharted. In her portrayal of men in her texts, Drabble focuses on male "being," rather than on male "doing," and, thus, on the contemplative, hesitant, vulnerable aspects of men that have had scant documentation in either history or fiction. In doing so, she not only challenges history's "symbols of worshipful masculinity" but also woos

those "distant" aspects of the male psyche that have been left out of patriarchy's image of malehood. The vision that enables her, in her earlier "psychological" novels, to document the difficulties of being a woman in a society with prescriptive sex roles is thus enlarged in her subsequent sociological works and directed, as well, at the difficulties of "being a man." Moreover, while her analysis focuses very clearly on these gender-specific themes of "womanhood" and "manhood," it does not rest there, but expands to become an examination of the difficulties--and joys--of "being human" in an "uncharted world."

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Particularly fruitful for a study of Drabble's "balanced" view of the human condition are The Needle's Eye and The Realms of Gold. These two novels form a bridge between the earlier texts that deal predominantly with the inner fabric of the personal and the later ones that focus on the network of social relationships; in each work, equal attention is given to the representation of women and men. What is also particularly effective and strategic about these two texts is that in more than one instance, they jointly present a pair of characters--a female from one text and a male from another--who are so similar in philosophy, habit, and personality that they serve to blur gender distinctions and, thus, focus our attention on the limitations of these distinctions. As well, this strategy of Drabble's serves to make a literary text an open rather than a closed, self-contained construct. Readers are directed to considerations beyond

the pages of one fictional society to the pages of another and, in that way, are being encouraged to draw comparisons, test assumptions and readjust patterns as a sociologist must when studying patterns of human thought and behaviour.

The Needle's Eye is the account of an enterprising woman, Rose Vassiliou, who chooses a life of poverty by refusing to be an "heiress" to her father's fortune, and a stoic man, Simon Camish, who lives the wealthy, "successful" life mapped out for him by his ambitious mother and wife. The two protagonists meet at a party and form an instant bond as two exiles. She is attempting to live an "innocuous" but an "authentic" life cut off from the privilege and validation that comes from what was considered a normal response to wealth, marriage and kinship; he is struggling to accommodate a life of "misrepresentation" in his "normal" life as the icon of successful manhood, cut off from an authentic, self-determined existence. Rose sheds her husband Christopher, after years of rancour and turmoil, but Simon remains with his wife in a sterile, hopeless union of discontent. The narrative charts the intersection of Rose's and Simon's lives: he, a barrister, aids her in trying to deal with a vengeful ex-husband, estranged parents, three bewildered children and other consequences of giving her inheritance to an African charity and moving into a "slum" neighbourhood; she offers him a model of a life outside of the norm, one of authenticity and integrity because it is self-directed and lived "with love." Rose becomes for Simon a beacon of hope and survival, an "intimate,

redeeming, cluttered pool of light" (52), for he recognizes that "nothing that [he does] is done with any love at all" (112).

Through the stories of these two "exiles," Drabble is able to explore the costs of living within and the struggles of trying to live outside societal norms, be they traditional or modern. Both characters have to make compromises and accommodate less than ideal life situations. Rose discovers there are limits to self-direction that assert themselves through the needs and rights of others. She returns with her children to their father because "she could not bear to keep the children from him" (394). Simon learns to accept both Rose's decision and his own life, which "had its conveniences" (383). His admiration of Rose is shared by his wife when the two women meet, inadvertently, and Julia Camish, responding to Rose's affection, blossoms and merges "a little more happily in Simon's mind with the image he had once had of her" (384).

Elaine Showalter comments on the perceptible sense of desperate compromise that Drabble registers when depicting Rose's return to her husband: "A graceful resignation to feminine destiny, to the curse of Eve has come [in Drabble's texts] to seem much more masochistic and despairing" (Literature 307). While this is true, we must also note that Simon has had to make compromises of a similar fashion and cost. As was evident in Eliot's Daniel Deronda, parallel plots invite comparisons, and the similarities between Rose's fate and Simon's is designed to present a mutual theme of entrapment: a male

experiences imprisonment within marriage and the public, professional realm--supposed enclaves of male power and privilege; a woman experiences insurmountable barriers in trying to live an authentic life free from enforced compliance to either the traditionally defined duties of a daughter and wife or to the modern expectations of a liberated woman. Drabble brings into focus those aspects of her characters that are not generally accepted as the norm for their respective genders and, thus, exposes the limitations of normative thinking regarding men and women.

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In The Realms of Gold Drabble continues with her exploration of those aspects of the lives of men and women that challenge various norms. She centers this narrative on the thoughts and actions of Frances Wingate, an internationally acclaimed archeologist, a divorced mother of three, a member of a large extended family (that has a "tragic flaw"), and a lover of Karel Schmidt with whom she experiences a love that was "one of the most amazing patches of her altogether amazing life" (67). All the other characters move from background to center stage as their lives intersect with Frances's. One of the female characters who sometimes occupies center stage and reinforces the theme of entrapment that occupied so much in The Needle's Eye is Frances's cousin Janet Bird.

As counterpoint to Frances, who through luck, natural ability, and

personal determination has carved a satisfactory place for herself midst a world of conflicting obligations, Janet is an unlucky, unnatural, unmotivated wife and mother who hates her husband, despairs over her baby's vulnerability, and dreams of world catastrophe--or at least the explosion of a local gas line--to provide meaning and intensity in her life. Unlike Frances, she has no knowledge or motivation with which to carve an independent existence for herself in the public realm or to survive with any sense of joy or purpose in the domestic realm. She acts as a foil not only for Frances but also for Simon Camish from The Needle's Eye. She is like Simon in her despair over a union that is "a horrible, horrible mockery" as well as in her determined compliance to the duties and obligations of this union because it is unthinkable to "break the convention" (172).

In a reversal of the traditional paradigm of gender associations, the men in this text are characterized primarily by their emotional and domestic relationships. Karel Schmidt, Frances's lover, is characterized by his open, demonstrative love for her, his desperate unhappiness in a marriage to Joy (the irony of that name!), his excessive personal concern for his students, and by the fact that he is a man who is "without vanity" (63) and with "no hatred in him" (354). Karel is a male counterpart to Rose Vassiliou from The Needle's Eye in his experience with an abusive marriage relationship and because of his empathetic response to others' needs. In descriptions that are remarkably

similar, Drabble describes these two characters as ones who are constantly at the mercy of needy souls who use up their time, energy and resources. Rose declares: "I do the right things most of the time, but it's not because I really want to you know, it's just because I don't know how to say no" (177). In a similar manner, Karel muses on his own traits: "He [was] forced to see himself in the light of common day: weak, overidentifying with the unlovely, unable to say no"(95). Thus Drabble resists the traditional alignment of woman with nurturance and men with emotional distance. She offers these two people, male and female, as compassionate human beings, in contrast to "mean people" who "broadcast around by secret messages that it's no good asking them to do things" (The Needle's Eye 177).

Karel shares center stage for males with Stephen Ollerenshaw, nephew to Frances, father to a baby daughter, and inheritor of the Ollerenshaw family's tragic flaws of psychosis and suicidal tendencies. Stephen acts as an "internal" male counterpart to Janet Bird in his despair over seeing the sum total of human vulnerability heaped on his baby daughter's head. While Janet survives her despair and plods on in a "self-contained, dry" manner (357), Stephen gives in to despair and perishes, a fact that is indicative of Drabble's recognition of the fortitude needed to survive as a prime caregiver of young children. Stephen's characterization belies the notion that what is termed the "maternal instinct" lies only in female breasts, and his inability to survive attests to the inadequate

socialization of men to accommodate their parental roles and feelings. As well, by situating "tendencies" as that which is psychologically and genetically determined, Drabble deemphasizes the identification of traits according to gender.

Thus, the basic plots of these two novels in themselves provide patterns of internal and intertextual male and female "parallels" that serve to emphasize shared rather than oppositional realities. Nor is this interaction merely structural; it is pervasive throughout the presentation of these two fictional societies. If we turn now to an examination of Drabble's handling of the construction of gendered identity, of marriage and related conventions, and of the distinction between public/private and culture/nature, we can see how consistently her feminist perspective includes a consideration of manhood as well as womanhood and rests ultimately on what it means to be human.

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Drabble's concern with gender balance involves a questioning of the framework that supports traditional norms. Because she employs what might be called a "sociological perspective," a helpful context for understanding her strategies can be found in Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality (1981), a collection of essays edited by Sherry Ortner and Harriot Whitehead. In their introduction, Ortner and Whitehead explain that the purpose of the collection is to deconstruct the "long held" assumption "that

male and female are predominantly natural objects," and to advance instead "a radically different" premise:

that natural features of gender, and natural processes of sex and reproduction, furnish only a suggestive and ambiguous backdrop to the cultural organizations of gender and sexuality. What gender is, what men and women are, what sorts of relations do or should obtain between them--all of these notions do not simply reflect or elaborate upon biological "givens" but are largely products of social and cultural processes. The very emphasis on the biological factor *within* different cultural traditions is variable; some cultures claim that male-female differences are almost entirely biologically grounded, whereas others give biological differences, or supposed biological differences, very little emphasis. (1)

Ortner and Whitehead acknowledge that Margaret Mead, of course, argued these points over 50 years ago, but they claim that their study fills a gap in that it also provides an identification of the cultural and social processes "to which culturally variable sex and gender notions might be related." They hope to correct the "naturalistic bias" by focussing on gender and sexuality as symbols "invested with meaning by the society in question, as all symbols are" (1).

In determining which are the cultural and social processes that relate to notions of sex and gender, these sociologists identify a number of key components. First, they note that the differences between men and women are conceptualized in terms of sets of binary oppositions. There are, moreover, certain oppositions that appear frequently in gender ideology cross-culturally, and one of these is the opposition of culture/nature. In an earlier 1972 article, Ortner argued that "there is a universal tendency in cultural thought to align

male with culture and to see female as closer to nature" ("Gender and Sexuality" 7). Expanding from Ortner's theory, the sociologists in the Ortner and Whitehead collection identify other binary oppositions that are related to the culture/nature split. One of these is self interest vs social good. The editors explain this opposition: "Nearly universally men control the 'public domain' where universalistic interests are expressed and managed, and nearly universally, women are located in or confined to the domestic domain charged with the welfare of their own families" (7). What this means, in turn, is that the sphere of social activity predominantly associated with the males encompasses the sphere predominantly associated with females and is, for that reason, culturally accorded higher value" (8).

Ortner and Whitehead further note that in keeping with this hierarchial ordering of the binaries associated with men and women, men are defined in terms of status and role categories ("warrior," "hunter," "statesman," "elder") that have little to do with men's relationship with women. In contrast, women, tend to be defined almost entirely in relational terms--typically in terms pertaining to kin roles ("wife," "mother," "sister") that center upon women's relationship to men (9). The area of kinship and marriage is thus "one of the most important contexts within which gender ideology is produced and reproduced" (10), especially because the dynamics of marriage and kinship relations are encompassed by prestige (status) concerns:

Prestige structures are always supported by, indeed they seem as direct expressions of, definite beliefs and symbolic associations that make sensible and compelling the ordering of human relations into deference and condescension, respect and disregard, and in many cases command and obedience. These beliefs and symbolic associations may be looked at as a legitimating ideology. (14)

This collection by Ortner and Whitehead encourages the reader to identify those areas of social life that are particularly critical in shaping culture notions of gender in order to think critically about the "legitimizing ideology" that, for too long, remained unquestioned.

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The view of gender as a social construct is a given for a modern writer such as Drabble in a way that it was not for Eliot and Oliphant who had to resist the legitimating ideology of the biological determinism of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Drabble, however, is also aware that while for many (herself in particular) the intellectual acquiescence to traditional paradigms of gender construction may no longer persist, what remains are modes of living and thinking that have been conditioned by these belief systems. Thus, she starts from a position of positing the notion of gendered identity as social construction. She associates biological functioning with those aspects of humans that they share with animals--reproduction and adaption to the environment--and establishes reproductive roles as the source of the greatest difference between the male and female of the species. By implication, then,

she seems to be attributing other gender differences to that which Ortner and Whitehead term "products of social and cultural processes." By taking the stand that male and female differences have a basic but minimal grounding in biology, she provides a philosophical backdrop for her exploration of those "metaphorical associated binary appositions" (Ortner and Whitehead 1) that dictate how men and women are conceptualized.

Drabble's analysis of the biological component of gender identity is most dramatically shown in the opening scenes of The Realms of Gold with the image of the male and female octopus. Frances Wingate views an octopus in a research laboratory and goes on to speculate on its survival out of its natural habitat: "The octopus, intelligent creature that he was, could survive in a perspex box. Though why he bothered who could say." She then turns her thoughts to the female octopus who "died, invariably, after giving birth" (12). The identification of the female with biological functioning and the male with intelligence and the ability to have control over his environment is first presented in animal imagery, as if to test the adequacy of these simplistic categorizations for humans. While Drabble implies that humans, as animals, have been programmed (Frances muses, "It had been interesting, the experience of being programmed for maternity" [13]), she points explicitly to the fact that human destiny is beyond biological determinism. Frances is described as a woman who has had children but who has stopped before her biological time

has run out, proving to herself that she was "unlike the octopus." Moreover, equally unlike the octopus, Frances has continued to live beyond a time of biological productivity, a fact that the narrator notes with an ironic aside: "She seemed resolved on a course of defying nature" (13). In a like manner and with a similar tone, the image of the male of the species as chief enactor with the environment is dispelled by the overt assertion that Frances "did seem to have amazing powers of survival and adaption" (21), thus showing alignments other than male with culture and female with nature.

The suggestion that the theory of biological determinism is more suited to animals than humans is repeated in the imagery related to Frances's cousin Janet Bird. As her name suggests, she is a creature who needs freedom and space in which to soar, but as her circumstances show, she is more like a bird with clipped wings. She is stranded in a marriage that is "a horrible, horrible mockery" (176), numbly tending to her duties as a mother with "something approaching anguish" (138) and her duties as a sex partner with a determination to "grit one's teeth and bear it" (176). She tends to think of herself as "norm" in Tockley, the small village in which she lives, and, as if to give credence to this view, Drabble characterizes Janet's female neighbour in a similar manner. Jean Cooper, with an equally suggestive name, is viewed by Janet with enormous fear and pity: "Like a sad white bird, like the stranded sea gulls that sometimes swooped and mewed, far from the sea, in the elms, Jean Cooper

fluttered and swooped in her suburban garden, watched by Janet Bird" (154). Janet experiences a mixture of "fear and pity" because in Jean she recognizes her own fate: "She was an awful warning, poor Jean Cooper of what Janet herself so nearly was--timid, nervous, gauche, sad, and unfinished" (152). The term "unfinished" suggests lost areas of development and registers the limitations of having biological function dictate totally the circumstances of a woman's life. In this recognition that assumptions of biological determinism lie behind traditional notions of the roles of women, Drabble points to the individuality and specificity of women and, thus, displays a second-tier brand of feminist consciousness. She also provides a starting point for her deconstruction of the notion that the oppositional roles of men and women are rooted in a fundamental natural or biological difference--an indication of a third-tier brand of feminist awareness.

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In Volume I of No Man's Land, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim that in literature from the mid-Victorian period to the present, we have the record of a sexual battle: "both male and female writers increasingly represented women's unprecedented invasion of the public sphere as a battle of the sexes, a battle over a zone that could only be defined as a no man's land" (4). They claim that different literary periods reflect the plot of sexual struggle in different ways:

Mid-Victorian writers of both sexes tended to dramatize a defeat of the female, while turn-of-the century authors began to envision the possibility of woman's triumph....At the height of the modernist era, however, both sexes by and large agreed that women were winning, while post-modernist male and female writers, working in the 1940s and 1950s reimagined masculine victory. Finally, contemporary artists, influenced by the second wave of feminism began again to conceive of triumph. Whichever side they championed, though, all these writers evinced a militant urgency that made their texts especially compelling. (4-5)

Gilbert and Gubar's thesis, like any totalizing theory, does not account for all contemporary artists, and Margaret Drabble in particular cannot be contained by this win-lose paradigm because she resists the binary oppositional modes of thought that are necessary for conceiving of the relationship between the sexes as a battle for power. This is not to say that Drabble avoids human conflicts and power politics, for her fictions are full of human strife and torment, but these struggles are not envisioned strictly along gender lines, and there is something close to a deliberate avoidance of siding with one sex over the other.

In The Needle's Eye and The Realms of Gold there are only a few references to power that have implicit in them the male/dominant-female/submissive paradigm. At an archaeologist conference, Frances's Italian colleague Galletti is described as not wanting to "take her seriously or talk to her about work because he couldn't believe in her because she was a woman" (40). In another instance, Frances makes reference to her first husband: "he was a cold man with a violent temper, and she was frightened of him, but she was not easily intimidated, she refused to submit" (22). These references to the

dominant position and attitude of the male are exceptions to Drabble's usual practise and occur almost as though they are acknowledgements of something she wants to discredit. For, with issue after issue she leads her readers to a space beyond blaming, to a consideration of how to envision women and men other than as representatives of good or evil in an endless war. Even in her treatment of violence, Drabble shows a resistance to laying all the blame on one sex.

In Drabble's fiction, marital violence appears as common as tea after dinner. In The Needle's Eye, Rose Vassiliou comments on divorce cases in court having "the usual complaints of physical violence" (77), and, as if to support this observation, Drabble writes of wedded relationships that are punctuated, if not characterized by brutality. She also, we can note, shows both partners to be equally adept at hurling, smashing, beating and pounding. Frances and Anthony in The Realms of Gold are locked in "the misery of marital violence" and would both "shout and throw things at one another at night" (231). Karel and his wife Joy, who "wanted to be knocked about," engage in a ritual as brutal as it is senseless: Joy "amused herself by inventing all kinds of degrading explanations for his social habits," which would eventually enrage him. He would then "beat her up," a result that would give her "a peculiar satisfaction" (96). The violence from this union spills over to Frances in her role as the other woman. She and Joy have a wild physical

scuffle over their mutual man, in which Frances ends up with blood running down the side of her face and, as if in a symbolic resistance to the usual conjunction of women and poetry, she suffers the indignity of having Joy beat her over the head with the Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse (75). In The Needle's Eye, Rose and her husband Christopher reached "a point beyond any hope of repair" in their physical fights. In one of her fits of rage she had "flung the smaller of two children down the stairs at him"; Christopher's response to these fits of Rose's was to marshal defenses that become "violent out of all proportion" (93).

Even in the most positively depicted marriage, that of Hugh and Natasha Ollerenshaw, there are spots of violence. Although Frances feels that "everything Natasha did was real and perfect" (89), we are also told that Hugh had once "thrown a tea pot at Natasha, for suggesting that he mind his own business. She had to have stitches" (199). When a marriage depicted by Drabble is free of physical violence, other debilitating patterns are there to take its place. Sometimes the urge is just below the surface: Janet envisions "stick[ing] a knife" in her husband one day (143). Sometimes, as with the union of Simon and Julia in The Needle's Eye, a type of psychological destruction moves in to take its place. In one scene Simon sits passively while his wife hurls verbal abuse at him. He wonders:

if it would have been better, once, to greet these attacks with counter-

attacks to shout back, to deal blow for blow. It was impossible now to do such a thing, though it might have been possible; but he had taken the line of no resistance, afraid to lose his temper, afraid to destroy her by losing his temper. That it seemed, now, as though he had destroyed her by keeping his temper was an irony that he had not foreseen. (191)

Accommodating Drabble's handling of marital violence in these two texts can pose a problem. Those of us who recognize the disproportionate amount and epidemic nature of the physical abuse of women within marriage would resist the trivialization of this abuse that passing it off as the "usual" would imply. Nor is it sufficient to defend Drabble by invoking the notion of mutuality: that is, that her women are abusive too. We need to understand Drabble's "balanced" representation of both men and women as perpetrators and victims of violence as something other than an adoption of these deflectionary tactics.

One way of understanding Drabble's concern with domestic violence is to consider the way she locates it in the context of oppositional thinking in general. Drabble filters this mode of perception through Rose Vassiliou's thoughts about "the confrontation" between married people that cause them to end up in divorce courts:

The decisions of judges, even when in her favor, were irrelevant: they chalked up no victory. The confrontation (ah, this was it) could not end in victory, because it was a fight in which there was no winning. Some other resolution would have to be made, in which victory and defeat played no part, in which the boundaries did not enclose the spoils of war, and were not drawn by neutral external treaty and convention. She did not see how it could be done, she despaired at the thought of it, she knew

herself incapable of voluntary and true concessions, incapable of sitting calmly at the table, incapable of ceding a square inch of her land, and yet it consoled her, that there could be no other way. (199-200)

The human commitment to a win-lose paradigm and the accompanying impulse to refuse to concede "one square inch" are shared realities of both sexes. The recognition that everyone has to go beyond these oppositional modes of thought in order to uproot violence is a "first step" that Drabble holds out as more productive than laying blame on men alone. The fact that there are people like Rose--those who recognize that there "could be no other way" than compromise to avoid violent confrontation between people--is a hopeful note in Drabble's analysis. The realization that there are also many people who, like Rose, know they are "incapable of voluntary and true concessions" is an aspect of Drabble's realism in that it shows her understanding of human limitations.

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Another way that Drabble attempts to go beyond gender is by exploring the extent to which social institutions generate human strife. She makes her stance explicit in an interview when she explains to Diane Cooper-Clark:

There's no use pretending that marriage is in a good state or that relations between the sexes are happy....It's no good blaming men....Both sexes are at fault. And the institution of marriage itself is at fault. This is one of the things that novels can explore without any preconceived ideas as to what the answers should be. (21)

One would not, however, need this direct statement in order to gain this insight, for such a view is evident, almost to the point of overstatement, in Drabble's

representation of the institution of marriage as a hideous entrapment for many--most--human beings.

Drabble's characters get channeled into this socially sanctioned mode of living because of a mindless acquiescence to social convention, an enforced response to other's expectations, or the perverse ability of humans to repeat dysfunctional patterns. The image of family as an enclave of repeated cycles of destructive behaviour and relationships is presented repeatedly in these narratives. Simon Camish reflects on his marriage to Julia: "he had been attracted to her because his life with his mother was so appalling, and she to him because he was the only possible escape from her father" (72). Rose Vassiliou marries in defiance of a materialistic, oppressive father who "disowned and disinherited her, as thoroughly as he could" (76) but then she acquires a materialistic, oppressive husband from whom she received "physical violence...abusive language, violent and unreasonable demands, incessant and unmotivated jealousy" (77). In The Realms of Gold, Janet Bird's desperate attempt to remember why she "had ever got married" results in her speculation, "was it because she couldn't think of any other way of getting away from her mother?" (129). Frances too is troubled by the ghost of family connections: "And one day, in a moment of comic horror, it had occurred to her that in seeking to avoid her mother's ghost, she had in fact behaved exactly like her mother" (85). Frances's brother Hugh, who coped with life "with excessive

quantities of drink" (200), had "escaped his mother and his heritage at some cost to his liver" (88).

