Reading institutions: alternative responses in women's fiction

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Thesis for the degree of Master of Arts 1990 Ella O'Dwyer

From what could be called a growing curriculum of women's fiction, I have selected a range of books for their ability to illustrate the institutional nature of literature. The analyses I offer represent the audience's point of view, and the sequence of texts is arranged as a reading journey. In studying my own experience of reading, I explore the practical activity and role of the reader and attenpt to dramatise the event of interpretation. In choosing to write about 'women's fiction', I set out to use sexual oppression to gain insight into the experience of oppression generally. Putting myself and my reader into the predicament of the often marginalised audience, I intend us to understand more about how we are manipulated by any given text.

Perceiving literature as an institution, I've located readings of individual novels within the dissertation so as to depict a developing sense of how the reader fares in the literary system. We start with a discussion on 'control' and move on to a section which uses two novels which seem to naturalise oppression as if it were just a 'normal' condition. These readings indicate that the mere illustration (however realistic) of women's plight is not enough to bring about change. So less 'realistic' works are used to highlight the contradiction present within naturalistic representation. In such works, the 'normal' starts to look strange, and the concrete authority of the narrator dissolves to make room for the reader's own creativity. These changing expectations lead to an analysis of the drive to know all about the source and presence of the self. From there, we look at our 'ghosted' or other selves, and the effect of placing otherness at a distance. By the time we reach the final section, omniscience starts to look like a barrier against the reader's creativity rather than a secure guide 'mothering' us through our reading journey.

If we start with exposing what the text actually does to us, a growing self-confidence on the part of readers will enable us to subvert the rules of the text, breaking with the habit of reproducing silence and oppression.

READING INSTITUTIONS

Alternative responses in women's fiction

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Epigraph. "It's important not to look to individual texts by women to alter literary norms, abstracted from the need to control the way that texts are received".

Claire Wills.

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'CONTROL':

The Controlled Reader as Previewed in Villette .

Charlotte Brontë.

Writing of "Institutions and Inversions" in his book On Deconstruction , Jonathan Culler quotes Jacques Derrida on page 164, "the present in general is not primal but rather reconstituted". The observation is relevant, not only in that Lucy's biography is a reconstruction of her past, but in that the reader's lot is one of surmising much of her unwritten biography. The text is written between gaps which Lucy and Brontë expect, at least some readers, sometime, to notice and fill in. The reader who "responds" to the text's impression upon him/her, cannot fail to effectuate Derrida's comment, in that our responses not only "reconstitute" the unwritten elements of Lucy's past, but they create the reader's present too. In an important way then, reader response criticism points to the reader as potential authorial interpreter of textual and extra-literary experience. What has concerned many more "traditional" critics has been the fear of readers rewriting texts, a view to be considered in the light of how differently we readers of the eighties interpret Villette , from how Brontë's contemporaries would have done so. What I hope to assert is that my reading of this text reveals a hidden content which had been repressed by the readers of Brontë's day. Social taboos caused this repression which was allocated to the 'unconscious' of the narrative, where we stumble upon it in the spaces and absences of the story. Recalling my own response to the novel as my reading advanced from page to page, I'm struck by the fact that my earliest impressions from the first page, remained and intensified as I travelled through the plot. It was as if I pursued a linked stream of consciousness throughout, which I later discovered

to be the repressed unconscious of Lucy Snowe.

Like most readers, I found myself imagining what kind of earlier childhood comprised what Lucy had left out of her story. At the same moment, even on the first page, I became conscious, perhaps sooner than most readers, of an antipathy on my part, towards the type of English used by Brontë. Already my own responses were interrupting the flow of predictions I was making, not only of how, when, if or where Lucy's origin would be revealed, but also with a view to assessing how my own origins, with the accompanying cultural prejudices, would effect my reading. Eco expounds on the idea of "Inferences by common frames" and " by inter-textual frames", noting that readers make "the only possible inference", or 'the one appropriate to the context (T.R.R. p.20-21).