Once again, Drabble is offering an examination of heredity and determinism that goes beyond biological and gender-related concerns. People, she seems to be saying, can "inherit" dysfunctional patterns, and even when obviously trying to "disinherit" themselves they can fall into other patterns equally as destructive. Thus, a large part of what "determines" patterns in human lives is exposed by Drabble to be psychological mindsets that can reside in females and males alike.

Indeed, the most depressing analyses of marriage as entrapment is contained within the "parallel" stories of Simon Camish of The Needle's Eye and Janet Bird of The Realms of Gold. The descriptions of the despair felt by these two people are so similar in language, tone and imagery that it would be hard to read one without being reminded of the other--and thus hard to see marriage as a potential prison only for women. Both these characters fall into the state of wedlock by default. Janet Bird experiences the social convention of marriage as a conspiracy: "There was some conspiracy afoot, to make people believe that marriage was necessary and desirable and nobody seemed at all concerned to justify it, as though it needed no justification" (129). Working with this Levi-Straussian idea of the exchange of women in marriage transactions as basic to human society, Drabble filters her critique of the system

though Janet's perceptions of woman as sacrificial commodity:

There is some tribal insanity that comes over women as they approach marriage: society offers pyrex dishes and silver teaspoons as bribes, bargains, as anaesthesia against self-sacrifice. Stuck about with silver forks and new carving knives, as in a form of acupuncture, the woman lays herself upon the altar, upon the couch, half numb." (130)

While Janet succumbs to the weight of societal pressure and form, Simon has also been sacrificed--only for him it has been on the altar of his mother's neurosis:

He thought back to his childhood--to his disabled father, to his driving neurotic, refined mother who had worked so hard for him, who had insisted so on his rights, who had pushed him and pushed him to where he now was, through Junior School and Direct Grant Grammar School and through Oxford and on, whether he liked it or not, to the Bar. He had done it for her. He had hated her for so many years, that he had had to do it for her. The two major decisions of his life, his career and his marriage had both been made through default, through guilt, through a desire to appease and placate, brought on by a lack of spontaneous love. (131)

In these parallel passages, Drabble dislodges the association of marriage with the "natural," for both women and men. First, Janet's musings on her desperate circumstances leads the reader to a consideration of the part authority figures play in endorsing this system of socially constructed sacrifice:

Vicars and doctors were all the same, they told one it was natural to suffer from headaches and misery at puberty, to dread marriage, to feel ill and get cystitis when newly married, to dread pregnancy and feel ill and cry a lot with post-natal depression. It was all so natural. (132)

The question that occurs to Janet after these musings is one fundamental to Drabble's philosophical probing, "But why, why was it so natural?" (133)

Simon Camish has a similar insight on how far from "natural" married life can be. His musings on his failed union lead him to wonder:

There must have been, there might have been a right life for them, a possible life, which might have embodied a little warmth and beauty; a natural life for them, for people, to which it would not have been a mockery to aspire....Oh Christ, it was exhausting, this living on the will, this denial of nature, this unnatural distortion." (187-88)

Finally the imagery associated with these two characters reinforces the mutuality of their experiences. The image of a married person as a caged bird that is implied by the name Janet Bird is given explicit emphasis in the description of Simon Camish's experience with marriage:

And his spirit would struggle freely within the net that held it, and he would imagine some pure evasion, some massive rent through which he would emerge. But there was no action possible that would not involve destruction, violence, treachery, of those to whom he had pledged himself...He was caught. And his spirit would hunch its feathered bony shoulders and grip its branch and fold itself up and shrink within itself, until it could no longer brush against the net, until it could no longer entangle itself painfully, in the surrounding circumstantial mesh. (140)

Drabble's characters, both women and men, are shown not only to experience a state of marital misery but also to be psychologically astute about their marital circumstances and how they came to them. Moreover, in contrast to the situation in Oliphant's and Eliot's nineteenth-century fiction, parents are not all represented as unaware of the part they play in consigning their children to what can be experienced as a "horrible, horrible mockery." Janet Bird's mother is shown agonizing over her daughter's entrapment: "Marriage, what a

business it was. Why didn't one drag one's daughter back from the altar instead of pushing them [sic] up the aisle?....It was a cold bed that Janet lay on." While Janet's mother has an awareness of her role in promoting that which has been destructive for her daughter, she is still bound by the dictates of social convention, for she abides by one of the aphorisms that endorses the marriage contract: "And now it was too late. Never interfere between husband and wife" (151). Drabble's fictional society is peopled with those who, like Janet's mother, have lost faith in the institution of marriage but are caught by the net of obligations that accompany it.

The difficulty of trying to break free from the network of needs and responsibilities that accompany marriage is dramatized in the circumstances of Rose Vassiliou. Her efforts to live free of the bonds of marriage are valiant but abortive because her needs are superseded by those of her children. For while Drabble shows people quite capable of finding satisfaction outside of social institutions, she does not show them as able to sever the lines of duties and obligations that come from commitments to dependent children. If we go back to the insights of Ortner and Whitehead, we can read Drabble's critique of marriage as a critique of an area in social life that has been particularly critical in shaping "and in turn being shaped by" cultural notions of gender. Many of her characters have fallen into marriage because of unconscious compliance to traditional patterns of gender relations, not because of belief in the rightness of

these patterns or because of a well-thought-out, free choice.

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At the same time that she is critical of marriage, however, Drabble lives up to her commitment to the novel as a form for exploring relationships without prescribing what form they should take. The closest she comes to a formula for satisfaction within any style of life is the advocacy of freedom and loving regard as being essential components of human commitment. Frances and Karel of The Realms of Gold provide an example of two people who embrace marriage as their preferred choice of lifestyles. Their loving respect for each other is the content that gives the form meaning, and the fact that they have chosen freely to marry, aside from family or societal coercion, establishes their action as one of those of which Drabble approves, because it is done "with love" (112).

Thus, Drabble offers her readers a critique of the institution of marriage as a form of societal or family coercion and control, but she also offers a vision of what it can be, when people enter into it freely, willingly and with the desire publically to declare the "wedding" of two souls. Drabble is, therefore, not hesitant to depict women as being in need of intimate relationships and, sometimes, in need of the form of marriage to declare their having found the satisfaction of this need. When Mary Hurley Moran identifies Drabble's focus on "romantic love" as an endorsement of "certain unliberated female attitudes"

(7, 11), she seems to have overlooked the way that Drabble might be demonstrating a positive feminist resistance to being locked into categorical absolutes. Moreover, Drabble offers evidence that the need for the intimate other is a shared human need that motivates both men and women.

In The Realms of Gold a scene that particularly dramatizes the way that love and marriage can go together occurs when Frances and Karel share a sandwich:

They looked down at the two halves [of the sandwich] on the plate, each with large bites taken out of the soft white bread, lying together. Both had taken identical bite-sized pieces. "I enjoyed deciding to buy this sandwich," said Karel. "And now I'm going to enjoy eating it." And hearing him speak, [Frances] shivered slightly as though a moment of intense joy had come to its proper completion, and it occurred to her that she had never been as happy in her life as she was there....with two half-eaten sandwiches in front of her, signifying union....Of such things did life consist. (71)

The fact that Frances and Karel are unmarried at this time of intense consciousness of connection and the insistence that something as mundane as two half-eaten sandwiches can "signify union" indicates Drabble's feeling that intense relationships are possible outside of marriage, but the fact that Frances and Karel later do get married attests to her refusal to reject the institution completely.

In her fiction Drabble is committed to ordering the lives of her characters according to what suits their natures. For example, Frances declares at the time of her settling into married life with Karel in Eel cottage, "it may not be

paradise, but it suits me" (357). Thus she depicts women and men like Simon and Rose who are numb with agony inside married unions that are a "mockery" of what a "union" should be; but she also writes of Frances's and Karel's joyful embracing of marriage as a formal extension of their love. In this way, Drabble is indicating that the second-tier feminist insistence on the specificity of people be expanded to include men as well as women. Simon Camish and Janet Bird do not suit the married unions they had been coerced into entering; Karel Schmidt and Frances Wingate "suit" their marriage because they have entered it with freedom and loving regard. Drabble seems to imply that marriage as a choice can be fulfilling, and that it becomes a "horrendous mockery" when it is seen as the only form for adult love relationships and when social pressures force the continuation of a failed union.

* * * * *

Drabble's resistance to representing men and women as oppositional entities is also reflected in her handling of the public and private aspects of her characters' lives. First, she rejects the traditional alignments of the public and private realms of human activity with males and females respectively. As well, she blurs the distinct separation of the two spheres by emphasizing the personal and domestic details of the lives of both her professional and at-home characters. Through the use of this strategy, Drabble is able to undermine or deconstruct the notion that the public realm should be, in Ortner and

Whitehead's terms, "culturally accorded higher value." Nor does she valorize the domestic realm. With this as with all other gender-related issues, Drabble makes sure that she does not simply reverse the binaries.

Drabble highlights a variety of responses to the domestic and public demands of life that show no clear separation according to gender. Her women seem to be creators of their own realities, and they move in and out of the private and public realms according to inclination, desire or degree of need to conform to traditional conventions. Rose Vassiliou suddenly acquires public prominence when she performs an act of international charity by giving her inheritance to an African cause but then, willingly, retreats into the private and domestic where she revels in "the ordinary signals in the world" (111).

Conversely, Janet Bird despairs of her confinement in the private and domestic realm. She has no vision beyond outward compliance to traditional conventions and dedicates herself to "total and secret" resistance to these conventions (128). Through choice, then, she has confined her association with the public realm to the neurotic yearning for some global disaster or local public calamity--

"anything to break the unremitting nothingness of her existence" (134). It is Frances Wingate who seems to have a life and attitude that demonstrate what Drabble endorses as a "balanced" integration of the public and the private.

Frances is an internationally acclaimed archeologist who jaunts about the globe giving lectures, attending conferences and discovering lost cities of

civilization--often with a pair of her lover's false teeth (a spare one, we assume) tucked down the front of her brassiere. This registration of her powerful need for intimate connection is as repetitive in the novel as is the reference to her professional life, and these two pulls of existence are shown to intersect repeatedly. When she is dissatisfied with her personal life (as when she is estranged from Karel) professional activities become "deep excesses of boredom" (251) and "feelings of claustrophobia set in" (261).

Drabble, pointedly, depicts Frances to be most content when she has achieved satisfaction in both realms. In a moment of contented bliss, this "vain, self-satisfied" woman reflects upon the public acclaim she has gained from discovering a lost city and the private triumph she has experienced in being reunited with the person whom she loves:

With Tizouk behind her and Karel before her, she felt herself a made woman in every sense. Flattered and courted, she flourished and blossomed. She enjoyed the attentions of the public; she enjoyed even more her ability to live at last in the private. (68)

Drabble, thus, represents the private realm of relationships, when they are not functioning as the only valid sphere for women, as a much needed and yearned for retreat. As well, she presents the public realm, and its systems of status and prestige, as accessible to and beneficial for women.

One scene in The Realms of Gold is particularly striking for its demonstration of this integration. When Frances is being introduced before one

of her professional lectures, she basks in pleasure at the listing of her accomplishments:

She liked to lie in a hot bath. And like lying in a hot bath it was, two hours later, to hear Professor Anderson introduce her to her audience she sat there, neatly, happily, listening to the long list of her achievements: she let them flow over her, reassuring, relaxing, comforting, like water full of compliments. (30)

The use of the domestic analogy to explain the public experience and the resultant equation of a hot bath and prestige serve to dislodge the usual associations with these terms. Frances revels in public prestige as she revels in a hot bath--both of which have something to do with preference and self-satisfaction, the analogy implies; neither of which have much to do with the inherent worth of an individual. In this way, Drabble refuses the notion of the public and private as separate spheres and presents them, rather, as intersecting planes of human activity.

Drabble's two main male characters similarly inhabit two realms. Although both occupy positions that have been traditionally accorded prominence and prestige--Karel Schmidt is a professor, and Simon Camish is a barrister--both are characterized more in relational and emotional than occupational terms. Karel, whom Drabble describes as "opaque with goodness" (31) and with "a peculiar capacity for enduring hours and hours of unrelenting boredom" (95), is most often depicted during his professional hours, tending to the "unlucky" and "the needed" among his students and colleagues. As well,

the "important" professional activities of Simon are backdrops to his inner, emotional life. His work as a barrister and a co-author of a book on international labor law appears only as an occasional topic of conversations: "for some reason....he did not often speak of his own affairs" (172). In the characterization of Simon, in particular, we can note that Drabble effects the same kind of "balance" between public and private that she does in her characterization of Frances Wingate.

Simon is the first of Drabble's dramatic portraits of the inner, private life of a twentieth-century male. The Needle's Eye opens with an interior view of Simon, and in the process we are given a powerful portrait of prominence as exile. Simon, who is marked by race, sex and profession as one of patriarchy's favoured sons, is lost in a desert of alienation, embitterment, loneliness and envy. He has been forced to rise "above" his working-class origins and become a barrister by his mother who "had bent on [her] son the peculiar weight of [her] own thwarted ambition" (31). He feels "forever exiled" from the world and people of his childhood and is full of "hatred" for his wealthy peers. He sees them inhabiting the fashionably mixed districts of London in a calculated effort to feel superior to "black men" and "seedy old ladies," who offer their children lessons on "poverty and despair." For Simon, preference or a desire for anything is a "rare visitant"; irretrievable boredom and bone-deep dryness of soul are feelings so persistent, so ancient that he is "growing fond of [them]"

(19). The sight of two women, Rose and her friend Emily who are connected and actually "interested in one another's affairs," cause him to "ache with loneliness" (34).

While Simon is initially depicted in the role of male advisor and rescuer of Rose, a female in distress, he ends up, because of his greater need, as the one who gains more from the relationship. Through his response to Rose's moral integrity and aura of authenticity, he is able to fill in a gap in his own inauthentic life. His relationship with her and the rewards from the relationship are, tellingly, described in terms of female privilege and status: she "bestows upon him an especial light" (170).

Drabble's characterization of Simon takes on the symbolic significance of a portrait of the male as a victim of stereotyping, as someone exiled from the authentic and the natural by social definitions. In the case of Simon, we have a man who, in point of fact, has no appetite for the activities or the role of the dominant and the powerful, a man who defines himself inwardly in relation to values other than those of traditional status and prestige. Nor is he alone in his sense of alienation and "inadmissible emotional craving" (47). Through the lens of Simon's perceptions, Drabble offers a picture of a whole society of disillusioned status seekers:

Those who had fought their way out onto a clear drawing room carpet with empty yards on either side would eye each other across the spaces, isolated, marooned, unable to approach or touch, or share a bodily

warmth, having lost this capacity. (55)

Drabble ends Simon's bleak musings with one of her characteristic philosophical queries: "What had they lost in gaining so much?" This query becomes one that she directs at men's lives in general: what has been the price of their being defined, exclusively, in terms of status, prestige and public realm accomplishments? Drabble seems to feel that this is as important a query as the one feminists have been asking about the traditional alignment of women, exclusively, with the relational and the private activities of life.

* * * * *

Drabble's resistance to representing men and women as oppositional entities--evident in her treatment of the themes of marriage and the public/private split--also causes her to deal more philosophically and abstractly with issues that feminists tend to regard as political battleground territory: namely, issues of inequality and powerlessness. Drabble focuses on the inequality that is experienced by both sexes, and her reason for doing so seems to stem from a sense that to restrict the matter to the political is to manufacture more of what already militates against human beings. Rather than using her characters as voices that promote and insist on equality, Drabble has them troubled by that inequity that lies beyond human control. Thus, in The Realms of Gold, Karel Schmidt reflects, "There was no justice in life....What justice could ever have given to him and Frances such years of loving, and to others,

no loving at all?" (223) Rather than a justification of privilege and riches by reference to a code of inalienable rights or superiority, Drabble has this male character, himself in a position of privilege at the time, identify the role of chance and luck and offer sympathetic understanding of those who are not as fortunate.

In her analysis of Drabble's philosophy of fatalism, Mary Hurley Moran claims that Drabble repeatedly emphasizes "the powerlessness of human beings against the inimical conditions of life" (26). What needs further attention, however, is the way Drabble uses such a perspective to illustrate a more "balanced" attitude toward the sexes. Thus, instead of associating only woman with inequality or lack of justice, Drabble presents men as equally unable to defend themselves against what Moran identifies in Drabble's fiction as "large menacing powers" (27).

In The Realms of Gold, in addition to Karel Schmidt, Drabble presents others who recognize and feel that they cannot cope with the evils, injustices and uncertainties of life. Beata and Stephen Ollerenshaw both collapse under the weight of a fatal view of life. Beata, who believes "the conditions of survival so dreadful" that "living is a crime" (92), lapses into a state of catatonic withdrawal from life, from her husband, from her baby and remains there--forever, as far as we know. Stephen, her husband, makes a more concerted effort to withstand the "sordid, degrading, sickly, unimaginable" (349)

aspects of life but is constantly haunted by the futility of it all: "There was something overwhelmingly disgusting about man's efforts, against all odds, to stay alive. One spent one's life in inoculating oneself, swallowing medications, trying to destroy disease, and all to no end, for the end was death" (344).

Stephen makes a valiant effort to provide protective parenting for the baby daughter his wife has abandoned, but fails. Driven by his terror of the baby's vulnerability and his powerlessness to protect her, he succumbs to a fit of mingled mania and parental love in which he kills his baby and himself. Moran points out that Drabble's female protagonists must struggle to align themselves with the forces of light and life and sanity, for "the forces of darkness and death and insanity loom large in [her] universe" (30). This observation, however, needs to be extended and qualified to incorporate what the portrait of these two young people also suggests: that men are equally, if not more than women, beset by despair over human powerlessness and insignificance.

Those who are prominent in the public realm are also at the mercy of their own impotency in the face of powerful forces. In the opening scene of The Realms of Gold, Frances Wingate, a thoroughly intelligent, successful, liberated woman, is depicted as battling "the horrible thing" she sometimes dignified "with the name Despair." These bad moments arrive unheralded, cause her to writhe, moan and weep, and then leave her "flattened, like a field after heavy rain" with a profound "sense of loss" (14). Drabble never allows

Frances full knowledge of the source of this despair but does have her recognize that while these moments happened frequently during her unhappy marriage, they were still with her in what she viewed as "the happiest years of her life" (16). Simon Camish, of The Needle's Eye, as professionally successful and publicly prominent as Frances, dwells in a perpetual state of meaninglessness, in regions of "darkness" and "misery," which he sees as a condition of all human beings and as the basis for the only equality and justice that exists:

And to what end, to what end, to what right end of life, to what glorious form of living, to what possible joy, there was nobody who had achieved it, there was no achieving and no arrival, there was merely a ghastly chain of reiterated disillusion....But there was no light, or none that man might enter: he could create for himself an ordered darkness, an equality of misery, a justice in the sharing of the darkness. (189)

Thus Drabble avoids the usual association of powerlessness with those on the lower social scale, just as she resists the association of powerlessness with the female; in her world, men and women, regardless of social position, are seen to be equally vulnerable in the face of powers beyond their control.

* * * * *

Paralleling Drabble's focus on mutual vulnerability is her depiction of men and women as being equally enthralled with and cut off from an "ideal" existence. In this facet of her fiction--the handling of the notion of the ideal--Drabble is able to lead her reader to an understanding of what may lie behind both the tendency to despair and to envision social panaceas. Alerting us

immediately to the utopian issue are the titles of her texts: the connotation of "realms of gold" and the idea of passage through "the eye of a needle" direct us to the Platonic and biblical concepts of the ideal. That which lies behind the title, the content of each narrative, however, registers the human frustration in trying to achieve and the inevitable failure in ever attaining a perfect state or place of existence. Indeed these texts are replete with references that imply, and sometimes strongly declare, the discrepancy between the ideal and the actual, between the philosophical image of an ideal state and the actual substance of what is humanly possible.

In The Realms of Gold reference is made to Mrs. Ollerenshaw's pain because "her golden boy [Hugh was] a drunken grandfather" (89). Janet Bird's agony is at not being "as natural mother: mothering did not come easily to her" (131). Midst the lengthy description of her despair and guilt over not living up to the maternal ideal, Drabble interjects a short bracketed paragraph that seems to be sent as a missive for Janet, and for us, to hear: "A goodenoughmother" (131). In The Needle's Eye, too, Drabble documents human despair at not being able to achieve the ideal. Rose Vassiliou is oftentimes weak with anxiety because of her flawed brand of maternal love: "She reproached herself. She did not forgive herself. She was not much good at accepting in herself...the shortcomings of humanity" (157). Simon Camish is as equally despairing over the flawed type of parenting he and his wife Julie are doing. One "domestic"

evening when he and his wife are having a chic, but tense dinner party and their child is receiving basic sustenance in the kitchen under the guardianship of an oblivious au pair girl, he reflects:

but there was something hopelessly wrong with a life where a child sat in a kitchen eating a fried egg in terror watched by a hostile alien, while adults in the drawing room gulped down alcohol and displayed their unlovely hypocrisies.”

Anyone who reads this passage must surely be arrested by the sheer brilliance, power and sardonic wit of Drabble's dystopian family portrait. Moreover, as if to emphasize the gulf between the ideal and what is sometimes achieved, Simon reflects further: “But nevertheless, he would swear, there had hovered before Julie herself a higher image, a legitimate hope: she had miscreated and deformed it, but it had been there, and it had fatally lured her on into this chattering of monkeys” (187).

Although Drabble thus resists any utopian dreams of perfection, she also resists the either/or of pessimism. This balancing attitude is subtly suggested in the musing of Frances Wingate of The Realms of Gold, the character who seems to deliver the most overt deconstruction of the notion of the existence of an ideal state or place:

The pursuit of archeology, she said to herself, like the pursuit of history, is for such as myself and Karel a fruitless attempt to prove the *possibility* of the future through the past. We seek a Utopia in the past, a *possible* if not an ideal society. We seek golden worlds from which we are banished, they recede infinitely, for there never was a golden world, there was never anything but toil and subsistence, cruelty and dullness.” (124,

italics mine)

While this passage represents Frances at her most despairing, the repetition of the "hope" word suggests that there is a way out of utter despair over the vagaries of life. The secret, Drabble seems to suggest, is to adopt a humanistic stance: there is a lot wrong with the world, but there is also a lot in life that makes one blessed. It is this attitude that distinguishes the characters who survive from those who do perish. Thus, not only does Drabble avoid the usual association of the male with power and the female with powerlessness by showing them to be equally vulnerable in the face of powers beyond their control, but she also redefines power as the ability to survive by finding joy against all odds. Drabble seems to locate the source or cause of this resilience in human imaginative powers, the ability to revision and thus the ability to stay, as Rose Vassiliou states, "open to the possibility that [one] might learn" (62). It is, indeed, a scene involving Rose that best demonstrates Drabble's "blueprint" for survival.

In a scene of remembrance, Rose recounts the patching of holes in the walls of her dilapidated home with patent cement mix from a do-it-yourself shop on the corner:

She went home with it and mixed some of it in a tea cup, and began herself to fill in some holes. It was an activity, it soothed her. The holes, when filled, did not look very elegant, but, looking at her work, she began to feel that there was at least a possibility that she might learn. (62)

The juxtaposition of "tea cup" and "do-it-yourself" cement sets up a host of related associations. Rose is able to go beyond the "tea cup" definition of her nature according to gender and can accomplish whatever she needs in order to live independently. Being open to "possibilities" other than those traditionally prescribed for her, Rose is able to survive with joy because she is able to "revision" what could pass for defeat and poverty:

The house, far from speaking of despair, spoke of the unflagging efforts of nearly a century: a little cement here, a new bit of wiring there, a new knob on a door (albeit a nasty bakelite one to replace the irreplaceable brass original) they all bore witness to effort, not to defeat. (61-62)

According to Drabble, then, power is not equatable with position, privilege or gender, but with resilience, the ability to cope with the threat of meaninglessness that lurks at the core of any human endeavour. Power is the ability to envision alternatives or "revision" and see life and circumstances from a different perspective. Those who perish, like Stephen Ollerenshaw, are not able to revision and mistakenly look to death for the power they never experienced in life. While he too has imaginative powers he uses them in a destructive way by envisioning himself an Empedocles at Etna. He imagines that "if one leapt now, unsubdued, into the flames, one would be freed, one would have conquered flesh and death, one would have departed whole, intact, undestroyed" (349). Instead of this notion of "power over," Drabble endorses the concept of "power to." Thus, those who survive endure in the face of what

Frances Wingate of The Realms of Gold terms "the absolute futility of all human effort" (227).

In her texts, Drabble gives voice to various versions of how best to survive, for she sees it as an individual decision that men and women share in having to make. Survivor Janet Bird declares "Sometimes I feel like giving up. But of course that's the only thing one can't do" (325). For Frances, meaningful survival is in trying "to salvage one moment from the sentence of death....to rejoice" (354). For Rose, in The Needle's Eye, survival means becoming "weathered into identity" which is something "she hoped, for every human soul" (398). Every human soul, Drabble implies, needs to "weather" or endure the vagaries and trials of existence. All these formulae involve an ability to revision that which could pass off as capitulation or defeat as opportunities for learning, growth and subsequent joy. The fact that Drabble has her women characters voice these aphoristic insights on survival may be evidence of her ability to identify more easily with the experiences of her gender, but the fact that the aphorisms are clearly meant for "every human soul" testifies to the fact that she is pointing to an issue that is of significance to all.

* * * * *

By having a range of characters--those seen by others as socially prominent and those seen as social misfits, those who function, those who do not, the young, the middle aged, men, women--experience despair, impotence

and disillusionment, Drabble is calling into question not only the traditional view of success and happiness but also the "metaphysics" that lies behind the desire for the ideal. All of the characters who despair experience a sense of loss of some vision, some promise that they feel has been held out to them in life. Drabble never has these characters identify what this unattainable dream is, and, in doing so, she ironically points to the idea of the ultimate as the promise and cause of their disillusionment. Once again, Jacques Derrida's insights into the metaphysical traps of our Western modes of thought are helpful in decoding Drabble's underlying philosophy on reality.

According to Derrida, the logocentric nature of Western metaphysics has promoted a valorization of the spiritual or ideal over the physical, which has led to a myriad of other hierarchical binaries. As Terry Eagleton explains, the logocentric is:

committed to the belief in some ultimate word, presence, essence, truth, reality which will act as a foundation of all our thought, language and experience. It has yearned for the sign which will give meaning to all others--the transcendental signifier--and for the anchoring, unquestionable meaning to which all our signs can be seen to point (the transcendental signified). A great number of candidates for this role--God, the Ideal, the World Spirit, the Self, substance, matter, and so on--have thrust themselves forward from time to time. (131)

The Realms of Gold and The Needle's Eye can be read as Drabble's attempts to deconstruct the idea of the ideal, the ultimate in place, position or being.

Against the logocentric assumption of self-fulfilment and total actualization, she

posits a life of endless readjustments and revisioning, and presents the ultimate as unattainable. There is no point of complete self-actualization and autonomy for either her male or female characters; those who achieve some outward semblance of these states, live an inner reality that belies that outward show. Thus, Drabble resists the inscription of a state of being that could be held up as "ideal" by any ideology, and posits instead an existence that is in constant state of flux. Happiness, success, self-fulfilment and contentment are not total states but fleeting moments or gleams of "joy" that come from ordinary life and human connections.

In a scene in The Needle's Eye two of Drabble's characters, Rose and Emily, are shown to be participants in this simplistic but profound view of life:

Christ, they would say to each other clutching small wailing babies stewing scrag end, wandering dully around the park. Christ, if only we'd known what we had to go through, if only we'd known--but in the very saying of it, betrayed (in Emily's case) bruised (in Rose's case) and impoverished (in both cases) they had smiled at each other, and laughed, and had experienced happiness....They were both happy people, incapable of resisting, incapable of failing to discover the gleams of joy....Such things must not be spoken of, they must not be admitted. But why are we alive at all? (243)

The final question, coming at us as it does from the perspective of the narrator, is a query that is pervasive throughout these narratives: "But why are we alive at all?" The answer appears to be repeated in countless incidents when the characters, in the face of entrapment, vulnerabilities and human limitations, are nonetheless able to experience a "natural flowing of a resilient, indestructible

personal joy" (243).

One of the avenues for this type of joy is a Wordsworthian sense of connection with nature. Transcendental moments are not for Drabble gained through traditional religious experiences, but rather through a sensual awareness of the marvels of the natural world. In scenes that are dramatically similar, she takes a number of her main characters, both male and female, through fleeting moments of enlightenment that provide momentary respite and meaning in chaotic lives. By restoring the concept "natural" to the world of nature in which men and women alike can experience their deepest selves, Drabble is also, quite pointedly, redirecting our focus beyond the gender considerations that are usually associated with this term.

Frances Wingate of The Realms of Gold is one of the characters who experiences a memorable vision of the natural. During her visit to Tockley, the small village where she grew up, Frances goes for a walk past a ditch that was a favourite childhood haunt. She remembers past visits to the same spot, and all remembrances contain sharply delineated images of nature. She remembers that on one visit she saw a scene of the teeming "variety of the earth's creation," of "fungi, odd fleshy plants, brown leaves, spotted leaves, thin needle leaves, mould and heaped curving interweaving branches" (23). On another, she saw a drainage pipe full of "hundreds and hundreds of frogs who looked "as though they had been bred from the clay, as in some medieval natural history."

Thinking back on these "natural product[s] of the landscape" gives Frances "such pleasure and amusement deep within her, a deep source of it" (25).

These moments are not just for those who are content and peaceful; they come to the despairing as well. In her bleak state of unhappiness while shuffling through her mundane household chores, Janet Bird is reminded of the empty echo at the heart of the Christian promise: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." Her inability to gain comfort from institutionalized religion is unequivocal: "There was no Lord, and there were no hills. It was all an even flatness....The church had been no help" (132-133). Later, however, Janet does lift up her eyes to the hills of nature and has an entirely different response:

She caught sight of the huge sky, which was an amazing colour, dark blue with a foreground of dark pink and purple clouds, a whole heaven of them, spread like flowing hair or weed over the growing darkness. It arrested her. She stood there, and stared upwards. It was beautiful beyond anything....The amazing splendour of the shapes and colours held her there, the teapot in her hand. I will lift up mine eyes, she thought to herself. I should lift them up more often. (155)

In a similar scene of quiet praise of the natural world, Simon Camish of The Needle's Eye is transported beyond himself and his miseries by the marvels of the resurrection of nature in spring:

Why should those branches not remain forever bare, the earth forever hard and inhospitable? By what grace did these green hopes and gentle exhalations perpetually recur? He had done nothing to deserve so munificent a resurgence. He touched, with his hand, the damp, raw, pitted cells of the brick wall, themselves weathered into a semblance of

organic life. And the smoky leaves of the ivy: in acknowledgement. (80)

The natural world, then, provides evidence of order, pattern and continuity, as well as an avenue for transcendent moments from which all these characters benefit. In her spontaneous response to nature, Frances, whose profession orients her to a study of culture and its artifacts, is given a "balance" in her view of life. In the same way, Drabble's series of parallels between the bleak lives of Simon Camish and Janet Bird is given a more positive emphasis in her depiction of their equally ecstatic responses to the natural world around them. In these instances, the socially constructed parts of their lives are put in the background, and their place in the natural world, a positive and shared reality, is brought into the foreground.

* * * * *

In her examination of what is natural and what is socially constructed, Drabble effects a disassociation of the traditional, exclusive alignment of women with nature. Similarly, she resists the exclusive alignment of men with culture, as it has been presented in traditional historical documentation. This realignment is most dramatically presented in two vivid tableaux that result from "visions" experienced by Frances Wingate on a return to her place of birth. Frances is on a visit to her grandparents' former home in Tockley, Eel cottage. Her first "vision" is triggered by the sight of women and children picking stones and debris at the site of a new school playing field. Frances experiences

some "ancestral memory" stirring within her, which causes her to see

"something quite different":

For what she had seen had been an image of forced labour, of barrenness, of futility, of toil, of women and children stooping for survival, harvesting nothing but stones. The big field stretched aimlessly, the people at the far reaches looked small and aimless. Shivering, she went back and caught the bus to Tockley. (122)

This passage could easily be lifted and placed appropriately in a text aimed at correcting an imbalance in historical documentation, registering, as it does, the unrecorded contribution to the history of civilization made by the labour of women and children. In a move that seems deliberately strategic, however, Drabble follows this scene with another "allegory of pointless rural toil," only this one is male centered. On her visit to the museum in Tockley, Frances views a fork used to trap eels:

It was a black pronged fork, and staring at it, she felt the same shiver as she had felt watching the bare field....She had had a vision, she had to admit it to herself, of old men pointlessly turning over eels in ditches in meaningless labour, just as those women and children in the field had appeared to her at first sight." (122)

The gender inclusiveness of these two visions, which are, pointedly, situated back to back in the narrative, is characteristic of the manner in which Drabble offers a fresh view on a feminist concern: the imbalance in historical documentation. This second vision is a reminder that oppression has been part of male existence too, a fact that is sometimes glossed over by feminists in their attempt to correct an imbalance in historical representation.

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Drabble's ultimate agenda can thus be understood as an extension of the views offered by sociologists such as Ortner and Whitehead, and feminist historians like Roselind Miles. While these critics are concerned with explaining how cultural notions of gender and sexuality have disadvantaged women, Drabble goes one step further. She shows how, in spite of the way patriarchy weights the balance of power on the side of men, they too have suffered from gender coding. Brought into focus in her fiction are those aspects of the lives of both women and men that have been denied validation in life and adequate representation in art because they are at odds with the gender definitions established by language patterns, habits of perception and ideologies.

Living and writing at a time when artists are caught between the Scylla of traditional "man-made" values and the Charybdis of feminist belief systems, Drabble is an example of a writer who tries to chart her way through the channels of two powerful ideologies that are at war with each other. In her fiction, she is able to create a navigational map that avoids the treacherous aspects of each and, thus, she registers a philosophic vision that goes beyond gender in that it brings into view those aspects of human nature that are "distant" in ideologies that are based on gender opposition. In a characteristic spirit of inclusiveness, she defines her subject matter as "the ordinary human emotions, the ordinary human duties, the ordinary common human experiences that everyone can share in" (qtd. in Cooper-Clark 25).

Chapter V: Carol Shields (The Republic of Love)

Present-day feminist writers such as Carol Shields are writing out of a climate that is vastly different from that of their nineteenth-century predecessors. As Shields herself notes, the situation and role of woman "has been extraordinarily altered by legislation and by a revolution in thinking." As she sees it, "what has also been altered is the kind of experience that can legitimately be brought to art." While her listing of this new context reflects largely those aspects of women's lives that have been traditionally left out of literary representation--"birth, motherhood, the rhythms of the female body"--she also draws attention to those ignored aspects of life that are common to both men and women: "a yearning for love and the domestic component of our lives" ("Ticking" 258). In Shield's writing, this wider scope of "legitimate" content is accompanied by her use of a variety of genres and media formats, almost as if to demonstrate that opening the boundaries of content necessitates a breaking down of the boundaries regarding form.

In a 1990 interview with Harvey DeRoo, Shields describes her literary career, explaining that she started out with poems: "I was, for about five years, enchanted with the making of....hard, thoughtful, honest poems" (40). She turned to prose in the seventies, initially, "to write the kind of novel she couldn't find on the library shelf," novels about the kind of woman she knew, about a woman "who had a reflective life, a moral system, a woman who had a

recognizable domestic context” (41). Later, she abandoned the writing of a novel (Swann) midstream because of “the problem of voice,” and turned to writing stories, Various Miracles (1985), in which she experimented with “different narrative approaches,” creating stories in which she experienced a sense of artistic freedom, feeling “uncommitted to voice and unfettered by design” (40). In her next collection of short stories, Orange Fish (1989), her focus started out to be on age, but ended up being on language: “the failure of language, the abuse of language, the gaps in language...the sudden ways in which language releases our best instincts by connecting us one to the other” (45). When she did finish the initially problematic venture, Swann: A Mystery (1987), she wrote the final chapter as a film script, complete with camera and sound directions. This launch into the genre of film has continued with her writing of a film script for The Republic of Love (1992). As well, she has effected a successful cross-over into drama with two, highly acclaimed plays, Arrivals and Departures (1990) and Thirteen Hands (1993), and most recently with Fashion, Power, Guilt and the Charity of Families, a play that she co-authored with her daughter, which will be presented by Winnipeg's Prairie Theatre Exchange in early 1995.

Shields rests comfortably with her movement from genre to genre, insisting that “there is always some refreshment in taking a different perspective” (DeRoo 43). This interest in alternative viewpoints is reflected not

only in her desire to write in a variety of genres, though; it is also evident in the structuring within her works, particularly her novels. Many of her novels are characterized by an emphasis on twin or parallel stories. Her earliest two texts, Small Ceremonies (1976) and The Box Garden (1977), are the separate stories of two sisters. Next, Happenstance (1980) and A Fairly Conventional Woman (1982) are companion stories of a husband and wife. This dual perspective of a male and female is especially highlighted in The Republic of Love (1992) with the parallel plots of Fay McLeod and Tom Avery. In her most recent novel, The Stone Diaries (1994), she expands from a dual to a communal perspective, presenting the life of Daisy Goodwill as a composite of the reflections, and thus perspectives, of a variety of other characters.

Although Shields is thus more technically innovative than Oliphant, Eliot and Drabble, commentary on her work has tended to focus less on her experimental strategies and more on her contribution as a woman writer. Mickey Pearlman, in her introduction to Canadian Women Writing Fiction, argues that Shields--like writers such as Alice Munroe, Mavis Gallant and Margaret Atwood--mirrors in her writing "the usually debilitating effects of enclosed or limited emotional and physical spaces in the lives of women" (3). A contributing writer to this volume, Abby H.P. Werlock, goes on to suggest that "central to Shield's art are her compelling portraits of women characters who attempt to fathom the nature of happiness, of love, and of their own

identities" (133). Donna E. Smyth lauds Shields as a woman's writer because "her women characters are wonderfully shaped out of the stuff of female experience" (145). In her commentary on Swann, Clara Thomas also praises Shields for her women's content and credits her with the creation of a new type of feminist heroine:

The love and care [Sarah Maloney] feels for her mother, her friends and her baby make her warmly human....[she] marks an advance I believe, in our gallery of young feminists: the bewilderment, victim syndrome, and defensive hard edges of early Engel or Atwood heroines are absent. Sarah's complexity, lightly worn, makes Joan of Lady Oracle, Rennie of Bodily Harm and even Rita of The Glassy Sea a little old-fashioned and anachronistic. (115)

Internationally, Carol Shields is also viewed as a writer whose feminist consciousness is aimed, primarily, at the documentation of the reality of women's lives. In a review of The Republic of Love, Nina Valentine, an Australian critic, welcomes Shields's expansion "outside Canada" into the "wider world of lovers," and then declares, "Carol Shields is a name in fiction I had not met before, but all I can hope is that we will meet again. She's quirky, interesting, amusing, intelligent, perceptive, aware of women as people, and a damned good writer" (np). Another Australian reviewer, Marion Halligan from the Canberra Times, applauds Shields's use of the mythic to add a telling "extra dimension"; in the mermaid motif in The Republic of Love, she sees "an emblem of all a human woman's worst fates: sexless, childless, will-less, and solitary" (np).

This acknowledgement of Shields's feminist sensibilities is sometimes, however, accompanied by another refrain from reviewers and critics: that her subject matter and focus are "limited." As in the case of Oliphant--and to a certain extent also Drabble--there is a tension between praise and reservation in a number of commentaries. In her review of The Republic of Love Colleen Godley declares, "It must be said that at times Shields here teeters on the verge of soap opera, teeters, but fails to fall" (n.p.). This tentativeness is again evident in the diction of Anita Brookner's in a review of this novel: she makes reference to "the *genuine kindness* of the narrative and the *honourable inevitability* of its outcome," and, then, goes on in a more pointed but still reserved fashion: "Other readers--and they will be few--*may* be disconcerted by a *slight squandering* of valuable material" (35, italics mine). Another reviewer, Kathryn Govier of The Globe and Mail, labels The Republic of Love a "small story" and notes that "the dark side is not Shields's territory, nor has it ever been" (C18). Govier goes on, however, to elaborate and also to query what she sees as her own basis of evaluation:

American-born Carol Shields has made a speciality of anatomizing the careful, chiefly contented lives of middle-class men and--with greatest sympathy--women in small cities. To say The Republic of Love is another successful depiction of the same is to risk damning by faint praise. But why should it be?

In Govier's query--"But why should it be?"--we can note a resistance to the notion that the lives of ordinary women--and men--occupy a low position in the

hierarchy of significant subject matter for literary representation, and thus she concludes by quoting Ben Jonson to support Shields's focus: "In small portions we just beauties see, / and in short measures life may perfect be" (C18).

Recently, this appreciation of the significance of the "insignificant" in Shields's work is growing and, interestingly, is not limited only to her women readers and critics. There are an increasing number of male voices that articulate similar sentiments. In his review of The Republic of Love, for example, Adam Begley evidences a view similar to Govier's. First, he notes that although Shields is "widely praised," she is somehow "damned at the same time." He goes on to explain:

The reviews [of The Republic of Love] are littered with diminishing adjectives like "cozy" and "sweet." Swann (1989), a three-hundred-page satire, wicked and stunningly clever, on the academic worship of literary genius, was actually described by one reviewer as a "knotty little novel." (66)

Later in the review, following a recap of the "his and her" plots of Shields's Happenstance and Fairly Conventional Woman, he challenges critical reservations about Shields's work by asking a question: "Domestic fiction pared neatly in half--sounds small, right?" He then goes on to answer the query himself and, in doing so, alerts other readers: "Don't be fooled. Though she works a claim no wider than a plot in a crowded graveyard, she digs deep and mines precious stuff" (66).

In a similar fashion, in "The Editor's View" section of The Vancouver

Sun, Ian Haysom pays tribute to Shields, her craft and her subject matter--love. He refers to The Republic of Love as a "superbly well-written" novel with "a profound theme," and then goes on to ask, "Love profound?"--a generic question that, he implies, could come from "journalists" and "the rest of society" who "continue to squirm and writhe in embarrassment at the very mention of the word love." Haysom then suggests that "things are changing" for journalists, for the rest of society and, by implication, for men in general: "Love is finding its way into our newspaper. We don't call them love stories. We call them human interest stories. Stories about people, about the human condition. Stories that celebrate, even love, people" (135). In an article on Shields in Border Crossings, Wayne Tefs also praises her handling of the theme of love: "What she has to say about middle-aged love is at once clear-eyed and wise....Shields's observation about people rank with the best" (33).

Nor does Shields's writing appeal just to the intellect of her male readers; it seems to touch them emotionally as well. Charles Wilkins, in an article in a special Carol Shields's issue of Room of One's Own, documents his emotional response to Shields's evocative prose in her short story "Home":

I put the book down and walked to the window. It must have been that the intensity of my response to the story produced a sort of gas or ether or alchemic reaction--it's difficult to be precise--but for a moment, perhaps too, the walls of my apartment, the entire living room and kitchen and balcony, became translucent. (93)

What Wilkins describes--an erasure of boundaries--seems to be what is

happening both in Shields's work and, possibly, as a result of it. The response that she is gaining, increasingly, from both a male and female audience indicates that she is crossing some boundary that has traditionally been seen to exist between women's and men's fiction, as well as a boundary that has tended to separate popular fiction and "serious" literature. An examination of The Republic of Love, the novel that has, to date, elicited the most extensive and positive response from both female and male readers, shows what it is in Shields's fiction that enables her to challenge and blur dividing lines that have been drawn traditionally--in both literature and life--between the masculine and feminine modes of thought, behaviour and inclinations.

* * * * *

Fay McLeod and Tom Avery, the dual protagonists of The Republic of Love, are two professional, approaching-middle-age people who live in Winnipeg, Manitoba, that "fairly large city with people who tend to stay put" (77). Initially, they are unknown to one another. Thirty-five-year-old Fay, a folklorist, is just ending her third live-in partnership in 10 years; forty-year-old Tom, a popular nighttime radio host, is "on the lam" after the breakup of his third marriage. Shields acquaints us with each of these characters in alternate chapters that chart similar backgrounds of domestic plodding, professional striving, family and friendship, into which are also woven stark interludes of emotional emptiness and longing for the intimate other. When Fay's and Tom's

lives intersect, the reader has an intimate view of how each perceives the other and, thus, Shields is able to explore the experience of love from a two-gendered perspective. Cliché after cliché about love is examined, as we witness the "earth moving" for Fay and Tom, but also follow them through the discovery that "the course of true love never runs smooth" when their intersected lives and cocoon of bliss break apart as the weight of family difficulties and responsibilities to others press upon them. Union rather than rupture, however, is what Shields chooses for closure, and Fay and Tom are last seen married, surrounded by family and friends at a launching of Fay's book "Mermaids of the Inner Mind."