I'm trying to direct my own reader towards a consideration of how making predictions, correct or erroneous and reading responses, in a fashion, write additional dramatic content. Our responses influence the text's affect, even on ourselves as readers. Stanley Fish includes in the category of response, "all the precise mental operations involved in reading including the formulation of complete thoughts, the performing (and regretting) of acts of judgement, the following and making of logical sequences" (Is there a text in this class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities p.42-43). On the question of Lucy's missing childhood, by chapter two we are so conscious that Polly's infancy has been swapped for the narrator's, that in order to predict whose story we're about to read, we flash back to page one where Lucy comments that "One child in a

household of grown people is usually made much of". The fact that Lucy seems to "make nothing" of her childhood actively affects a re-reading. The sort of action resulting from Brontë's arrangement of Lucy's early years causes us to be aware of the author from the start as having a definite approach towards the arrangement of her subject(s), both within and outside the text. She'll have known what will have been the reader's response at this point and is therefore very much in control of the entire 'work', including our inferences and the entire process by which the text unfurls itself. This response and questioning of the issue of the heroine's origin, is acceptable by even the standards of conservative criticism.

Adopting the roles allotted to us in this text is so obviously a process of acting out sections Lucy has edited from her account, that we question, act and judge, with a very heightened awareness that we are reading and, in a manner, interpreting our actual present. Our reading is as significant as the written words of the text, and the way in which we weave meaning into the textual "gaps", suggests that Villette holds and even invites an active, creative and influential reading, much in the nature of writing. My reaction, as a twentieth century Irish woman, to Brontë's style is an example of the kind of dimensions readers bring to any text. This 'reaction' has had far-reaching consequences for me as reader, and has parallels in the experiences of any group that knows itself to be marginalised. Feminists will identify with Brontë's exposure of the difficulties encountered by women in her time. Brontë will have had satisfaction in voicing much of her antagonism towards the literary world of her

day, which was male-dominated and essentially patriarchal. We're already being confronted by something of the writer's intentionality, which, ironically draws attention to our own. My response to the very linguistic style of the book leads to useful insights into the often repressed feelings of resentment a reader may, however unconsciously, bring to a text. The contradictions we feel in relation to some alienating feature of a text can stimulate an active intentionality in the reader. Traditional critics understandably enough are uneasy about readers' idiosyncracies being included in, any estimation of a text. Their fear is that semantic substance could be re-written as opposed to revealed. However, as we've noted, the text itself can be an accomplice to the creation of such intentions in the reader, by the mere fact of motivating creation from the instigation of contra-diction. Umberto Eco defines what he calls a 'model" reader, one of many conjectures on the subject (T.R.R. , p.7-9). He suggests that an author will "foresee a model of the possible reader supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them". Texts intend a certain reading and presuppose and develop the appropriate reader. Let us look briefly at how Lucy, the author of her own story, cultivates the kind of reader required for her specific purposes.

Where one discusses repression, as one must do in relation to the reader's lot in Villette , one will inevitably raise the issue of 'control". Indeed my defensive response to this text led me to consider how I came to feel, so early, threatened or compromised by

the book. It cannot have been the language alone. In Lucy's manner of explaining away the failings of her favoured co-protagonists, she treats them as children. She carefully positions herself to deduce select interpretations of their motives, as if to encourage the same condescension towards her own. In treating them like inculpable children, she subtly foregrounds herself as the really innocent, mild and forgiving heroine. She wishes to present her childhood in the drawn-out representation of her adulthood. We are profoundly aware of our situation within a gap in the textual experience here, where we read through Lucy's intention and become very conscious of older Lucy. No child Lucy could have so manipulated a situation, so as to direct our very sympathies, to this extent. The references to "Paulina" are so detailed, she was "neat, completely fashioned", "light, slight" and had a "pigmy hand" which, on page 66, grappled with "the buttons, strings, hooks and eyes...". Three whole chapters are given over to the whims and tantrums of another child than the one we are to finally 'grow up' with. Polly is presented as being the only possible child in the text, to the exclusion of readers and Lucy. The effect is interesting in that we typically, and childishly, wish to be what we are not. We seek an identity because we are assured that we have no access to it. Polly is on a pedestal and Lucy so elevated her as to have us feel that the way to Lucy's heart is to be childish. She even tolerates Ginevra's continual childish desire for gratification. Lucy seems to cultivate a simplistic pleasure principle, for all her seeming masochism. Eco presents his concepts of "Open" and "Closed" texts (T.R.R. p.7). The 'closed' text he describes as one aimed at