* * * * *

In both structure and content, The Republic of Live demonstrates that Shields extends the boundaries of feminist writing in a number of ways. For one, the image of sphere that characterized the nineteenth-century concept of the domain of the two sexes has been altered. In this work the sphere elongates and flows into parallel lines that register a resistance to viewing the realities of men and women as oppositional. Tom's and Fay's narratives are given equal weight, equal time: each are the focus of eighteen chapters; each have a three-page bookend section entitled "Tom" and "Fay" at the text's beginning and end respectively. Their narratives remain separate and parallel throughout, even when their lives intersect. There is no interweaving of a muted and a dominant

discourse of the nineteenth-century variety here either; Fay McLeod and Tom Avery are not presented as rivals for pre-eminence. They are two "equal" life-like characters depicted in parallel scenes that range from angst, to rapture, to rapture, to reconciliation--all played against a backdrop of toast crumbs, sock drawers, intestinal gas, work demands and family entanglements.

In this presentation of an equally weighted dual-gender perspective, Shields goes beyond what Eliot and Drabble did in their plots and companion novels. While Eliot presented parallel plots, they tended to be interwoven and overlapping, and the actions in each reflected an acknowledgment of sphere consciousness. Shields gives both sexes, graphically, their own spaces and, at the same time, emphasizes commonalities that deconstruct the notion that these spaces are gender-specific; they are more person-specific. Shields also moves beyond Drabble in the representation of the interior views of men and women. In Drabble's works, female protagonists tend to function as reference points for the male characters; whereas Shields does not allow either sex to function as a centralizing consciousness. One person is never subsumed, and one life is never totally directed by the other. We are always able to inhabit the individual consciousness: to see first Fay, then Tom as the other. In this way The Republic of Love also provides a subtle commentary on Simone de Beauvoir's contention in The Second Sex about the way women are positioned:

She [woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man

and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--she is the Other. (xvi)

Shields does not simply put under erasure the concept of woman as negation, as that which man is not; instead, she exposes the faulty syllogism behind perceiving the female as lone claimant of the designation of "other": "he" is depicted in relationship to "her"; "she" is depicted in relationship to "him." Thus, the structure of The Republic of Love resists the notion that the activities and inclinations of either gender should function as the norm against which the other is measured.

* * * * *

A balanced perspective is particularly evident in Shields's handling of the theme of motherhood, wherein she addresses a central concern of feminists but also questions formulaic thinking on the topic. For example, in "Wild Mother Dancing:" Maternal Narrative in Contemporary Writing by Women in Canada and Quebec, Di Brandt argues that "the mother has been so largely absent in Western narrative, not because she is unnarratable, but because her subjectivity has been violently and repeatedly repressed" (5). As if to counter or correct this situation, Shields handles the feminist issue of maternal subjectivity with immediacy and a comic exuberance that jolt the reader with upper-case emphasis in the opening sentence of the text: "As A Baby, Tom Avery Had Twenty-Seven Mothers" (1). In one deft, artistic flash Shields has refused what

Luce Irigaray calls the "murdered mother" motif of patriarchal Western narrative. She not only resurrects a bevy of maternal subjects, but gives them all to one character (perhaps as an appeasement to some of the characters in nineteenth-century fiction who, characteristically, were motherless). Tom Avery floats into the world of the text on a sea of tender, maternal care. While at times the tone of this section is obviously sentimental--such as in the retrospective, rose-coloured view, "Such love, such love, Oh, God, he'd never know love like that again"--the sensual imagery suggests that Shields is generally trying to evoke a reverence for "a kind of paradise" of total, selfless love (2). There is a gentle striving to convey the idyllic: in the superlatives--"whitest," "softest," "most lovingly"; in the qualifiers--"prettily," "adorably," "lovingly," "lusciously," "affectionately"; in the descriptives--"correct," "soft coloured," "tender" "scented," "fragrant," "charmed." As well, the potency of the nurturance is emphasized: the effects stay with Tom; he carries his affection for these women and this "charmed time" into adulthood:

These hands are now sixty years old; Tom has had occasion to meet a few of his old "mothers" around town, and he's seen and even held some of their hands affectionately in his own, and listened to remembrances of that charmed time. (2)

These images of motherly love are too tenderly crafted, too evocative to be intended ironically. On one level, then, she seems to be implying that there can never be too much nurturance in a person's life, and that mothering is a

bastion of gentle regard that can surround us like a halo for life. Perhaps too, she is attempting to capture a sense of what Julia Kristeva terms the "semiotic." In her discussion of the maternal in "Stabat Mater," Kristeva identifies the "semiotic" as the area of non-speech, the material "that linguistic communication does not account for." She insists that "the Mother and her attributes...reestablish what is nonverbal" (195). In the striving that is evident in the shifting, layered descriptives regarding the maternal element, Shields, at once, establishes the validity of the nonverbal and, as well, registers the failure of language in communicating certain experiences.

There are, however, other intimations about the maternal in this introductory section that demonstrate Shields's second-tier feminist concern with the specificity of female experience. The collection of 27 women who functioned as Tom's maternal care-givers have no individuality, have no purpose beyond the domestic and the motherly, no response other than the tender and the protective. "Their gaze was tender" (2); their hands were "pale, pearly" ones; "they loved him just for being alive, for doing nothing to deserve their love" (3). The hours were "lovely," "soft-coloured"; those days were a "charmed" time, a "passionate," "scented" time (2). Superimposed on this magical, communal ideal are the stark realities of a desperately ill biological mother: "His mother was sick, desperately sick, a kind of flu that worsened to pneumonia and then depression" (1). Shields thus inscribes absence and illness into the portrait of

maternal love--suggesting that these two aspects of motherhood need also to be taken into account. The cultural icon of an all-giving, selfless maternal love does not allowed for the possibilities of illness, depression and absence (unpreventable or chosen) that have also been part of women's realities with the experience of motherhood. In this regard, Shields's voice joins a chorus of other contemporary feminists.

Ann Rosalind Jones, for example, has pointed to the negative aspects of the institutionalization and "the coercive glorification of motherhood that has plagued women for centuries" (255). Similarly, in Of Woman Born, Adrienne Rich offers a scathing and relentless exposure of the chains of motherhood as a patriarchal institution. In a somewhat gentler fashion, Shields questions what lies behind the motherhood icon. While on one level she positively evokes the sights, sounds and textures of one of our strongest ideals and perhaps some of our tenderest of life experiences, she also draws attention to the components of absence and illness, which are the negative realities behind this powerful image. Consequently, like Rich--who despite her criticism honors the freedom of an individual to choose--Shields insists that women's experiences with motherhood are specific and cannot be universalized into a gender mandate.

Shields, however, goes beyond both Jones and Rich and second-tier feminist considerations by noting another kind of absence: "Where was the father in all this? Ha! That's another story" (1). While the tone and diction of

this jaunty, dismissive declaration point to the fact that most often women have assumed the major responsibilities for care of the young and that the absent-father syndrome has been a real and a tragic element in people's lives, the reference to "another story" suggests the need to be careful in jumping to conclusions in that it encourages the reader to go beyond oppositional modes of thought regarding the parenting by men and women. Just as Shields's evocation of the "semiotic" suggests that language is inadequate to express the primal experience of the maternal, her reference to "another story" of the father suggests that our vocabulary is deficient of terms that name what may be the primary experience of the male parent--a counterpart to "maternal instinct." By suggesting that the icon of maternal love may be faulty not merely because of an insistence on the female's powerful, emotional ability, but also because of the view that women have an innate and exclusive claim to nurturing, Shields implies that our language has had "gaps" in it for men too. She draws our attention to the fact that men have been excluded from the cultural portrait of innate, protective parental love, and that to see this "gap" exclusively in terms of a deserved omission would not be to see the whole "story." As well, we should note that this opening section is entitled "Tom"--a male name superimposed as signature on a story of nurturance, love and caregiving. Thus, Shields inscribes male presence in the place of male absence and resists the binary oppositional pattern that is so often part of male-female considerations.

As well as resisting the traditional story of maternal presence and male absence, Shields also resists the notions of male primacy and female subjugation. In fact, the binary oppositional categories of primacy/subjugation and presence/absence are resisted altogether; for what can be read initially as an endorsement of the supremacy of the female is muted, softened to a registration of maternal love as one powerful force of many in the lives of people. Shields resists the temptation to reverse the repression of the maternal by suppressing the role of the paternal, the role of the male. Indeed the focus is taken away from the maternal and paternal altogether and given to the parental. Both Fay and Tom have lively relationships with their garrulous mothers (each woman is accorded more than 25 lines of uninterrupted maternal advice), but Fay's tender, mutually supportive relationship with her father is documented with equivalent emphasis.

Along with leading us beyond the binaries and behind the stereotypes around the maternal and the paternal, Shields ushers us further into neutral sex-role territory when she joins the powerful icon of the maternal with the evocative image of the mythic feminine--the mermaid. Fay is depicted as writing a book on these amphibious creatures, and in describing historical attempts to "capture" them, Shields highlights their fascination and the purpose of her use of this motif: "the asexual morphology of the mermaids is obvious, there being no feminine passage designed for ingress and egress" (54). Here the

mermaid as image offers an opportunity to see the female as other than receptacle or container (ingress) and other than as site of reproduction (egress). As well, through Fay's observations about mermaids in a paper she gives at a conference, Shields alerts us to the fact that easy classification is not always possible, for some things reside best within the flux of ambiguity:

The mermaid, Fay says at the conclusion of her paper...is thus an image of sexual ambiguity. Traditionally women were regarded as lesser versions of men, with abbreviated sex organs, but the mermaid preceded even that image....She is erotic but passionless....a sealed vessel enclosing either sexual temptation or sexual virtue, or some paradoxical and potent mixture of the two. (97)

Through these observations, Shields not only points to the way that asexuality precedes gender stereotyping but also presents the paradoxical as the potent, which is not a usual alignment, and in doing so, she challenges categorical alignment in general.

In her revisioning of what the feminine entails, Shields thus begins with a focus on mothers, our culture's most clearly defined icon and then moves on to the mermaid, our most mystical and abstract representation of the feminine. In this way, she also encourages generally us to move from the assumed, the known and the "truthful" to the questioned and the possible.

* * * * *

Just as Shields questions gender-relational notions about male and female primacy, so she revisions current feminist thinking about gendered language,

some of which originated with Jacques Lacan. Following Lacan's contention that the acquisition of language and the submission to the Law of the Father are simultaneous and inevitable, feminist theorists have struggled with showing women the way to go beyond the syntax of patriarchy. The way out of patriarchal language for some feminist theorists is to invent a "woman speak" that taps pre-language consciousness (Kristeva), a body language of female jouissance (Cixous) or an oral break from the dictatorship of patriarchal speech (Showalter). Gilbert and Gubar, however, label these attempts to recuperate women from linguistic impotency as straight-forward reversals of hierarchies:

These women seem to affirm what the figure of Molly Bloom seems to confirm: that the Cartesian dichotomy is essentially patriarchal; hence, the only female solution to what one learned in school as the "mind/body" problem is an opting for matter over mind. ("Sexual Linguistics" 519)

Noting as well the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of writing in matter--blood, emesis, maternal milk--Gilbert and Gubar offer in place of female jouissance a vision of female puissance. Claiming that linguistic primacy has always belonged to the female, they view a binary vocabulary (superior/inferior, activity/passivity, culture/nature, man/woman, father/mother) as evidence not of male linguistic arrogance, but of fear and paranoia, a defense against "the astonishing autonomy of that mother tongue which is common to both genders" (538). As they see it, feminists need to "look beyond" the "masculinist syntax of subordination" and "recover the ways in which...women have sometimes

stealthily and sometimes ecstatically claimed the alphabet to capitalize [on] their own initials and their own initiatives" (538).

From a different slant, social scientists have also explored the relationship of language and gender. In their article "Organizational Genderlect: The Problem of Two Different Languages," for example, Nina Colwill and Teresa Sztaba claim that "men's and women's verbal communications have been found to differ in so many ways that researchers in the area have referred to these speech patterns as male and female genderlect" (64). Colwill and Sztaba then itemize the differences: feminine language is reportedly that which uses polite forms, tag questions, qualifiers, disclaimers, and words that imply feeling, evaluation and interpretation. While Colwill and Sztaba do not propose to know the origins of these sex differences, they express little doubt that "they parallel power differences in our society" (64). In You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation, Deborah Tannen similarly suggests that the linguistic alignment in which women and men find themselves arrayed is asymmetrical: men lecture, women listen, and "the lecturer is framed as superior in status and expertise, cast in the role of teacher, and the listener is cast in the role of student," as subordinate (125).

In The Republic of Love we can find both a basic recognition of such linguistic theories and a revisioning of the relationship of women and men to linguistic structures, a revisioning that seeks to avoid the oppositional or

hierarchical stances that such theories seem to entail. For example, as though in recognition of the view that men and women adopt different speech patterns, Shields peppers the world of The Republic of Love with inscriptions of genderlect. In "he/man" fashion Tom puffs along his jogging route reciting "fuck," "shit," "fart," "cunt," "all the sputtered grotesques of the language" (19). Also, he has a characteristic "wordless" way of expressing "his most passionate and painful moments" (101). Jokes about Tom's marriage are *male* jokes, and the narrator explains that "men tend to make these kinds of jokes more than women, jokes that are meant to be chummy, to stimulate envy" (123). Fay, in a "characteristic" female way, speaks openly to her family of her love for Tom-- "I love him Fay confides to her mother and father" (246)-- has "long mooney discussions" reminiscent of teenage days with her friend Iris, and believes that tears are very effective non-verbal communication (she also receives a "typical" male response from Peter Knightly: "Oh, for God's sake, why on earth would you cry about a thing like this?" [32]).

Shields's perspectives on the relationship between gender and language, however, do not neatly adhere to any theory. Similar to her handling of modes of thinking regarding "motherhood," after acknowledging and identifying forms of genderlect, she then shows that not all speech by men and women conforms to such patterns. It is true that some characters tend to lecture and some listen, but typical patterns are reversed. It is Fay's mother whose uninterrupted stream

of motherly advice to her daughter covers 37 lines, whereas the longest male burst of verbiage is 14 lines by Steve Fitzsimmons; and it is Fay's father whose "measured questioning and patient, listening face would help her put her thoughts, and her routines, in order" (29). The language of feeling and emotion, too, is not automatically female territory. In fact, Fay distrusts talking about feelings: "she could think of nothing to say" in response to Peter's invitation to sort out their feelings (27). She loves her godmother Onion but cannot "formulate the thought in words. It would embarrass them both" (73). Tom is the one who exhibits the profound yearning for intimate, emotional conversation when he remembers silently pleading with his former spouse: "Ask me what I'm thinking, what I want, what I'm made of, why I've gone so sick and slack" (23).

This pattern of linguistic role reversal is, however, not allowed to become a dominant concern in The Republic of Love. The language of the sexes is often aligned, mutual and conspiratorial, even between estranged couples. There is often evidence of immediate understanding, of recognition of subtleties and registration of inferences:

Fay to Peter: "People ... are talking"
Peter: "I know, I know"
Fay: "And Calvin had a lunge at me too this afternoon"
Peter: "Really? That's interesting what did he have to say? Or was it the same old line about what a striking couple we made?"
Fay: "How did you know?" (56)

There is also evidence of a balance of power in male and female speech. Fay's parents show signs of being linguistically symmetrical: "They share a yearning for jokes and subtle proofs and oddities of language" (15). An emphasis on the linguistic balance possible between the sexes is also evident in Shields's depiction of a film Fay had attended (with an "awkward," "opaque" man) where men and women "uttered breathy jealous threats or spoke in varying shades of cruelty of their mutual enthrallment and disgust" (117). In the world of The Republic of Love, then, genderlect is regarded as a contingent, slippery commodity, whose ideological basis needs to be exposed and examined.

As much as Shields departs from the views of modern theorists, however, she also continues a trend that is evident in her nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary predecessors. George Eliot's and Margaret Oliphant's works constitute early revisionist approaches to the notions of the relationship between language and gender. Eliot resists the male/rational vs female/irrational linguistic paradigm and allows her female characters, such as Princess Halm-Eberstein and Catherine Arrowpoint, some of the most powerful, rational rhetoric to define the specificity and individuality of women. Through inflation, deflation and conflation Oliphant erases the notion of a hierarchical ordering of the speech patterns of the sexes and either "elevates" the speech of females or demythologizes that of males. In addition to adapting such nineteenth-century techniques for breaking with stereotypical gendered patterns of speech, Shields

employs strategies similar to those of various twentieth-century female writers. Earlier in this century in A Room of One's Own, Virginia Woolf had called for the creation of a new woman's sentence because the man's sentence is "alien" to women's minds and experience. More recently, Phyllis Webb, a modern Canadian poet, has fashioned a new poetic breath line designed to free woman writers from "the big-mouthed---yawp, yawp howling male" sentence ("Talking" 68). As though she were heeding the entreaties of Woolf and Webb, Shields crafts a prose style that reflects an open, flexible consciousness, which cannot be contained by the traditional "patriarchal" grammatical syntax.

In The Republic of Love, the dependency on the sentence is broken and images often tumble out, pile up in a breathless fashion: Tom speculates on "what to do with [Friday nights], those gaping, sneering, stubbornly recurring bits of time--how to accommodate them, fill them, use them, annihilate them" (17). Fay's answers to the question of whether Onion, her godmother, is grieving are given quick airing: "Perhaps, probably, yes" (74). This type of "breathless" prose is suitable for speech that comes in quick, sometimes incomplete bursts and is fuelled by impulse and emotion, and is thus equally appropriate for both males and females. Shields's use of spontaneous and disjunctive prose also suggests that, like Margaret Drabble, she resists functioning as an all-knowing narrator, as an author who prescripts and prescribes the speech of her characters. In The Republic of Love we get a sense

of a consciousness that is not so much in-control-of as in-step-with the thought and speech patterns of the characters.

A related characteristic of Shields's prose is her use of a chorus of voices that reports on, advises on and responds to much of Tom's and Fay's activities and lives in general. Initially, these voices are those disembodied ones that come over the airwaves in response to the "question of the week" on Tom's radio show. They function as the ubiquitous "they" who "say," and are part of the heteroglossia of our lives:

One caller says....a woman says....a man says....another caller says....a woman says....an out-of-town caller reports....a young male voice says....a final caller says. (46-47)

These voices also reflect, we can notice, a balance between male, female and non-gender-specific speakers.

The choruses become more specific, more bodied, and the speeches become more detailed when Tom is gathering in information on his new-found love Fay or when his friends and families are commenting on his in-love exuberance. Within the space of two pages of the text, we have a wide variety of voices and perspectives:

"So What's Got In to You?" Ted Woloschuk asked.... "Well For Pete's Sake" Tom's mother yelled.... "Why, Tom Avery, you look like the cat that ate the cream," Jenny Waring told Tom." (227-28)

Just as there is general rejoicing when they are in love, there are communal declarations of shock and sympathy when Fay announces that they will not be

getting married:

Her brother....said "Jesus Christ".... "Listen Fay," Sonya said....
"Oh Fay," Bibbi said.... "What a mess," Iris said.... "Oh Boy,"
Beverly Miles said.... "Hmmm," Muriel Brewmaster said.... "Oh
Fay," Hanna Webb said.... "Oh, my dear," Richard McLeod said....
"This is a terribly serious decision," Peggy McLeod said. (334-35)

The cumulative effect of the chorus of voices is the conveying of a speech community that is, in turns, declarative, questioning, supportive, but always available and always varied. What Shields gives us is thus a type of stream of consciousness that is different from that of Virginia Woolf. This type of consciousness is more societal and registers the fact that just as there are individual processes of reflection, evaluation and assumptions, there are also communal ones that govern what we do and how we view what we do.

In an interview with Harvey DeRoo, Shields explained that in her fiction: she wanted to "reproduce the chorus of voices" that reside within us and direct our lives: I think we all carry around with us a...tape-recorded set of directives" (53). If we take this insight back to The Republic of Love, we can see that Shields is working with a new kind of speaker-listener relationship in her presentation of the communal and societal expectations and declarations that "live inside" Fay's and Tom's heads. The "play-back" analogy, however, also suggests that Shields resists the oppositional positioning of society and the individual and suggests a pragmatic, common-sense approach to societal and other-person directives. A tape can be erased, and, hence, the implication is that

people do have some control over what they allow to keep playing inside their heads. As well, Shields's technique of listing utterances one after the other emphasizes connections and repeatedly presents the characters, both male and female, as part of a positive network of people, voices and concerns.

This change in focus from the binary oppositional--men's speech vs women's speech--to the mutual and the collective--people's speech--allows us to see a way beyond the rigid adherence to any theory or stereotypical view. Also, in a clever narrative move, Shields has developed a linguistic background that helps us read through all the speech patterns in the text with an eye on connections rather than conflict. She refuses to silence anyone, any group, and insists on letting all the voices in. The multiplicity of voices and the refusal to privilege one over the other undermines structures of linguistic authority and leaves us with the consideration that all authority is provisional. Although she acknowledges language as a site of difference--Fay and Tom "live inside different vocabularies" (300)--she locates that difference in the signifier, the name, the construct, and not in the signified, the substance, the people.

Shields also resists the hierarchial ordering and gendering of any difference that does exist between various modes of communication. Because Fay is depicted as a folklorist who is writing a book and her subject is female mythology, we might be tempted to read female linguistic supremacy in these inscriptions, as well as a privileging of academic research and the printed word

over other modes of communication. As counter balance though, Tom is depicted as king of the airwaves and is able to register his linguistic competency very publically, whereby Shields also suggests the efficacy of the popular media:

A lot of people in town know who Tom Avery is, and in a sense he's a sort of local celebrity...he feels good when he's communicating. He feels in touch with, well, a certain segment of the population, the night segment. (25)

The relationship between linguistic issues and gender, then, is not a simplistic matter in The Republic of Love, and we are gently encouraged to resist and question any formulaic thinking in this regard, no matter how "modern" the theory.

* * * * *

Addressing social stereotypes is an essential feature of feminism and a major focus in Shields's text. With this issue, as with the issues of motherhood and language, Shields adopts a subtle manner of presentation in which a number of associated "ideologies" are acknowledged and explored but without any overt political posturing (one of the reasons, perhaps, that Shields's brand of feminism seems acceptable to men as well as to women).

In some ways, Shields's handling of social stereotypes constitutes a critique of Kristeva's theory of marginability. From their position of marginality, says Kristeva, women should "reject everything, finite, definite,

structured, loaded with meaning in the existing state of society" (Desire 66).

Certainly, in Shields's challenging of accepted theories about genderlect and the lives of men and women in general, we can read in The Republic of Love a resistance to the fixed, the rigid, the definite; but we also witness the author's critique of a Kristeva-style fixed stance--a system against all systems.

Philosophically, Shields's artistic consciousness is more closely aligned with the views of Green and Kahn: "If we hope to challenge the ideology which has so long passed for 'truth' we must be careful not to recuperate its terms and assumptions in our own positions" ("Feminist Scholarship" 25).

Since the very vocal public declaration of feminists in the 60s, views of woman as people trapped by the feminine mystique have developed and become a powerful negative paradigm for liberated young woman. The images of young women mindlessly enduring tupperware parties, *kaffee klatsches* and the bastions of female collectivity--baby or bridal showers--have loomed large as the ultimate to denounce in the minds of many Betty Friedan devotees and descendants. Shields resists this axiomatic attitude gently, but emphatically. The female communal gift giving, food sharing, and role supporting that make up the fabric of a baby shower for Donna Watts are depicted with beauty and with a type of reverence that put these activities beyond the territory of ridicule or satire: "the faces of these women seemed softened, beautiful..."how happy she was to be there. There is nowhere else I'd rather be, she said to herself,

and meant it" (47-48).

Similarly, Shields tackles some "modern" taboos on love and romance that have been inculcated by the women's movement. In an attempt to recuperate love as a serious grist for the writer's mill in the era of feminist resistance to the Harlequin-romance phenomenon, the narrative voice, using Fay's thoughts as a springboard, launches into a persuasive case for more literary attention to "the thunderous passions" of love:

Work is important. Living arrangements are important. Wars and good sex and race relations and the environment are important, and so are health and illness. Even minor shifts of faith or political intention are given a weight that is not accorded love. We turn our heads and pretend it's not there, the thunderous passions that enter a life and alter its course. (248)

Like Oliphant's elevation of the domestic, Shields thus equates love with the so-called great themes of work, wars, sex, race relations and the environment. After this fairly overt piece of authorial comment, she goes on to introduce some of the formulas for thinking about romance that have the "hefty weight" of truthfulness since the sexual revolution of the 60s. One is the argument that an intelligent woman does not engage in romance because it is a trivial, foolish affair: Fay's friend Beverly admonishes, "you're far too intelligent a woman to be having a romance. Only deeply fluffy people have romances." Another assumption is that irony rules in the twentieth century and that love belongs in the Middle Ages or as "a mere literary device" (250).

As a corrective for this type of formulaic thinking about love, Shields offers the individual experience. Through the consciousness of Tom and of Fay, we see the relevance of what some may consider irrelevant and the validity of that which may be deemed false. Tom thinks, "You are first in my heart," and then the narrator continues, "The phrase feels dated, scented, genteel, sentimental, false, and yet it embraces the whole of his desire" (324). Fay recognizes that the old phrase from the wedding service--"With my body, I thee worship"--is "archaic [and] out of fashion," but once again, we are told that "it suits her emotional fervor, presses close to her, and offers comfort" (336). The process that is going on here is the recuperation of the love story and the validation of romantic love, not just as a worthy subject for fiction, but as a meaningful human experience for both men and women.

In emphasizing the importance of love, however, Shields does not generalize it into an unconditional paradisaic ideal. In keeping with her impulse to examine and question attitudes toward social stereotypes, Shields begins with a deconstruction of some of the modernist axioms about love but, then, continues with other evidence that love is not a panacea for everything that besets us. The initial Fay chapter of The Republic of Love, for example, opens with an image that provides a sharp juxtaposition to the abundance of love in the "Tom" section. Against the image of the "gentle," "scented," unconditional love that Tom receives, we have the inertia and emptiness of Fay McLeod who

is "lying in bed beside a man she no longer loves....Yesterday she loved him, but today she doesn't" (4). Sensual caresses are reduced to a "twiddling thumb," and the perfectly aligned duo become "two identical slices of toast" that "bound upward" in the toaster providing the morning with a "shock of happiness" (9). Similarly, against the large backdrop of Fay and Tom's mesh of romantic love is the drama of Fay's parents, Richard and Peggy McLeod, a couple who labelled themselves "each other's gift" (16). Richard leaves his wife because he "got lost, that's all, in all that warmth and loving" (318). Thus, we are exposed to the flip side of loving dependency, for as much as love is a glorious republic, it can also be "a black hole" (320). The other side of a caring nature is the need to control; the other side of being looked after is being suffocated and controlled.

* * * * *

In constantly giving us a view of the "other side" of issues, Shields refuses bi-polar politics. She is not out to prove or disapprove, to convert or coerce; instead she wants us to consider, as Fay does, that "it all depends on the angle of vision" (269). This flexibility is particularly evident in that she does not resort to an automatic rejection of stereotypes but explores the way that they result generally from the cognitive process of categorizing, and are instances of how we process information.

Shields's characters often use the thought process fundamental to

stereotypical thinking. For example, Fay casts a sympathetic eye on early morning bus passengers who are "mainly women, a separate caste," who carry with them "suggestion of their flushed domestic chaos," and expressions that are "rushed and resigned" (58). She later sees flight attendants as "nerveless automations....binding, reaching, adjusting, offering their balletic strategies" (94). Such stereotypes are not inherently negative; we need to be able to identify people with their "caste" or peers to understand something about their existence. Fay's sympathetic vibrations come from her identification of these human beings with their collectives. What could be dismissed as the quirks of one existence cannot be so easily passed over when seen as the plight of a group.

In addition, Shields avoids what might be called a stereotypical attitude toward stereotypes. She does not simply dismiss them as cultural constructs, but shows how they are part of a person's believing, functioning reaction to the world. For example, Tom is presented as a typical male, with the seeming universal male tendency to de-emphasize his own needs for children and align himself with a woman who wanted them-- "even if she didn't actually have them." Tom recognizes that his desires could be viewed by others as old fashioned, but he also recognizes that individual inclinations can go against what is fashionable or expected. His insight comes as inner reflection: "This was illogical and antiquated, he knew that much, but that was the way it was" (141). Fay, too, is startled by the truth in the trite and by her attraction to what she

feels is seen by many, in this last decade of the twentieth century, as a "metaphysical ruin":

Sometimes, lying in bed, resting her face against the hollow of Tom's chest, Fay feels trapped in the shallow rhetoric of Hollywood or of pop music. Everything she pronounces or thinks seems to come winking off a set of diluted song lyrics. (319)

Despite these thoughts, Fay's emotional leanings lead her to a realization that she wants to "cry out to Tom" to "save" her (320) in a fashion typical of trite romantic song lyrics.

After acknowledging some of the validity that can lodge behind rigid thought patterns, however, Shields cleverly and immediately pushes us to consider the other side--the limitations of this type of thinking. She shows how antiquated beliefs also need to be adjusted in the light of modern realities. Tom's three abortive marriages have been with women who did not fit his image of a woman as someone who automatically wants children--one because it took too much time, one because it required too much responsibility and one because she did not want stretch marks. Fay, too, has to readjust her attitudes towards love when what she perceived as her parent's "perfect union" is broken, and she in turn disengages herself from Tom. The idea of love as a mystical union that is popularized in song and "romantic" public discourse is unsettled, making the belief in a trouble free "republic" of love a pinning of faith "on a curtain of air" (332).

As much as Shields asks us to reconsider compliance with and resistance to categorical thinking, she never goes to the point of making trivial the debilitating effects that can result from a belief in social binaries, those that label and draw a defining line of hostility between "them" and "us." There is a cautionary message in this regard that comes through with some force when the narrator observes: "People's lives don't wrap up nearly as neatly as they like to think" (80). The impulse to wrap up the flux of life into neat categories, neat gender divisions--men are this, women are that--is being questioned. More than that, in The Republic of Love, Shields also charts the way beyond this impulse.

In Bridging Differences: Effective Intergroup Communication, William Gudykunst claims that to create positive expectations and improve our relations with members of other groups we need to first be aware of our stereotypical thinking and then use a corrective three-pronged approach: "changing our attitudes towards outgroups, increasing the complexity of our intergroup perceptions, and decategorization" (82). In The Republic of Love, Shields demonstrates the first requirement of awareness by presenting sex-role stereotypes as constructs of which the characters are conscious. Both Tom and Fay are depicted as musing over their own complicity with gender stereotypes. Tom is aware that "this business of being a guy, it never lets up," and he is beset by anxious musings over whether sleeping in pyjamas that have been left stuffed under a pillow in a ball or sleeping in "nothing at all" is "being a guy"

(44). In a similar scene, Fay is shown musing over what is appropriate for a woman her age: "Is this a thirty-five-year-old voice....Is this seemly? For a woman of my age?" (95). In having her characters consciously comply with stereotypes, Shields aligns this type of response and the social power of gender stereotypes with the human need to belong, to be accepted by peers and to be approved of by others in general.

The process of decategorization, however, is also ubiquitous in The Republic of Love. Shields's male characters possess what have been traditionally female concerns and traits. For example, Tom is preoccupied with body image--"belly fat...a disgrace"--and with his innards: "his kidneys he pictures as hard little lozenges" (18). Similarly he is not a "typical" male out to satisfy his testosterone-driven bursts of lust: he sees nothing sadder than loveless sex and is beset by "immense disappointment" with the idea of "love on the loose, on the lam" (236). In addition, Shields unveils the other side of some gender-specific stereotypes. One such is male jocularly. First, she establishes the accepted norm: "Men tend to make these kinds of jokes more than women, jokes that are meant to be chummy, to stimulate envy" (123). Then, she offers a specific example of how one man (Tom) responds to this kind of "male joshing": "He feels his mouth move sideways in what he supposes is a grin. A stone enters his throat, and the skin of his face freezes over. As soon as he can, he moves away to safer territory" (123). Fay's individuality, too, is set off

against what is the stereotypical norm. She avoids obsession with body image and seems to "possess none of the dissatisfaction that other women feel towards their bodies" (44-45). She does not take part in so-called typical female rivalry; her sister's beauty "has never given Fay anything but the most intense pleasure. Not that she expects anyone to believe this" (116).

* * * * *

Shields moves from a decategorizing and deconstruction of stereotypes to a more positive focus on shared realities. She explores the territories of maleness and femaleness and identifies a basic humanness: doubts, regrets, false fronts, longings, bewilderments and obsessions. Tom and Fay are not characterized primarily by their actions and roles in the domestic or public spheres, but by their inner reflections. The emotional life of a man is revealed alongside that of a woman, and, thus, Shields is able to encode in her fiction her belief that "men and women are more alike than we do admit" (qtd. in Wachtel, "Interview" 33).

As if to emphasize the similarity of the two sexes, the focus in The Republic of Love is often turned away from the gender-specific and binary oppositional and centered on the common human impulses that underpin some of the specific sex-role constructs. For example, there is a recognition that beneath what has been labelled the "male gaze" there may be a benign human impulse: "Beyond the tug of sex rides the simple wish to gaze upon what is

fresh" (96). The binary categories of male versus female are also often diffused in the images of the mutuality of couples. Fay's brother and his wife "balance between them...an image of that amorphous thing, they've brought into being, their love;" her parents "coax from each other's bodies new expressions of tenderness or definition" (116). Another couple is described as figuratively inhabiting the same skin: "meek, puzzled, country people with pink, plumped skin" (281).

One shared reality of men and women that has central focus in Shields's text is the need for intimacy. The structuring of the novel into parallel narratives provides a suitable framework for this inscription of the need for the intimate other as common to both sexes. There are scenes in the Tom and Fay sections that are so similar and so obviously intended as parallel that we cannot read the second without hearing echoes of the first. Similarly, Shields highlights this need with other characters, and, thus, we are encouraged to see the longing as one that is basic to humans.

The need to be connected drives people to strange couplings, furtive, abortive attempts that leave a bad taste in the mouth and, thankfully, a blank space in the mind. One of Tom's encounters was with "what's her name with the fingernails" (103); one of Fay's was with "who was he? who? tiny hands, thumping knees, panicked flesh" (108). Both characters are aware of and silently articulate the need for the intimate other: "When pushing up against the

world [Fay] needs companionship, someone by her side" (10). Some pages later Tom's need is exposed: "He asked for something. But it wasn't sex. What he wanted was something to love---someone, some person he could have" (105). To emphasize the need further, Shields provides examples of others who are shattered by loss of their loves. Onion, after losing her partner Storm to illness, is shown "feeling her loss, her injury, that shell of the self that breaks against another" (74). When Fay's father leaves, claiming that he needs space and air, free of "suffocating" warmth and loving, her mother takes to her bed and retreats into despair: "She's not reasonable, Not rational...She's suffering...it's heartbreaking" (312).

The envy and longing that besets the "have nots" of love when they are confronted with scenes of the haves is also registered with empathy and graceful prose. Tom is moved by the sight of a loving act of a father for his young child: "The tenderness of the man's bent head had reminded him of his own solitariness, how it was possible to get used to this condition and die of it" (166). A little later, Fay's longing is depicted with poignant force:

Occasionally, seeing her brother and his wife together like this, in a scene fragrant with earned exhaustion and with the mild, disordered pain of domesticity, Fay has felt herself suddenly starved of oxygen. Jealousy, or else panic, grips her at such moments. Will she ever own even a portion of what they so effortlessly possess? The question strikes like a blow and never fails to leave a trace of shame. (182)

As in pain, so in love, Shields's characters partake of "the privileged but

hackneyed citizenship in each other's lives" (247). Both characters, male and female, fall instantly in love, fire passionate declarations of love to each other across the sea, and offer evidence of a merging that is tender, soul-satisfying and free of power plays. "You are first in my heart," and "I want to have [your] child" and similar declarations tumble off the lovers' tongues (324, 265). Fay and Tom as individuals seem to dissolve into the mutual: awake, they "inhabit and cancel" hours together (253); asleep they are "locked body-to-body...in twinned silence" (276). Tom's thoughts are the declaration of all lovers of all times: "He's waited all his life for a time like this" (253).

Just after Tom and Fay merge into the mutual and the universal, they are both forced to leave their "immediate sphere of passion" because of the demands of a domestic life and familial connections--"human interferences...human needs" (333). In having the two lovers move apart when Fay goes home to comfort her mother, Shields emphasizes the fact that lovers cannot live in a two-person republic where the needs of and responsibility to a wider community of others is disregarded. Thus Shields adds to her exploration of otherness by also addressing the communal concept of other, showing that neither men nor women can exist exclusively in a world of romantic claims and needs.

* * * * *

In showing that Fay and Tom have multiple facets to their identities, Shields resists the notion of the self as a totality, a "snug, round universe"

containing that which is fixed and knowable. She depicts, instead, a flexible, fluid, "unstable" entity that can flow into and out of molds, that can, as Fay states it, "quickly drain away when brought face to face with someone else's identity (154). This attitude towards identity aligns Shields's philosophical vision with those of many of her contemporary Canadian women writers.

According to Carol Ann Howells, producing fiction in which there is no fixed procedures for self-discovery, in which the self is something that is constantly "reflecting, deflecting, fading back, re-emerging," is a feature of the Canadian novel by women, and aligns Shields with those writers who "provide models for the story of Canada's national identity" (3). Howells posits that women's stories register a search for validity and identity that can be read as analogous to the Canadian search for a distinct cultural image. If we accept this premise regarding Shields's work then we can read in The Republic of Love a validation of a cultural identity for which Canadians have often been apologetic--our lack of a fixed position, our fence sitting, our inconsistencies, contradictions and diversity. Revisioned, as they are in Shields's text, these traits do not connote the weakness of vacillation or lack of substance but the strength of flexibility and open boundaries. In this light, one can also see further evidence that Shields's concerns are not narrow, nor her subject matter "small;" although she leaves it to her readers to make the explicit connection, in her work the personal does become the political.

Shields's stance on the nature of identity thus seems to echo Margaret Laurence's famous declaration of the inherent paradoxical nature of existence-- "the river runs both ways" (The Diviners 1). Indeed, this image is explicitly invoked when Fay is dining with the Australian folklorist, Dr. Fletcher Conrad, and looks out the window of the restaurant to see that "the current of the river shifted, and a drift of wind made it hard to know which way the river was flowing" (59). The Republic of Love is designed to deconstruct any set notions about who or what is up, who or what is down and encourages us to be open to "flowing" either or both ways at once. In her handling of the issues of motherhood, language and stereotypes Shields leaves us with the insight that we need to experience as much as possible, "the other way."

While she envisions this experience in terms of a love relationship in The Republic of Love, elsewhere she suggests that it can be attained by anyone, anywhere, in moments of transcendence over otherness. In a travel piece entitled "Encounter," which appeared in Without a Guide: Contemporary Women's Travel Adventures, Shields tells of her experience of being in Tokyo "to attend a conference [as] one of a thousand or so delegates" (225), looking for something that "was worth the effort"--some "shock of otherness that arrives from time to time, rattling loose your bearings and making you suddenly alert to an altered world" (226). What she did find is what she so often provides for her readers, not the "shock of otherness," but an experience of

mutuality and transcendence. As she recalls, while walking to an evening banquet at the Imperial Hotel, she was offered protection from a sudden rain shower under the umbrella of a stranger whom she by chance encountered on her route. Strangers in language too, they walked in congenial silence, "as though we had each admitted to the other that language was absurd, that rhetoric was a laughable formality that could be set aside for this brief interval" (227). In her description of the effects of this moment we can read a recognition of a human connection that goes beyond language, culture, age, size and gender:

Suddenly careless of social taboos, and because it's difficult for a short woman to walk with a tall man under an umbrella, I took the stranger's arm....Now, arms linked, we were able to walk together smoothly, stepping over and around puddles without losing our stride....a forward rhythm with a very slight sideways roll like a kind of swimming. Our mutually constrained tongues, the sound of the pelting rain, and our random possession of a random moment in time, seemed to seal us in a temporary vacuum that had nothing to do with Japan, nor with gender or age or with Hollywood notions about men and women walking in the rain. This was a good walking, though, I knew that much--walking that transcended mere movement. Hypnotic walking, walking toward the unimaginable and I found myself wanting it to go on and on." (227-28)

It is in this union of "walking together" and in the image of the umbrella as a protective "roof" over both men and women that we can best situate Shields's affirmative feminism.

It is her belief that "we are all born with a full range of sympathy toward both men and women--and yet something, somewhere gets in our way and makes us strangers" even though "we have all been living under the same roof

all these years listening to the same ticking clock" ("Ticking" 258). In her fiction, Shields draws attention to the "something" that gets in our way-- unexamined acceptance of cultural icons, social stereotypes and gender asymmetry--but her resting focus is on the "full range of sympathy" that exists between men and women, whom she is able to bring together "under the same roof" in her fiction.

Conclusions

In Feminist Literary Theory, Mary Eagleton introduces a section on definitions of feminist writing by asking some fundamental questions regarding what constitutes feminist consciousness in literary works. Is women's writing to be equated with feminist writing? Are the writings of declared feminists automatically evidence of feminist consciousness? Does feminism lie in how open the works are to feminist interpretation, or how popular they are amongst feminists? Does the fact that the content of a work deals with women's experience warrant the label feminist writing? Eagleton feels that "these problems are not open to easy solutions" and then refers to the contributing authors of the series of articles to answer her own queries:

Both [Coward and Michele Barrett] agree that we cannot take "women's" writing to be a synonym for "feminist" writing: feminism is "an alignment of political interests" (Barrett) which some writers adopt and others not....Barrett agrees that an emphasis on female experience does not necessarily make the work feminist....Equally, an examination of authorial intention raises more questions than answers. Books conceived with the most laudable political motives can prove, on reading, to be lame and unconvincing. Conversely, books from authors with no particular sympathy for feminism are widely read by feminists and provide a rich view for feminist criticism....Readers too are unreliable guides. Coward makes clear that women-centered novels do not become feminist simply because feminists read them. (149-50)

After these insights on what cannot be assumed about feminist imaginative writing, Eagleton focuses on what she sees to be a defining criterion as outlined by Barrett: "it is not possible to conceive of a feminist art that could be

detached from a shared experience of oppression" (163). The articles that then follow Eagleton's introduction offer other defining criteria of feminist imaginative writing, and an expanded view of what feminist ideology can incorporate.

One article that is especially relevant to the argument I have been advancing is by Cheri Register who believes that "because of its origin in the woman's movement, feminist criticism values literature that is of some use to the movement" (169). As she sees it, one function that literature must provide in order "to earn feminist approval" is that it "serve as a forum...illuminating female experience" (170). Register believes that feminist critics look to literature to provide role models for women, "to introduce new possibilities and to help [women] evaluate the alternatives open to them" (171). A second criterion for Register is that literature should promote sisterhood, that it should foster a new sense of community among women "by recounting experiences that the reader can identify as her own, experiences that are, perhaps, shared by many women." Register then quotes Kate Millet who claims, "Insofar as we are able to learn and know of each other, we can acknowledge, and even in part assimilate into our own imaginative life, the thousand differences that have always been used as wedges to drive us apart" (172).

As well as emphasizing this need to recognize the positive aspects of difference, Register argues that literature should augment consciousness raising:

Literature should provide realistic insights into female personality development, self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and other "private" or "internal" consequences of sexism....The remaining tasks involved in consciousness-raising are left to the reader: to compare the problems encountered by female literary characters with her own, to explain similarities in terms of causes and to decide on appropriate political action. (173)

Finally, Register highlights a criterion--"cultured androgyny"--that accords with Kristeva's concept of third-tier consciousness: "Feminists want a new social order...for both men and women need new standards against which to measure themselves" (171).