arousing a "precise" response, and in doing so, leaves itself "Immoderately" open to any "aberrant" decodings. The closed text can better be recognised on acquaintance with what he calls 'Open' texts. Of these he says, that in their cases "You cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it". These 'open' texts "outline a 'closed' project of its (their) model reader as a component of its structured strategy". Eco develops on this openness by comparing it to "the considerable autonomy left to the individual performer in the way he chooses to play" some "recent pieces of instrumental music". He says the performer "is not merely free to interpret the composer's instructions following his own discretion (which in fact happens in traditional music), but he must impose his judgement on the form of the piece, as when he decides how long to hold a note...: all this amounts to an act of improvised creation" ('The poetics of the open work, T.R.R. p.47). The use of the term "closed project" for the reader in the "open" text is designed to draw attention to the fact that texts will hold their readers to what the material yields, while leaving an opening where the reader's participation is required. There is a difference however in the kinds of 'systems' texts used to cultivate certain readings and it must be remembered that the "open" text may use its power to enclose the reader in an alienating role which one will do all possible to avoid. The real opening power of such a text lies in the reader's observations upon their responses.

We wonder if Villette is an "open" text, or if it's a 'closed' text which the "response reader" can open. We've seen that in

manipulating us into the child role, Lucy has managed to lead us in and out of various roles throughout the book, from jealous attention seeker to the ever vulnerable Villette idiot. To follow Lucy's own intentions for us, we would become as immature and untrue to ourselves as Lucy herself. The extreme attention to Polly as child, suggests a narcissistic and fantastical game in which Lucy expects us to facilitate her in the drawing up of a might have been Lucy. We subvert her "closed project" for us when we tune into our responses. Having felt that I was participating in the compromising of my own cultural loyalties, the sense of being 'managed' by Lucy increased. In order to travel through the text at all I was going to have to repress or contain my responses. So we see that resisting the author's/narrator's project for us becomes part of our reading experience. The "closed" in the "open" text will be seen to have had an opening function for this reader at least. My present was being re-written before my eyes, as if a kind of consciousness was visible to me. Its very visibility told me that it was astranged from me, as if not my own consciousness. I was, I felt, living out someone else's psychic life. An important factor in this reading is the consideration that the text may have been written for two audiences, Brontë's contemporaries and readers of a future generation. The consciousness Lucy seems to require us to live out, her own unconscious, is not one we can readily adapt to. It is the contradiction fostered by the imposition of an alien intellectuality which creates a second reading, one we release from a lone burial under Villette . Providing the reader with all the facilities for making the "model" reading does not ensure that the reader will

necessarily learn from the experience. In fact the term "model" reader is a bit reactionary in that it might suggest that, at least some readers, are not required to learn anything but on the theoretical or aesthetic level. I want to foreground the possibility and importance of rearranging our traditional docile and passive attitude to reading, by illustrating how "open" and "closed" texts can be equally enclosing unless we use our entire faculties to remain, or become dynamic, active and assertive readers of all experience.

To summarise the position in the reading to date as I experienced it, two factors in the early stages of the reading sent me on the defensive. Concern that I could be landed in the missing child role, and the style of English used by Brontë drew attention to itself as English , the surrogate language which Brontë's generation used to displace what might have been my medium of communication now. J Culler tells us that "Freud emphasises that the unconscious is by no means simply a layer of actual experiences that have been repressed, a hidden presence. It is both constituted by repression and the active agent of repression" (O.D. p.162). Freud calls the unconscious the "primary repression" analogous with the first pretextual gap where Lucy's childhood might have been. Culler goes on to explain how this unconsciousness is nonoriginary, by describing Freud's treatment of one of his patients who had traced her problem back to an early age, allowing that an experience like puberty happening in between both dates, allowed the patient's mind to interpret the memory differently, remembering the effect rather than the experience. What I encountered as my rejection of a

particular style of language, may really relate to a more repressed dissatisfaction with the facility for self expression linguistic rules and norms allow me, as a woman. How much more repressed resentment must have existed in the psyches of female writers of Brontë's time? To illustrate, couldn't women generally share my sense of having to repress my own accent and Hiberno-English idioms, in order to be understood or accepted at all?