If we use these five criteria to judge whether the novels of Oliphant, Eliot, Drabble and Shields have the necessary content and are thus useful to the women's movement, then we would have to conclude that all of these novels are "feminist." They all contain portraits of women that either point to or militate against the oppression of women. In Eliot's and Oliphant's works the oppressing of women is more evident; in Drabble's and Shields's texts strong, professional, family-oriented women provide role models that defy the view of women as subordinates. As well, all four authors provide illumination of female experience, acknowledgement and validation of female individuality and endorsement of female self- and political-actualization. In addition, in these texts the representation of these first- and second-tier feminist concerns and activities are augmented by third-tier feminist concerns, for all these writers highlight "new standards" against which men and women can measure

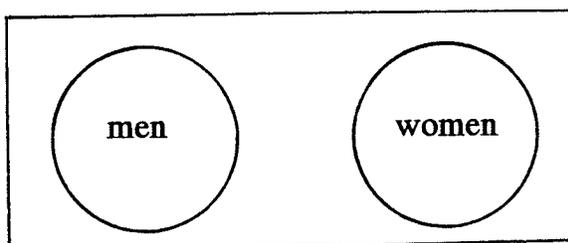
themselves in terms other than those dictated by a belief in patterns of domination and submission; they endorse angles of vision that ultimately go beyond patriarchal perceptions of gender asymmetry to an assertion of the mutuality of human experience. While there are some evolutionary developments of thought evident--Oliphant and Eliot have more first-tier concerns of equality and insertion into history than do Drabble and Shields--there is abundant evidence of third-tier consciousness in these artists of both centuries. What we can also uncover in their works is a remarkably similar, persistent and heightened awareness of the extent to which the so-called "two spheres" of male/female activity have striking similarities, because contained within each are areas of mutual human experience.

In order to endorse the fact of women's and men's shared realities, these four artists have had to chart a way through social perceptions and dictates founded on the beliefs that men and women do and should function in "separate spheres" of activities and consciousness, and that the male sphere should be accorded higher value. While this sphere consciousness is more overtly evident in the writings of Oliphant and Eliot than in those of Drabble and Shields, all four writers show evidence of incorporating deliberate strategies to deconstruct the validity of perceiving men and women in this fashion. While Eliot's and Oliphant's deconstructions focus more on showing that some women feel, think and behave as men do, Drabble and Shields have adopted, primarily, a reverse

tactic by showing how some men feel, need and aspire as women do. In doing so, the latter two writers have avoided the error of "replacing one faulty syllogism with another" --a trap that Janet Radcliffe-Richards, in The Skeptical Feminist, warns can await twentieth-century feminists who do not resist the debilitating modes of thinking that have characterized patriarchal cultures (72). Radcliffe-Richards implies that insisting on a position of dominance for women and relegating men to the position of repressed other is not a constructive strategy for feminists to take.

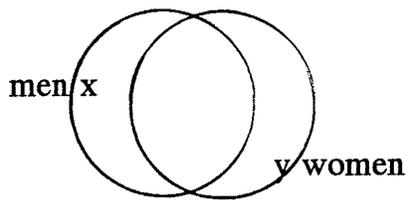
In a discussion of the use of the sphere as geometric metaphor for gendered cultures, Elaine Showalter provides a context that can help us identify the positions that Oliphant, Eliot, Drabble and Shields have adopted to revision gender relations without perpetuating sexual asymmetry. As Showalter explains:

In the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century the term "woman's sphere" expressed the Victorian and Jacksonian vision of separate roles for men and women, with little or no overlap....If we were to diagram it, the Victorian model would look like this:



Showalter goes on to explain that from cultural anthropology we get a twentieth-century revision of the separate spheres of Victorian times. To illustrate, she reproduces the diagram provided by Oxford anthropologists

Shirley and Edwin Ardener concerning the relationship between the sexes:



Commenting on the diagram, Showalter explains:

Unlike the Victorian model of complementary spheres, Ardener's groups are represented by intersecting circles. Much of the muted circle y falls within the boundaries of dominant circle x; there is also a crescent of y which is outside the dominant boundary and therefore (in Ardener's terminology) "wild"--a place forbidden to men, which corresponds to the zone in x which is off limits to women. ("Feminist Criticism" 200)

I would like to suggest that the sphere consciousness of Oliphant, Eliot, Drabble and Shields cannot be neatly separated into nineteenth- and twentieth-century modes. What we uncover in their writings is that, despite the social realities of the day, Oliphant and Eliot were as aware of the inherent overlapping of the spheres as are Drabble and Shields. Moreover, all four artists offer visions of social organization that are more in keeping with the Ardeners' views of intersecting circles, but go "beyond" the anthropologists' theory in that these writers also include a resistance to the traditional view of gender-wide "off limit" zones. They envision the off-limit zones in terms of social and cultural oppression. That is, all four writers deal, in some fashion, with those aspects of the masculine and the feminine that have not had validation under patriarchal

culture and which, therefore, offer what Cheri Register terms "new standards" against which men and women can identify themselves.

Oliphant's vision of new standards of social relations comes via her resistance to the usual ordering and evaluating of gendered experience. She accomplishes this realignment by demystifying terms and traits that are associated with zone x, those which Showalter terms "off limits" to women. Oliphant first depicts the public realms of the military, government and church as exclusive enclaves for men, ones that function as prime generators for the concepts of power, nobility, greatness, worthiness and brilliance. Then, however, she goes on to expose these terms as linguistic constructs appropriated for ideological purposes. First, the representatives whom she chooses from these fields--Colonel Chiley; Mr. Halburton, parliamentary member for the areas; and Archdeacon Beverley--exhibit traits that are, in many ways, diametrically opposed to those generally assumed to characterize those in the military, government or church professions; she, thus, deflates--reduces from an inflated condition--that which has had a hierarchical privileging and exposes the "common" human element in the area of male activity that has been "off limits" to women. Second, she describes a woman and her activities in the domestic social realm using the terminology that is usually reserved to connote the privileging of the male and his activities. Lucilla Marjoribanks becomes associated with all the privileged terms usually reserved for the male, and thus

the associations with women and the domestic/realm are elevated--raised in importance--and the notion that certain areas of human activities and positive human traits are "off-limits" to women is deconstructed.

George Eliot goes one step further than Margaret Oliphant and deals with those aspects of both sexes that have been "off limits" because of strict gender roles. One of her contributions takes the form of recuperating the emotional/feeling sides of men that have been "off limits" in our cultural notion of manhood. Daniel Deronda is characterized, largely, by his empathetic, intuitive nature and his ability to form close emotional bonds with men and women. His love for his guardian, Sir Hugo Mallinger, and for his friend and eventual brother-in-law, Mordecai Lapidoth, is documented with poignant sensitivity. Similarly, Deronda's genuine sensitivity to and compassion for Gwendolyn Harleth despite their lack of romantic involvement shows that male emotion can be extended and not "off limits" to women who are outside of romantic or marriage confines. Conversely, in the vivid portrait of Princess Halm-Eberstein, Eliot depicts the wild zone--y--of woman; she deals with those independent, ambitious, artistic impulses that can lie within the heart of women as much as in the heart of men. The Princess rejects her first-born child, her religious inheritance and the social roles prescribed for her; as well, she insists on the specificity and individuality of women--"my nature gave me a charter" (728)--which, as Eliot seems to imply, has been denied validation in a

patriarchal culture. Thus, both these nineteenth-century writers show that the social organization of separate spheres is one that serves the ruling hegemony rather than one that reflects anything in the nature of the two sexes. Oliphant offers a critique of male-privileged terminology, Eliot offers insights into sexual stereotypes that perpetuate the submissive-dominant paradigm of sexual relations, and thus, both evidence a form of feminist consciousness that goes beyond gender asymmetry and opposition.

The two twentieth-century artists, Margaret Drabble and Carol Shields, reject the notion of "off limit" areas altogether by giving the reader equal access to the sexual, psychological, emotional, domestic and professional aspects of the lives of men and women. The inner, emotional lives of Drabble's men are as accessible as the professional, public lives of her women characters. The "wild" zones of the irrational, the violent and the psychotic in the lives of the male and female characters, are explored equally. In addition, Drabble rejects the notion of a muted and a dominant culture. As someone who sees everyone's life as "a mixture of emotional experiences, self-analysis and going to the post office" (Hardin 290), she is able to highlight those emotional, reflective, domestic experiences that form a bond of commonality between the two sexes. All of her characters experience inadmissible longings; her lucky ones achieve "states of grace" in the form of spontaneous outpourings of joy or thankfulness for being alive and free. Her characters are depicted in states of inner

reflection; most are shown to be wrestling with some degree of the existential fear of meaninglessness. Everyone in her fictions eats and brushes his/her teeth; some characters are subject to toothaches, the flu and bouts of panic over their children. There is no clear boundary between the domestic and the professional realms, no division separating a male-type of response from a female kind, no acknowledgement of differences other than those marked by inclinations, abilities or personalities.

Drabble is quoted as declaring that "one of the reasons that women's novels are particularly interesting at the moment is that women are charting this ground where the rules have changed...[they] are writing about what happens next. Often with a very vague vision of the future. I'm trying to find out where we're going" (Cooper-Clark 22). Obviously, for Drabble, one direction we should be heading in is away from rigid sex role divisions to an exploration of the areas of mutual experiences.

In replacing spheres and circles with parallel lines to represent the male and female cultures, Shields accomplishes a mind sweep of effects. She does not erase difference--the lines are separate. But she does emphasize similarities and resists the representation of one culture as dominant over the other--the lines are parallel. Her intersection of the two cultures can come at any juncture. Her male and female characters Fay and Tom both have domestic and public/work lives--the separate spheres are rejected. Fay's female sexuality is as

accessible as a male's--the "y," "wild" zone is not unknown or "forbidden." Tom's male emotional life is as accessible as the female's-- the x crescent is not off-limits. What Shields offers to her readers is accessibility to the "cultures" of both genders, and an insistence on connections rather than conflict between the two.

Shields is very definite on her views of the relations between the genders. In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel she stated, "I really do think that men and women are more alike than we admit" (5). The Republic of Love is an attempt to identify and demonstrate the shared realities of men and women--areas of their mutual needs, motivations, vulnerabilities, and reactions. Shields is not interested in "the divisiveness of human society"; she is, instead, focused on "that rich potent, endlessly mysterious cement that binds us together" (qtd. in Metcalf and Rooke, Anthology 210).

Shields also identifies a fundamental principle operating in her writings and that of the other three artists. In an article she wrote for How Stories Mean, she declares the need for the stories of both men and women:

We want, need, the stories of others. We need, too, to place our own stories beside theirs, to compare, weigh, judge, forgive, and to find, by becoming something other than ourselves, an angle of vision that renews our image of the world." ("Ticking" 257)

To date, the history of the women's movement has consisted largely of a series of attempts to bring into focus the story of the "other" who has been

marginalized, muted, disregarded in some way. Creative writers have done and are still doing their share in documenting, illuminating and validating female experience to keep women from the position of other in a male-dominated society. As Shields notes, however, "this situation has been extraordinarily altered by legislation and a revolution in thinking" ("Ticking" 257). There is now a need also to document the "otherness" of men, to place their stories beside ours and to trust, as Shields phrases it, "the human core we all share" ("Ticking" 259).

This move beyond opposition, the exploration of men's and women's mutuality and the refusal to inscribe a faulty syllogism founded on domination and beliefs in superiority are ways in which these four creative artists can and have been of use to the movement. They point the way beyond destructive and debilitating modes of thought and perceptions--"formulas for thinking" in Eliot's terms. They, each in their own way, explore stereotypes, challenge assumptions of gender difference; they expose the ways in which social constructs pass for natural truths; and through narrative structure, voice and incident, they offer models of alternative possibilities and angles of vision that help us to see the complexity of human nature and its relations. Essentially, they offer us evidence that the third-tier attitude of commonality between the sexes is something that has already been given artistic expression; therefore, it should be considered another mental space within feminist criticism for feminist thinkers

of whatever gender to explore.

* * * * *

The need for feminist critics to focus on commonalities is addressed, albeit with a different slant, by Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller in the conclusion to Conflicts in Feminism. As an indication that, in the process of editing the text, they had "found [themselves] confronting surprising, sometimes upsetting, but always shifting areas of disagreement" (380), they write separate concluding statements that appear as a final "conversation" in matching columns down the pages of the text. The format of the "dialogue"--separate, yet together as parallel discourses--and their views on the direction to be taken in the future for "the political as well as intellectual well-being of feminist theory" (385) offer insights that are evidence of the third-tier brand of feminist criticism and a format that demonstrates how form can reinforce content.

Fox Keller offers a caution: "We have learned well the lesson that differences can be suppressed; I suggest we need also to learn that commonalities can be as facilely denied as they were once assumed." She then goes on to declare what feminist theory "needs":

It needs, at the same time, to include as assiduous a search for, and recognition of, commonalities as we have mandated for differences. After all, the constructive and pleasurable practice of conflict presupposes both the existence and the possibilities of connection--connections that are never either guaranteed or secure, but instead motivating precisely because of their contingency. (384)

With a different focus, Hirsch calls for feminist theorists to acknowledge and deal with the differences among women. She cites the case of a young Chicana feminist woman who insisted that she felt more deeply connected to Hispanic men than to white women. Hirsch tells of the initial shock and fear that she experienced when faced with this threat to the solidarity of the feminist project:

I argued back, heatedly, passionately, terrified that if what she said was true I would lose what I had been building--personally and theoretically--for fifteen years. It took a long time for me to acknowledge that I was trying to argue her out of her experience. Her experience threatened me profoundly, and with my defensiveness I was only confirming her point. (383)

Hirsch goes on to claim that in their recognition of the positive aspects of differences, feminist theorists "might be able to agree about at least some of the work that lies ahead, perhaps even regain, around certain issues, the power that comes from solidarity" (385).

How to deal with the complexity of the co-existence of commonality and difference in the discipline of feminist theory is a concern at the center of this dialogue and is one that has ramifications for the third-tier brand of feminist criticism. The form Hirsch and Fox Keller choose for the expression of their dialogue--parallel columns-- provides, in a way, an answer to the philosophical query. For, if what has been envisioned as polar opposites can be revisioned as parallel entities within a reality, then the focus can shift from opposition to convergence and co-existence. A third-tier brand of feminist criticism would

extend what Fox Keller and Hirsch demonstrate about feminist theorizing, then, to apply to the subject of the theories: the relationship between the sexes. Retaining an acknowledgement that some fundamental differences do exist between men and woman will keep feminist theorists from doing what Fox Keller reported: trying to argue people out of the realities of their experiences. Directing its focus on the commonalities, the shared realities of men and women, as they have been delineated by our creative artists, will offer what Fox Keller calls for--"the power of solidarity." This affirming focus has a chance to provide feminist criticism with what these two feminist theorists both call for: "a forward momentum" (385) that is both new and positive but one that incorporates and is respectful of other modes of thought that have come before or co-exist at present.

In considering the direction for future scholarship, we can conclude that the type of methodology called for by this brand of third-tier feminist consciousness is an eclectic mix, especially of the interdisciplinary kind. For, in refusing the boundaries between disciplines, we can reinforce the challenging of rigid gender boundaries and, perhaps, in the future, even challenge the entrenched boundaries between the two gendered-coded, dominant-submissive spheres of "science" (male) and "literature" (female).

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview with Margaret Drabble

(October 10, 1994, at Chateau Lake Louise, Banff, Alberta)

In her fiction Margaret Drabble repeatedly encourages her readers to join her in a mutual journey of invention and discovery. Her insistent "authorial intrusions" draw us into the process of creation and, in a way, demand that we puzzle over and speculate on the complexities and peculiarities of human nature and behaviour along with her. In her resistance to the notion of an all-knowing author and her awareness that "omniscience has its limits" (Realms 341), Drabble also deconstructs the assumption that an artist is an oracle of universal truths. What we get in her fiction, then, are layers of theories, hosts of possibilities and endless multi-voiced speculations.

The rhetorical device of the question is central to Drabble's insistence on engaging her readers in an on-going dialogue. Apart from the overt directives to the reader--"invent a more suitable ending if you can" (Realms 356)--Drabble creates narrators and characters who are constantly examining the world via a process of probing questions. For example, in The Realms of Gold, she depicts Frances Wingate as having received a compliment with a "curiously insincere tone" from a colleague at a conference. Frances's queries into the motivation behind this action are phrased in such a way that the reader is called upon to provide answers on the basis of his/her own experience: "Why [did] he employ it? Was it simply to prevent himself from sounding foolish? Or was it meant

to intrigue? Or had he got a lot to hide?" (49). No answers to these queries or the multitude of other questions throughout the narrative are ever given.

Questioning remains, then, as a stylistic device that insists on reader-writer engagement and exchange.

In the following interview, I asked the questions; Drabble provided *some* answers, but she leaves us, at the end of this exchange, where she leaves us at the end of each query within her narrative--asking "but why?"

* * * * *

Q. *With whom do you have a stronger affinity, with your predecessors, the nineteenth-century novelists, or with your twentieth-century contemporaries?*

A. That question is very difficult to answer because I do have a very strong sense of the nineteenth-century novel. When I started writing in the early 60s, I looked to the nineteenth century for the tradition and the continuity; but, of course, as I've gone on writing I've got to know more and more twentieth-century writers, my contemporaries. For example, I discovered Virginia Woolf, who I hadn't read at all when I started writing, so it has been a developing pattern, really. There are some twentieth-century writers by whom I have been very much influenced: Virginia Woolf and, in a strange way, Doris Lessing; but, I do continuously look back to nineteenth-century writers as well.

Q. *Are you aware of any stronger sense of affinity with male novelists than with female novelists?*

A. There are some male novelists who have influenced me very profoundly, yes; it would be hard to say more or less. I've certainly been influenced, probably for the worse, by Henry James, and also, in a positive and very strong way, by Angus Wilson, a British novelist. There are also some American writers; Saul Bellow is one. It is not very obvious in my work, but he had a very strong influence on me when I started writing. So, it's not just the female tradition.

Q. *I would be interested in hearing about the influence of two of these writers: Doris Lessing and Saul Bellow.*

A. Well, partly I'm impressed by the sheer courage and scope of the writing in both cases. Doris Lessing has had children; she has had the sort of struggles that women have had (her Golden Notebook is an archetypal novel of women's struggles). So I suppose I feel a lot of familiarity with the subject matter but also with her way of looking at things, which is very radical. She doesn't go back to the nineteenth century; she looks at what she sees in her present world and tries to do something with that. With Saul Bellow, what influenced me, when I was young (about 19 or 20) and first started reading him, was the feeling that a writer could use the contemporary world to create something serious and profound. He demonstrated that not everything momentous happened in the past. He has this wonderful way of dealing with daily life in a mythic way, and I think both of these writers have that sense: the present is not

trivial; the present is exciting and important.

Q. *One thing in Doris Lessing's "present" is her depiction of madness as an area of consciousness that is positive rather than negative. Is this unique way of looking at madness what you mean by "radical"? I think that is the term you used.*

A. Yes, I did use the term radical. Yes, her way of looking at madness is one way of being radical. She enables us to look at things in a way that no one has perceived before; she gets rid of the conventions of perception and asks us to see what we see rather than what we are told to see. I think she is brilliant at that. We are led to look at something and wonder why is it behaving in this very peculiar way. There is a British school of poetry called Martian poetry in which a poet, appearing to be a Martian, looks at the peculiar way people behave on earth and wonders why. Doris Lessing has been doing that for years--looking at the way we behave and saying, "really, how peculiar the human race is."

Q. *She makes us, the readers, the aliens, and allows us that perspective?*

A. Absolutely. She pulls out and back and looks in from a very, very long distance, and yet what she is looking at is people doing quite ordinary things.

Q. *You spoke of Sam Bellow's mythic perspective. In Henderson, the Rain King, there is a strong sense of the mythic, the "other worldly." Is that element something you have in your fiction?*

A. Well, I don't have enough of it; it is something I greatly admire; it is something that I feel I should allow in more. It is something I admire, because I can't quite do it.

Q. *But, some who do it well are misread. Jack Hodgins is a West Coast writer who has distinct other-worldly elements in his texts. In a review of The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne one critic referred to the mythic elements as "delicious puffs of nonsense about nothing" because she was reading his text with a particular definition of "reality." I'm interested in your view on reality, what is "real." You have a lot of historical chronicling in your fiction: life in Thatcher England, life during and after Pol Pot in Cambodia. Where, for you, are the boundaries between fiction and history? You have shown, in your writing, that fiction equals history; do you agree with Hayden White that history equals fiction, that there isn't a very strong boundary between the two?*

A. History certainly is fiction. More and more, now, we are aware, when we look at the way history has been written and presented to us, that people make up stories not only to make sense of the past but also to try and understand what we are doing in the present. I think there is no boundary, really. I think what fiction gives is a very great freedom to get rid of the desire for a certain literal accuracy and an underlying pattern. Yes, writing fiction does give a great sense of liberation from the details you don't need, but, on the other hand, the relationship between history and fiction is very close. You don't

want to create a fiction--or I don't--that has no relation to life; there is a constant interchange between the two.

Q. *In an interview in 1992, which was aired on CBC, you stated that you couldn't write from the viewpoint of those who were actually at war. I quote: "I couldn't find it in myself to write about the military or murderous act." Yet so much historical documentation has focused on military or murderous acts. As an artist, are you therefore consciously rewriting history or writing that part which has been left out of historical documentation?*

A. That is a very good way of putting it, yes. A lot of history is the person who isn't doing the murdering but who is being murdered and left by the wayside, or picking up the pieces. Yes, I suppose I am doing what you say, but I'm doing this partly because I simply cannot do the other thing. I just don't have any murderous instincts. I look at the newsreel of Yugoslavia, and it is quite obvious that a lot of people are enjoying fighting, but I find that very hard to enter into. What I see is the huddled refugee in the corner and the people who wish that they hadn't started all this off in the first place. So, yes. I am writing the history of the people who aren't the combatants.

Q. *But you wrote about Paul Whitemore in A Natural Curiosity. What was the impulse behind writing about someone who was a mass murderer?*

A. I have a fascination with writing about what I can't do--I mean the fascination of the difficult, writing about the kind of person I really don't

understand. And, I suppose, I have always been interested in psychopathology. I think we all are; we don't admit it, but we are interested in extremes of pathological behavior. There is an awful lot of pathological behavior going on in urban life at the moment, people shooting one another because someone smoked a cigarette in a restaurant, that sort of thing. There is a lot of really mad behavior, and I suppose I was asking myself and the reader whether we think it has to do with a sort of post-industrial urban concentration or whether it's that some people are just born barmy. That is a perfectly possible explanation: some people are born odd; they are no more interesting than that; they are just a fault of nature. I suppose I was exploring that kind of debate within myself. Every day in the newspaper there is some incomprehensively violent act, and sometimes when you look at the history of some people you find out that they were abused as children or their mothers abandoned them or there is some reason for their odd behaviours. But sometimes there is no reason. I find that just fascinating. To me Paul Whitmore poses an extreme question about human nature.

Q. *So do you identify with Alex?*

A. Yes, in having an insatiable curiosity, just wanting to know what it is that makes that person tick.

Q. *Did you feel compelled to offer us the theory that his mother had not loved him properly?*

A. Yes, to me that is the easiest story to write, and I think it is a very convincing story. When one looks at the histories of people who do go mad with a shot gun or snipe on towers, one usually finds an unsatisfactory parent. It seems so simple to put it that way, but there is very often some truth in it.

Q. *Ah, simple but often true. I want to ask you now, about the true-to-life, about verisimilitude. Carol Shields is a writer who consciously writes about domestic detail because she feels that the domestic detail of women's lives has often been left out of fiction. Do you also consciously choose to include the domestic?*

A. Well, it's not very conscious. I just can't resist documenting domestic detail because I find it absolutely compelling the way people lead their domestic lives: the things that some women are good at, and some women are bad at, and those things we all do every day. I just find the daily extremely interesting.

Q. *Were you working from the premise that the "daily" had been left out of fiction and needed to be documented?*

A. When I began writing I wasn't aware that it had been left out; I wasn't aware that I was doing anything particularly interesting. I was just doing what I was doing. As I continued to write, however, I did become aware that a lot of this had been left out because people would point to it and say "that's interesting; I haven't seen that before." But since then there has been quite a lot of writing about what people throw out, which is an archaeological interest:

what's in the dust bin, what we dig up. I have noticed that people have become increasingly interested in that. To me it was a very early obsession: the dust bin, the trash can, the garbage, the gazing in the refrigerator, all that.

Q. *Engaging in the archaeology of our society while we are still in it?*

A. Yes. I didn't set out with a conscious approach; I just became terribly interested in these details.

Q. *So it isn't from an overt philosophical, political perspective that you are writing this way? It is just an interest in the details of life?*

A. Yes, and I have since rationalized my interest in various ways. One of the things I would never have thought of ten years ago is that it is partly an ecological interest. Just think of the amount of stuff we used to throw out that we are now more conscious of, because we read about environmental concerns. We are all worried about whether things are biodegradable or not. In a landscape like this [*points to Lake Louise*] everything is so pure, and then we go back to the city and everything is so dreadful. So it's not simply the domestic aspect; the domestic is the global, eventually. I find that premise increasingly interesting, but I certainly didn't think about it in the 1960s.

Q. *Yes, I can recognize the wedding of the domestic and the global in your writings. But there is another pairing in your fiction that is interesting, and that is of the domestic and the unsavory, even the grotesque. I am thinking in particular now of Janice Enderby in A Natural Curiosity. In one passage you*

have her recoil in disgust and nausea when she looks at egg whites and their mucous-like blobs. You also write about her having her menstrual period and being worried about spotting and smelling. I haven't read about those particular things in fiction before. Can you recall when you were writing those passages, was there was any obvious decision "I am going to put this in"?

A. I knew people would find it nauseating, which they did, but at the same time I knew that a lot of people must feel these feelings. Yes, there is a feeling that you have when you know it is going to be horrible to some people, and then you know you've got to stick with it because you probably are breaking a taboo.

Q. *Is it important to you that you break some artistic taboos?*

A. Important? I don't know whether it's important. I know that I am writing interestingly when I am writing something that I know is slightly near the edge of acceptability, so maybe breaking taboos is important. But not for a philosophical reason, as you are suggesting; it is more a sense of let's see if we can write about that in a way that makes sense, and let's see if people can take it. Sometimes, of course, they can't take it. Yes, I suppose it is a curiosity about how far one can go.

Q. *Is there something that artists should not include in their writings? Is there a boundary beyond which you as an artist should not go?*

A. That is an extremely interesting question, and I don't know the answer. I

think that writers have different answers for themselves. We all have our own personal taboos, one of which is writing hurtful things about people who are close to us. But of course some break that taboo, and maybe some of the greatest writing is writing that contains hurtful things about one's mother, husband, or child.

Q. *Is that because this writing comes from a well of powerful emotion?*

A. Yes, a deep source of very primitive emotion, and, of course, we edit out certain things or don't deal with them, for it is also true that it is artistically impossible to cope with certain things without betraying them. I will give you a very clear example. When my mother died, which was ten years ago, I thought I would be able to write about her. She was really a very strange woman, and my sisters and I talk about her a great deal, but I actually can't use her. I cannot get her down on paper. So there is obviously some inner taboo about her that I would breach if I could, or I think I would. So, why can't I? I don't know.

Q. *Do you think of taboos that your readers might have?*

A. No, I don't care about those. I mean, if they don't like what I'm writing they can go and read somebody else's book.

Q. *They can close the book?*

A. Exactly. No, I don't worry about my readers' taboos. Similarly, when I'm reading other people's books I don't think that they shouldn't have written

about some particular thing because I don't like it. I just think okay, fine, that's not for me. I also think that way about violent films I can't take; I don't think that they shouldn't have been made. I may think the material meretricious or done for the wrong reasons, but I don't think that artists haven't a right to create what they have. People have the right to write about the holocaust; I think they have the right to write about extreme sexual deviation. I have just read a novel by Adam Hollinghurst called The Swimming Pool Library. It is the most extreme homosexual novel I have ever read, absolutely extraordinary and brilliant. In it he has broken every possible taboo. It is a brilliant piece of fiction, and I was overcome with admiration. That book deeply shocked a lot of people, but it also won a literary award. I think it is amazing that a book like this one can be published and can get a respectable prize. I mean, we have gone so far in the freedom of expression.

Q. *I want to get back to the detail in your novel for a minute and talk about a juxtaposition that frequently surfaces in your texts. We, as the readers, are drawn into your fiction because of your ability to make us live the life of the characters, live in the setting. But then you explode that illusion of reality with authorial comment; you draw our attention back to the fact that what we have is a story and a story teller. In fact, the opening of The Gates of Ivory is, "This is a novel." I find this interjection fascinating, but I have talked to people who say that having the author's voice coming in and chatting to them is*

disconcerting. I wonder why this technique appeals to me, why it doesn't to others, and, also, why you employ it.

A. You are obviously a sophisticated reader; you are what is called a trained reader. You know that there is a writer, you know that you are a reader, and you know that there are a variety of relationships we can have. The people who don't like this mode of writing are the people who use literature as escapism; they just want to forget themselves. I think this is right. Some people just want to forget themselves and go into a world that is nicer than the world they are in. They hate being jolted and reminded. I like books that have a certain amount of authorial intervention. It's nothing new, Jane Austen does it, also Trollope, Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot. The novel did it all the time until the late nineteenth century. Almost all narrators were interventionists, and then it became unfashionable, deeply unfashionable in the 1920s, and 1930s. But then intervention came back again in the 1960s, and that period of writing in which the narrator didn't intrude was quite a short period of a convention; adherence to it was really the aberration. A comparison can be drawn to the theatrical conventions in which characters don't speak to the audience. This practise is not the norm, for, in fact, in the vast history of drama, actors do address the audience; they know the audience is there, and they address the audience. So I think that I am representing the norm, the mainstream.

Q. *Do you feel uncomfortable assuming the position of the omniscient*

narrator?

A. Yes, I think it is a ridiculous position to assume, to assume that you know everything and that you are writing as though you are writing a history. How can we know all? Even historians don't know it all. So, naturally, novelists can't. The historians these days admit that they have no documentation of a particular event, and I feel, as a narrator, I can say exactly the same. It seems more honest to admit frankly that there are some things you don't know, some things you do.

Q. *Are you inviting us, the readers, to take part in the creative process? That is how I accept your overt intervention, as an invitation.*

A. Yes, it is a genuine invitation.

Q. *And could it also be read as an anxiety of authorship? Here we are getting into psychological territory. At one point in A Natural Curiosity you say, "this isn't a political novel, it is a psychotic novel," and you apologize to the reader. Also, in Gates of Ivory you question the reader about Liz Headland's motives, your knowledge of them, our knowledge of them: "does she know? do you know? do I know? does anybody know?" In that way, are you deliberately declaring your limitations as a narrator?*

A. Regarding that particular passage, my editor in New York said, "you can't do that; it's ridiculous. People will laugh." I said, "it is a perfectly serious question. I am not having it taken out." She said, "people will think

you are mad." I said, "I don't think they will think that at all." It is a serious question, and I see no reason that I, as a novelist, shouldn't create a situation in fictional terms to which I don't have a solution, just as in real life. I have given birth to a number of children, I have friends with tremendous muddles and worries, and I don't always have the answer. If I were a psychoanalyst, I might suggest rather than be certain of the answer.

Q. *As Liz does?*

A. Yes, exactly. One suggests; one doesn't declare. There is no one answer; there is just a range of possible answers, and it is perfectly feasible that a reader might know more about what Liz is up to than I do. I just try to describe what she is.

Q. *Well, you can tell your editor that you talked to one reader who found your questions delightful; I felt invited into the process. Your invitation creates an extra dimension for your readers. When we read a novel we have the privilege of going into the author's mind and, then, with your texts, we have another privilege: being offered a part in the creative process.*

A. The novel doesn't exist without you. The reason I write is to find out more about these people and about life "out there," as well as "in there." I mean, one hopes that readers may even give one the answer eventually. They may know; they sometimes do.

Q. *Your characters are fascinating. Your fictional men are kinder and*

gentler than a lot of male characters, for instance Margaret Atwood's. Her most sympathetic male character in The Handmaid's Tale, is the Commander but really he draws our sympathy more than he does our admiration. Brian Bowan, in A Natural Curiosity, is a man we can easily admire: his relationship with Steven is so beautiful and he is a man who is alarmed and disgusted by army life. Also, in Gates of Ivory, Charles Headland had a young man who did cleaning for him. Are you aware of resisting or trying to work against stereotypes in the depiction of your male characters?

A. Yes, I am aware of trying; one is always trying to avoid stereotypes. Stereotypes are slightly boring. But it is also true that the men I have known in life don't really correspond to the stereotype all that much, just as women whom I know don't. I think we live in a time when roles are changing very rapidly and even quite conventional-seeming men aren't as stuck in a frame as they used to be.

Q. I also see character pairs in your fiction. Rose, from The Needle's Eye, and Karel, from The Realms of Gold, are similar types. In fact they are so similar, they seem to be mirror images of one another--one male, one female. They can't say no; they give large chunks of themselves away and end up resentful. Were you consciously breaking down some of the stereotypical gender alignments?

A. Hmm, that's interesting. Not consciously. I do play with stereotypes

occasionally, almost as a joke, but with the principal characters, no. The people who most interest me and attract me in life and whom, I suppose, I've used imaginatively tend not to be very stereotypical, very male or female.

Q. *You mean that your men models have a strong feminine side and your women models have a strong masculine side?*

A. Maybe we are talking about writers here, the kind of people whom I tend to know. But, maybe people are much more fluid than the stereotypical fictional romance makes them out to be.

Q. *You have such a wide range of character types. On what do you want your readers to focus? Do you want to minimize gender differences or show the effects of gender socialization on motivation and character? Do you want us to focus on the shared experiences men and women have as human beings?*

A. Yes, yes! In Margaret Atwood's writings, and Fay Weldon's too, there is a slightly aggressive feeling that all men are dreadful. I think that these writers convey this attitude for a comic effect a lot of time; they do it as a sort of satiric exaggeration. Only occasionally does this attitude well up in me; I tend to dwell more on what we have in common than on what separates us.

Q. *And, what of criticism? Is this the direction that you think criticism needs to go now? Do you want it to focus on you as a female writer and talk about your experience as a female or would you like to go beyond gender differences? Do you have compliments or complaints about criticism as it is*

now?

A. Well, I have difficulty in answering that because I don't read a great deal of criticism. I find that it is slightly inhibiting if I read too much; therefore, I actually try to avoid reading about my own work. Occasionally, I am put in a position where somebody is working on my work, and I feel I ought to look at the criticism, but I don't, on the whole, read about my work or read about contemporary fiction. I find it worrying. Whether I agree with the critics or not, I worry. If I disagree with them I just feel annoyed and irritable that they have missed the point, and if I agree with them, I think I have wasted my time because I knew that already. What I experience is just a very human, ordinary feeling of irritation. I don't want to clutter my mind up with thinking about what other people are thinking in terms of critical response. If one worries too much about critical response one doesn't actually get on with the next book. Already I think there is a danger in some of my work, and in a lot of contemporary fiction, of worrying about reader response. When I ask the reader a question about what he/she thinks, I am not asking the critic. I am asking the reader who, to me, is a different person. I am not saying, "do you think this is a good device," I am saying, "do you know what is happening here?" I am interested in the material, and I find that too high a level of consciousness of critical theory is quite inhibiting. I take on board your question about being read as a woman writer, but I would like to get beyond that. Having said that, I

must acknowledge that a great deal of support for me has come from people who have seen me as a woman writer and, naturally, I feel a great kinship with other women writers, with women critics, with women readers. I don't draw much distinction; they are just people responding, obviously with great warmth, to some bits of my books.

Q. So you don't feel that you need to campaign for women artists or for female responses to your works?

A. No, I don't. It happens anyway. I am just interested in readers, be they male or female.

Q. Your last three texts were continuous novels in which characters keep appearing and reappearing. One theory is that continuous novels speak of the artist's fear of "The End" or of closure. While I mention that theory I must tell you my response. I was so pleased to see your characters of one text re-emerge in another because I had been wondering what they had been doing, and it was so delightful to meet them again, to see Constantine as a man, for example.

Why do you write a continuous novel? What are your impulses behind the lack of closure for some characters?

A. It is partly just for fun, curiosity again, because one wants to know what has happened to one's children or friends of one's children, so one is curious about the children in one's books: what would they be doing next? So it is just pure fun, some of it. I don't think it is fear of closure except in the very, very

simple, profound and terrible sense that we are all afraid of death, and afraid of our folks dying and our children dying. Sometimes it is nice to make sure that my characters are still alive. So there is a fear of closure, but it is not a fear of my coming to the end of the book; it's more a hope that things continue. There is something very easy and seductive about writing continuous fiction.

Q. *Is one of the reasons you become so attached to your characters that you don't want to let them go?*

A. There is a bit of that, but there is also an element of laziness.

Q. *You don't want to invent a new one?*

A. Fun and laziness have a great deal in common. When you think, "Oh now I need some characters for this party scene. Oh well, I will just grab some out of an earlier novel and give a little sentence saying what has happened to them." That's fun; that's pure fun.

Q. *So it's joy for you as artist to be able to do that, and you hope it's joy for us as the readers to meet your characters again?*

A. I hope it's amusing for the reader, but if they don't spot them it doesn't matter. With Constantine it is was slightly more serious because he is actually quite a significant figure in the novel. I suppose I am interested in the idea of the golden boy not being wholly golden and also in the speculation about what might happen to a child who had been brought up with a mother like that? It is fascinating.

Q. In "Archetype and Signature," Leslie Fiedler claims that realistic detail is but a vehicle; the artist's focus on his/her present allows the archetypal aspect to emerge. Also, according to Jung, the difference between the psychological and the visionary artist is that the former just deals with the raw psychological material of daily life, while the latter is a conduit through whom a creative imperative is expressed. Do you think of yourself as a conduit in that way?

A. Yes, I think one hopes to be, one does hope to be. I know that some people find the amassing of sociological or physical detail in my novels terribly irritating, but I just hope that through that detail, if I put it down, something will come through. I know that some thing is there, and if I put it down right maybe the other thing will also come through. There is a quotation from Zola that applies here. He was always accused of overloading with physical detail, and his explanation was that from the springboard of detail the writer takes flight into the symbol. I think that is very beautiful, and very true. Often the symbol is unintentional; as you write down the stuff, you realize you have reached some kind of other level.

Q. Are you ever in a position that H. Rider Haggard confessed to be in when he was writing She? He said the material came with such white hot heat that he couldn't get it down fast enough?

A. Occasionally, there are moments like that.

Q. *You have those experiences where there is a creative imperative that is driving you.*

A. Yes, and you just can't write fast enough. That does happen, and then there are the other dreary patches where it doesn't move at all.

Q. *What do you do when it doesn't move?*

A. Go for a walk. I just stop and do something else for a while.

Q. *What is, for you, the purpose of fiction? What does it encourage our society to do, and what do you hope your fiction does for your readers?*

A. Well, I don't see it doing anything; I see my readers and me all on the same journey. I think that I am asking questions, and the readers are asking questions, and I am certainly not telling them the answers. They can tell me the answers. I mean, I genuinely do see it as a journey; I see it as a quest; I see it as a pilgrimage, though not to a known goal, so it is more like a quest. I see fiction always as a journey, an exploration. I see it as a way of exploring the known world and pushing back its frontiers so that we discover things that we wouldn't have discovered if we hadn't been writing this fiction or reading this fiction. It is a way of entering other territories, other minds than our own. But sometimes I feel I'm saying to the reader, "Look, I bet you don't know this; I bet you haven't seen this particularly horrible bit of London or this particularly beautiful view, so here it is. Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it horrible?" And quite a lot of the time I am just trying to explore something for myself to make sense

of it. I feel that if I can make sense of it then other people will see the sense that I am making.

Q. *So what should we as your readers go away with from your novels?*

A. I suppose questions about what we are doing and what's happening next?

I always think that Doris Lessing is asking about what is going to happen in a hundred years; I am asking what is going to happen in five years, or the day after tomorrow. My focus is much shorter than hers. I am very conscious of asking myself, what are going to be the consequences of my own actions, of the actions of my characters. What is the world they live in going to produce for their children? What are we doing? That is the question I am asking, what are we doing?

Q. *In which novel did you deal with this question to your greatest satisfaction? Do you have a favorite novel of all the ones that you have written? Do you have one with which you identify the most?*

A. No, I haven't written that one yet. No, I always think the next one is going to be better. I have different feelings about the novels: with some of them I remember mostly the pain, the difficulties, and the problems, but with others---. When I did The Realms of Gold I had a great sense of fluency. I wrote most of it very happily and easily. I was really in quite a good mood when I wrote that text. Even though I haven't reread it in years, I still have a fondness for it. With the trilogy, [The Radiant Way, A Natural Curiosity, and

The Gates of Ivory], I thought I had gone into a slightly different gear, quite strong. I thought it didn't come as easily as The Realms of Gold, but I felt I had actually gotten a bigger range, and I had gotten some muscle into it. I was pleased with that. I was pleased with the scope of it.

Q. *You said that you wanted to leave your readers with some questions: what's next or what should we do? What's next for you? What is your next agenda? You have gone from the individually focused novel to the sociological novel. Do you have an agenda for a change of focus?*

A. Not really. At the moment I am writing this biography of Angus Wilson, which is really very, very hard work, and I'm writing two or three thousand words a day. I haven't had time to look beyond it. When I do look beyond it, I realize that various things have come to me during my research on that book. One writer whom I read, because Angus greatly admired him, was John Cooper. His book is really quite extraordinary; it is sort of a rustic, provincial novel but with the greatest psychological weirdness and violence. There was something in that novel saying to me, "there is something you can do here." When I finish my Angus book I may look at that novel as a possible source of something very interesting and very neglected, but I don't know. When I decide to write a novel but then realize that I haven't got the story, yet, there is two months of misery as I trudge around trying to get it down. The end result is sometimes so different from the original little flicker or impulse.

Q. *So sometimes it doesn't matter what your agenda might have been?*

A. Right. By the time I get to it I have forgotten what the agenda was.

Morris Stowe (*Drabble's agent*) has been trying to get me to commit myself to the next novel, to what it's going to be like, but I can't. At the moment, the forefront of my brain is full of Angus Wilson and Dickens. I am stuck in 1869 and 1970. Those are the years I'm writing about. I know, however, that underneath there is a whole lot of stuff bubbling about, which I can't begin to let out.

Q. *So you keep it held down until you are ready. I wish you luck in having the next novel "bubble" to the surface. And now I want to go back to a past novel and ask you one of those questions that a reader would love to ask an author. In Realms of Gold, Karel is such a likeable character, but periodically he beats his wife senseless. Why did you have him do that?*

A. Well, that is a very interesting question. I think it was something to do with the fact that quite gentle, patient people can be violent. It was partly to do with the fact that some people beat their spouses because their spouses are very annoying. I mean the stereotype that any man who beats his wife is a monster is just absolutely untrue, like the idea that any person who beats a baby is a monster; sometimes these people are just desperate, hopeless children themselves. So I think I was consciously trying to get away from the stereotype of the wife basher. I sometimes think, what if my father had just stood up to

my mother once--she was such a cruel woman. If only he had, just once; he was so gentle and patient, and she was remorseless. So I think there was something in there about my father, possibly. I think I was doing something with him, and also with the fact that human beings are just so incredibly peculiar that we must forgive all. It's no good coming along with prim little moral judgements.

Q. Your concern, then, is to give us a look behind the public image of a wife beater, a look at the individual and not the action, to provide your reader with constant encouragement to see other than categorically, to see other than stereotypically.

A. Absolutely, absolutely, don't trust a sort of newspaper judgement.

Always ask yourself when you read the verdict, "yes, but why?"

Appendix B: Interview with Carol Shields

(May, 1993, in Winnipeg, Manitoba)

The dialogic is of fundamental importance to Carol Shields: it informs the structure and overall format of her fiction and the handling of voice and perspective within her narratives. Significant public recognition of this dialogic aspect is concretely evidenced in the recent (1991) one-volume publication of her two novels, Happenstance and A Fairly Conventional Woman. The former is the story of a man's experience when he stays at home to tend to household and family while his wife goes off on a quilting convention; the latter is the story of this woman's experience at the quilting convention. Obviously, publishers recognized that the two stories form one "conversation" on a particular event in a couple's life, and that the reader's experience would be enhanced by having both stories bound in one volume.

An emphasis on the need for dialogue is also evident in Shields's recent award-winning novel, Stone Diaries, in which one woman's life is told from a multitude of perspectives. Excerpts from diaries and letters, as well as inner reflections of friends, family members, and the central character herself form parts of the mosaic representation of Daisy Goodwill's life.

Shields's desire to "let all the voices in" is equally evidenced in the way she engages in frequent dialogue with her public, her community of friends, readers, critics and reviewers. She is gracious and generous with her time and

her attentions. She willingly grants interviews, writes essays and introductory missives for others' books; she speaks at conventions, community gatherings, *kaffee klatsches*; she gives readings in book stores, in public libraries, at universities, and most recently in a massive auditorium in New York city. Her engagements are never totally monologic in nature; she always spends time in asking questions, listening, commenting, gathering in other voices, other perspectives.

It was, significantly, in the course of a conversation I had with Shields one May morning while driving with her to one of her reading engagements that she agreed to the interview that follows. We were talking about the anger and obvious pain that often surfaced when women talked about patriarchy and their struggle for liberation. During this dialogue, she commented on the need for men and women to talk to each other, to try to understand each other, and then said emphatically: "We simply have to get beyond blame." The views she offers here provide far-ranging insights into how this might be achieved.

* * * * *

Q. If I had to name one central assertion of The Republic of Love I would cite the need of the intimate other as fundamental to life. Would this be a fair definition of a central thesis of your text?

A. Yes, I think it is. That isn't to say that I don't feel uncomfortable with this assumption, because there is something rather smug about it. Certainly I

think that people who live alone, who are not part of a couple, are not necessarily living a life that is pathetic in any way, or even lonely; but there is a part of human need that involves a search for the other, that ultimate intimacy, and I suppose in our society and our culture we arrive at that traditionally through marriage. For all the things that are wrong with marriage, it seems to give us that one chance to really know an other.

Q. Is this knowledge of the other truly a knowledge of someone who is alien or other, or is the "other" a type of self projection? In other words, is love essentially narcissistic?

A. No, I don't think so. There is a certain amount of the wish to be adored that accompanies the so-called "in love" stage. But I think love, the reaching out for another human being, is truly the Martin Buber "I-thou" relationship; one feels one's self is that person. You touch the other so intimately, and your care for him/her is so great that you can actually feel what it is like to be that person. I think that is one of our great longings in life--to be that close to another.

Q. Is this longing also one of the causes of the emptiness of modern life? There seem to be a lot of people who do not have that "I-thou" relationship.

A. I don't know. Most of the people I know are involved in a friendship, in a relationship with a child or a relative, not just a marital partner. There are ongoing, continuing relationships in their lives that they value, and what are

those relationship composed of? They are obviously composed of very sensitive intimacy. I used to hear people talking about how we search for the one who completes us. I am not sure I would think of that. We search for the one who answers us in some way and touches us at that intimate place where we touch that other person. I don't know many people who are not involved in intimate relationships, but I do know that loneliness is the disease of our times. So I suppose that there are people who don't have a perfect assurance about their relationship, who feel that they are always having to have it affirmed. I am talking in this book (The Republic of Love) about the kind of relationship that doesn't need constant affirmation, that, for want of a better phrase, we can take for granted; we can relax into it and just let it become part of us.

Q. You seem to be talking about some of the dangers of loneliness, of not having the other. Are there some dangers in having the intimate other? Is there a certain amount of distance and difference necessary in a relationship so that we don't become subsumed, or in the terms of Fay's father "smothered"?

A. Yes. I think that getting this love relationship just right must be the trickiest thing in the world--too much love, or not quite enough, or always having it just the way you want it--and yet it does happen. I think people are able to find that balance, maybe not at first, maybe it takes a long time for it to happen, but I think it can happen. I always think it is such an extraordinary miracle, the sperm hitting that egg and conception just happening, but it does,

doesn't it? Most of the time there is a healthy baby. I think that conception is no more miraculous than finding a happy balance in a love relationship.

Q. So conception is an analogue for what happens with the meeting of two souls?

A. Yes. It is possible.

Q. Can we use the relationship between author and reader as analogous to the relationship between self and other, and are there some boundaries to this relationship, some areas of shared reality that can't be inscribed?

A. Well, when I am writing I don't usually think about the reader because that would paralyse me; and it is not that I am talking to myself either. The sensation I have when writing is that of talking to the typewriter, or to the paper, or to this thing that I am making. So the reader, at that point, is outside. But then, of course, I do think about the reader, particularly in an area as delicate as this, because the last thing you want to do is to shut the reader out of your story in any way by smugness or by making declarations about the only way that things can be done or achieved.

Q. So you accept that there are boundaries to this relationship that the artist shares with the reader?

A. Yes, and I also think that I can't expect to connect with every reader. I can only talk to a certain kind of reader, and I don't expect everyone who opens my books to connect with me. I don't connect with half the books that I open.

It is very much like the network of one's friends. I always think that the people who read my books and respond to them are people who would be my friends; in fact, I met a woman who said she feels that she *is* me when she reads my books. It was the nicest thing anyone ever said to me.

Q. You mention friends as important kinds of readers whom you would like to reach. Are there any other terms that you could use to describe a reader whom it's important for you to reach? Can you describe this reader in gender terms?

A. Well, sometimes when I am in the middle of writing a book, when confidence fails, I think: who would be interested in this--and then I have to think, well, maybe there are one or two others. Sometimes I can imagine them, and often they are my daughters. Then I think, if there are two or three others, then maybe there are two or three hundred others. So there is this sort of mythical readership that I can call on, feel friendly toward and talk to.

Q. Is this readership for you often, always, sometimes female gendered?

A. I hope not. No, I don't think of my reader as being of a particular sex. My earlier books were very much considered women's books, but that was in a very curious time in our history when the kind of books I wrote were described as domestic. We all now agree that everyone has a domestic life. We used to just pretend we didn't. I never thought for a minute that the domestic life wasn't important to write about. I never doubted its validity but, I must say,

other people did. Of course now that men are writing so-called domestic novels they are not called that at all; they are called sensitive, contemporary reflections of modern life.

Q. You spoke of having your novels labelled as fiction for women, and from what I read of your reviews they certainly aren't considered that now. Did going to the dual perspective, having both male and female characters sharing the narrative, grow out of a concern that your novels would be considered for women alone?

A. I will give you the old answer--yes and no. The first two books (Small Ceremonies and The Box Garden) that were from a woman's perspective, from the first-person perspective, had men in them, so although it wasn't a shared perspective, I felt that the weight of those men's lives in the book was fairly heavy. So in a sense men were included, and I like writing about men. It was at a time when I was thinking a great deal about gender (and I seem to be doing that still), but I was curious about the way in which we understand each other and fail to understand each other. So, yes, the idea of writing Happenstance from a male point of view did come out of being tired of being called a women's writer. Although to tell you the truth not that many people did call me that, maybe one or two, but I took it very much to heart. Men review books in this country, and a lot of men were reviewing my books. For example, my books were reviewed by William French who always damned me with faint

praise, thinking I would be a fine writer if I ever found a subject worthy of my abilities. That was how he put it--meaning that he thought I should stop writing about women in domestic situations, I suppose. So I did think that I would try to write from a male perspective; I did not have the courage to write from the first person's point of view though, and I wanted, in any case, to try to write a third-person book and see what happened. So I wrote those two books, first Happenstance and then A Fairly Conventional Woman, one about a husband, one about a wife. But the person I feel closer to is Jack Bowman, the husband, in terms of his sensibility. Although, Brenda is an artist, and I feel that part of her is part of me too, Jack's basic life posture is one of watching rather than doing; he is someone who always stands slightly outside of events. This is how I have always felt. I had to write that book to know that. There are rewards in that stance and also losses. Nevertheless, I do feel that is where I am located and where, probably, most writers I would read are located.

Q. You are the watcher in your own life? You are the watcher in others lives?

A. Well, not in my personal life, but I suppose in my relationship to the world. I've never hurled myself into positions of organization, of doing or of real activism. I have tagged along now and then, but basically I have watched it happen. The 60s were very interesting years for me, but only because I was watching them happen, not because I was involved.

Q. Do you think, then, that to become a writer one must have a strong component of the watcher?

A. I do.

Q. Was the male perspective in the first person as easy for you to do as the third person?

A. Swann was a very interesting book to do because of finding different ways, different narrative lines. I found it far easier to make the gender hop in that novel than I did the age hop. It was easier for me to write about Morton Jimroy who was a man about my own age. Even though he happened to be a man and his sensibility was very different from mine, he was easier to create than Sara Maloney because I found it harder to imagine what someone 28 years old was thinking.

Q. That's interesting.

A. I have a romantic belief that men experience life very much as we do emotionally. There is the question of language, but that just requires paying attention to how language operates and what is really behind it. But men are as damaged as women by power, by powerlessness, by loss, by loneliness, by their need for the other.

Q. In The Republic of Love, you write that Fay and Tom inhabit different vocabularies. Is that what you meant, that they share emotional needs but they speak of them differently?

A. Yes.

Q. Are you conscious of trying to resist male and female stereotypes when you are writing?

A. No, I guess I am not. I try to resist other kinds of stereotypes. I was very anxious to subvert the stereotype of Winnipeg, for example. I wanted to show Winnipeg as a civilized society, a gentle society, an integrated society, and a society in which there was a summer, not just a winter. I didn't write all this down, but I made a mental list of the ways in which Winnipeg and Manitoba are thought of and tried to turn this upside down.

Q. I have talked to you about your desire to play with genre and you have mentioned subverting genre. What were you subverting in Republic? You mentioned subverting the idea of Winnipeg as a winter city. What else were you subverting?

A. The whole stereotype idea. I don't very often see decent people in novels, and why not? Some don't believe in them perhaps; but I do. I think there is an awful lot that doesn't get into fiction. I wrote about this idea in my essay in Anthology. It is the same thing in trying to find a love poem. One would think that love would be the subject of a huge bulk of our poetry writing. In fact, it's not. It's difficult to write about, and people have avoided it and have written about loss and longing instead. So I wasn't trying to subvert the love story; I felt more that I wanted to rescue it, hold it up against other major

themes, like war for example. Do I think love is a lesser subject than war? I do not. I think it is far more important than talking about war, or race relations, or these other things. Love is the basis of our lives. I don't think of it as a minor theme and yet we all know it's been relegated to Harlequin romance novels--serious, reflective people do not fall in love; it's embarrassing even to say so. I don't believe that for a minute, so I want to write about love.

Q. You want to write about love. What do you NOT ever want to write about? What stories would you not be interested in telling?

A. I would never write a war story. I mean THE war story, as it were, is entirely a male-modelled genre, and I have no interest in it at all. I think it doesn't involve much reflection.

Q. You are not interested in war in its pure form. What about the other types of war that go on and are really microcosms of macrocosms--the wars between people that lead to all sorts of human pain and agony right up to murder and death?

A. In The Box Garden I wrote about a kidnapping and I was very sorry I did that. It is one book I would recall if I could. What do I know about kidnappings and police? I felt I did it very flimsily, and I don't know why I did it. I don't think I'll make these kinds of mistakes again. I am interested in people's perversions and dishonesties to a certain extent and how they work those out, but violence has not been a part of my experience and I am far too

fond of my characters to want to do them violence.

Q. The other day I heard you make a statement about conflict. You said that conflict isn't about two people fighting; it's about the human heart fighting with itself. Is that accurate?

A. Something like that.

Q. Could you explain that to me?

A. Well, I think most of the dialogue that occurs in the world is what goes on in our own heads--us talking to ourselves. And this is where we are conflicted, I suppose, about right and wrong or attachment and detachment--all the things that humble us and trouble us. This type of conflict is a more realistic one in my life than actually battling it out with my colleagues or my family.

Q. What type of conflict are you concerned with in Republic? Are you saying that traditional conflict is not important?

A. I am interested in "what is important?" It seems to me that a lot of people think that one particular kind of thing is important. I want to jiggle that scale a little bit, and say, "Look, this isn't important. THIS is important." Some writers, especially playwrights, will often say, "the purpose of my play is to disturb you," and I sometimes say, "how dare you disturb me; you haven't earned that right yet. Why not bring me some wisdom, tell me what you've discovered, bring me some harmony, give me something else; you don't have to

disturb me. We go into the theatre disturbed already." I need someone to throw out an intellectual puzzle (I do love that) but I resent (here we are getting into ageism), I resent a 25-year-old playwright poking at me and saying "I want to disturb you."

Q. What do you want to do for your audience? Not disturb them, but what?

A. In a way, writing is like a conversation you might have with someone. You want to talk about these things. In Thirteen Hands, I want to present this notion I have of what goes on in small groups of people, how groups feed us and sustain us and in a way become an alternative to the family which has failed us to a certain extent in our society. I wanted to show how those stereotypical, "blue-rinsed" women are thinking individuals, worthy individuals, and how they often feel brilliantly alive in those moments when they come together with other people.

Q. Do you feel an affinity with 19th-century women writers because of this interest?

A. Yes, I think I do, and I feel a particular affinity with early 19th-century writers such as Jane Austen. She understands, I think, that fiction writing is making scenes. She knows how to create a scene, and this is one of the things that I am interested in doing, not just presenting the scene but furnishing it and lingering in it as long as I can, at least as long as it is paying for itself.

Q. Are there other 19th-century writers with whom you have a strong

affinity?

A. Yes, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, not Emily Brontë.

Q. Tell me about George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë and then also tell me about Emily. Why not the affinity with Emily? But tell me about the affinity with George Eliot and Charlotte first.

A. I read George Eliot before I read Jane Austen, which is not very sensible I suppose, but theirs were the first novels that I ever read about intelligent women, and I wanted to read about intelligent women, thinking, reflecting women. I was not finding these kind of women characters in my reading of contemporary novels in the 60s and 70s. I was reading about distraught, troubled women who didn't seem to have much power of reflection, much of a sense of loyalty, for example. George Eliot's women understand what loyalty is, and integrity. I think contemporary women do too. I don't see why they have so much trouble finding a place in fiction, why we are not writing about those women.

Q. So with George Eliot, it is intelligent women; what is it with Charlotte Brontë?

A. Oh well, Charlotte Brontë has so much wonderful narrative energy. I suppose I love that novel because of the narrative energy in it.

Q. Which novel in particular?

A. Oh, Jane Eyre.

Q. *And Villette?*

A. It was so long ago when I read Villette that I can't really talk about it except that I know it was a kind of novel that I just crawled into and happily stayed in as long as I could. What Charlotte has is the power to enthrall. With Emily it is exaggeration, a poetic exaggeration that I don't feel happy with.

Q. *What are some other affinities you have with 19th-century writers?*

A. Oh, the other thing is that they did understand the love story. They understood about the importance of finding the Other and weren't ashamed of it.

Q. *Did they have to write their love stories in a covert as well as an overt way? Do we have to do a lot of subtext reading in 19th-century fiction?*

A. I think so. I can talk for a minute about Susanna Moodie's stories. She wrote terrible novels and there are people who think that her Canadian books aren't that much better, but there is a subtext in them. A lot of people think that she was conscious of the subtext and felt that she had to hide things. I think that she was unconscious; she was very much a feminist, who didn't know she was a feminist and perhaps hadn't articulated these things even to herself. Nevertheless, if you read Roughing it in the Bush carefully you find the same motifs coming back and back, that of the strong female figure nursing and nurturing the weak, prone male. So that has to tell us quite a bit I think.

Q. *You see that as subtext?*

A. Yes, when Susanna Moodie talks about her better half you can almost see

her winking.

Q. What about the differences? How are you as a 20th-century woman novelist different from your 19th-century role models?

A. Ah, that's an interesting question. Well, I suppose just the furniture that I am dealing with.

Q. Is there a difference in artistic licence?

A. Well yes, I suppose, although there is this wonderful thing about 19th-century novels--I'm thinking about Trollope. He was very free with his narrative technique and did interesting narrative things that we think we have just discovered now and we call them postmodern, but 19th-century novelists were doing this. They were using different points of view and interruption of the text all the time. I think that we can still feel a affinity with 19th-century novelists, that we are working in the same tradition. Of course we can go further in terms of the social context. We can be a lot more immediate in terms of our physical lives, for example, but I'm not sure that that has made such a tremendous difference.

Q. Has the women's movement had some effect on changing the kinds of perceptions that we all have of the world? I am thinking now of the use of the image of the sphere in the 19th century to represent the domains of the sexes--the domestic sphere and the public sphere. I don't detect those separate worlds in your novels. I see that what has been represented as a sphere has elongated

and flowed into parallel lines. So, if I were talking about how you represent the world of the two sexes I would talk of parallel lines rather than spheres.

A. Yes, probably.

Q. Would this perception, which is possible now, not have been possible in the 19th century?

A. I think George Eliot did that too. She brought male consciousness into focus as well as the consciousness of women. The interesting thing is that the novel is the only literary form in which women have participated from its very beginning. They have had a strong foothold in it, and I think it is the most important literary form that we have, partly for that very reason: that the novel has had two eyes to it instead of just one. Certain kinds of novels--the novel of action, the political novel, and some of the adventure novels--were out of the female's sphere, so women concentrated on the novel of relationships. Just by accident they arrived at the most fertile territory for novel writing. They were, in fact, handed this very small corner to cultivate, and it proved to be the most interesting corner, at least for me.

Q. Where should women's writing go now?

A. I would like to see more novels about intelligent women, instead of novels about women as victims. We were talking about Jane Smiley's novel A Thousand Acres. I think the book would have been better if the women characters had been stronger. Everything revolved around victimization: the

quarrel between the sisters was over a man, the quarrel over land was the result of the father's perversity, their own destruction was the result of their being victims of sexual abuse. Everything seemed hinged to victimization and to male authority. It would be interesting to see what would happen if women could be stronger in their novels and be fully human.

Q. What do you do with the topics of male authority and hierarchy?

A. Laugh at them a little bit. I wish we had more comic novels. Women's novels have not been very comical, and men haven't written many comic novels either.

Q. So we should not take these issues too seriously?

A. No, but I think we can look at male authority ironically, for example, or comically, for these are ways we can arouse a kind of distrust in it.

Q. Are you aware of having done a reversal in Republic? I think of Tom as anything but an authority figure, and I think of Fay's father as the more nurturant of the two parents. He is the one who listens and he is the one who gives her licence; her mother is the one who makes authoritative statements. Were you aware of inscribing particular traits on a male and particular ones on a female?

A. No, I don't think so. I didn't start to divide the screen between the male and female and balance them. I am never that deliberate about how things work out. Someone once said to me--this was after I had just published two or three

novels-- "Carol do you know how feminist your novels really are?" And I said yes I did. I knew right from the beginning, but I thought there might be another way to do it.

Q. Other than confronting?

A. Other than novels of polemic.

Q. Were you also conscious of showing a type of male that isn't often depicted in fiction?

A. No, I wasn't very conscious of that. In fact, maybe my characters are just the kinds of males I know.

Q. Have you had people comment on that before?

A. Yes, once about Happenstance; a CBC reporter said he thought that Jack Bowman wasn't very masculine because he didn't do any sports.

Q. I have another question on the male/female theme in Republic. Do you think that there is such a thing as "maternal instinct" and if there is, is this instinct an exclusive territory of females?

A. I certainly think there is maternal instinct. It is enormously strong biologically and inscribed in our culture. This is an extraordinary feeling, the desire to protect the creature who comes from us and is bound to us, and it's astonishing how it does work out. Often, young mothers talk obsessively about their children. This has to be biological. The focus of women is necessarily divergent in those early months. Mothering is all-consuming because that infant

is so helpless and needs complete protection, supervision and total nurturing. It's frightening but also exhilarating to find that you are totally responsible for another human being. That is the bond of love I think. Most people who have children are astonished; they have never thought of themselves as having maternal instincts and then they feel them. The biological attachment may make it more pronounced in women, but probably it is culture that has divided the father from the child.

Q. In The Realms of Gold, Margaret Drabble writes about Stephen Ollerenshaw who is looking after his infant daughter and is very much involved in the parental obsessiveness of care and protection. In fact, this obsessive concern causes him, in a fit of compassion, protectiveness, and insanity, to kill both himself and the child. In that text, there is a parallel character who is also very concerned about her baby, but the woman character survives and the male character doesn't. Drabble seems to be saying that a strong, parental instinct is there for all of us but maybe women have been socialized into knowing how to handle it.

A. Well, maybe it is socialization, but women are able, for whatever reason, to care deeply outside themselves for another, whether it's their children or not. I do think that women have this capability to a greater degree than men. Why would that be I wonder?

Q. Is it nature or nurture--the old debate. I am also interested in the types

of female imagery that you have in Republic. I have noticed that your text opens with a powerful representation of the maternal--twenty-seven mothers-- and it ends with the iconography of the mermaid. What are we to make of the movement from maternal to mermaid?

A. I wandered into each of these stories simply out of curiosity, and I never intended to set up anything, but I suppose unconsciously it may have been there. The story of the twenty-seven mothers, this shared motherhood, is thought by some to have been very damaging to Tom, but by me to have had exactly the opposite effect. I would think the more nurturing one would get the better off one would be, and I think Tom felt that. He was getting mixed messages from so-called therapists who felt his early experience either damaged his love or developed it, I don't know which. The mermaid interested me for other reasons. The mermaid is one of the most interesting parts of our iconography because the mermaid doesn't reproduce; she has no reproductive organs, and is always alone. She is a sort of double figure and conveys an irony that I love. The figure of consolation for the drowned seaman is also the one who lures sailors to their deaths. All the fears of women could be located in this sea creature. I was astonished to find that no one has looked at mermaids from a feminist perspective, and I wanted to do that. At first I thought I would write a book about mermaids, and then I thought I would write a book about a woman who was writing a book about mermaids. What I did in this novel was to present

Fay's different theories; she goes from one to the other, and, true, she ends up with a kind of Jungian theory, but I don't expect for a minute that she will stay there. One thing that I think women have learned to do is to say "I've changed my mind" and not to have a closed system of belief. I wanted Fay to keep testing her theories, but always underneath she would be doubting what she was doing.

Q. What would you like your readers to take away with them after reading your fiction?

A. I never think in these terms when I'm writing, although, unconsciously, I must be imagining another eye sweeping over the print. I don't pretend, ever, to impart even a small ray of wisdom; writers, in fact, seem almost singularly unequipped to do so. I suppose I imagine the reader-writer relationship as a joint venture in the world. I remember Jean-Paul Sartre saying that "to read a book is to write it." This seems a profound statement to me, suggesting as it does a partnership of creativity, a decision to travel the same hills and valleys of language, not in search of enlightenment but of the experience that language can return to us.

Q. What is the purpose of fiction in our lives?

A. I've been thinking about this for years. It comes straight out of the puritan guilt of my childhood--fiction is lies. But it's not. Judith Gill in Small Ceremonies talks about narrative hunger: why do we need stories? Her

conclusion--and mine--is that our own lives are never quite enough for us. They're too brief, too dark, too narrow, too circumscribed, too bound by geography, by gender, by cultural history. It is through fiction that I've learned about the lives of women, and about how people think. Biography and history have a narrative structure, but they don't tell us much about the interior lives of people. This seems to me to be fiction's magic, that it attempts to be an account of all that cannot be documented but which is, nevertheless, true.

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