I am not here trying to introduce politics into the field, or rather "institution" of language. I am in fact, pointing to the relevant political nature of language as an instrument of oppression and control, leading us back to the discussion of Eco's "open"/"closed" texts. We've gathered that certain texts hold gaps which stimulate the addition of readers' intuitive predictions. The spaces are products of contradiction at another level of the text, and are often symptoms of the author's repression of some personal hang-up or trauma. Certain absences are created by the self censoring author, which we can be left to fill in. Could it not also be the case that readers will, in turn create spaces of our own? Traditionally this is what we do when we ignore our own responses, we create gaps which allow us to be the objects of other people's interpretation, spending most of our textual and extra literary lives without autonomy over the creation of self. Alienation is not only experienced in relation to the usual habit of dividing our textual from our real worlds, but is also experienced in the moment to moment reading of contradictions within a book. Quite often a text will pose antagonistic concepts, mutually oppositional, which will not be concretely resolved by the

surface content of the plot. On the unconscious level this repression will pronounce itself, however calculated a text's structure is to cover these omissions. To write is to leave unwritten, in that sense, and where there are words there are spaces, in conformity with the necessary and accepted form of linguistic presentation, though this form can be exploited to blind the reader to the wider content of the work. Aware as we are, that we are being lent a borrowed consciousness throughout the reading, we examine our responses to this new personality in order to identify it and to find the method in Lucy's use of us. Looking at our reading role, we see that we have had to adapt a new style of speech, dress and values with the increased class and gender consciousness accompanying the Lucy role. Perhaps Lucy travelled the same reading role, performing the same adjustments to her personal values. To perform such an undesirable role we've had to drag out all our faculty to pretend, as if we were playing a childish game. Yet the play is a dangerous one for the woman of the eighties who wishes to do things, rather than have things happen to her. The Lucy role is abhorrent to us since we cannot fail to see the injustice of her world, even if we can blind ourselves to injustice in our own time. We tell ourselves we'll be on our guard against a fuller usurpation by the text. Ironically it's this defensiveness which is the essence of the Lucy role, and we're model candidates. For me, the process involved winding through dialectical barriers in language, to become inscribed by a disposition inherently repulsive to me. Might not the values of Villette have been as antagonising in their connotations for Lucy and Brontë, as they were for me? The children Polly, Ginevra, Lucy and reader

share a common faculty for moving into roles in the text, while blinding ourselves to the repressed values assigned to the unconscious, or gaps in text and reading. I accepted a childish challenge to achieve ease with awkward and linguistic style, flowing along in a transforming identity until jolted by Lucy's comment, "I was turning away, in the deep consciousness of all absence of claim for further help from such a one as he", since "nature had made him good enough to be a prince" (Villette p.53). While Lucy pampers herself with this kind of hypocrisy, we readers are landed with the anger and disgust deserved by the sort of "prince" who would have her feel so demeaned. We wonder if we are to be the dumping ground for all the negative, repressed emotions Lucy could not reveal in herself. We're as confused as Lucy to find ourselves waking up in her godmother's new home. The scene is successfully carried off, as skilfully as any film of today could achieve. The craft involved reminds me of the attention to detail we noted on page 6, and advanced on page 7, "A mug of milk stood before her, a morsel of bread filled her (Polly's) hand...". There's a sense of old Lucy having memorised her own tale and of us getting a monolithic account of her past. We start to compare her approach to persuading us, with the image of herself she wants us to accept. It is obvious to us that old Lucy will white-wash contradictions, avoid issues, and squash us into no choice situations to get us to believe her to be passive, meek and inoffensive. Transferred from the fictional to the real world of Brontë the author, the contradiction follows. Though Brontë may have been latently subversive in her time, writing with a view to being accepted, she too became absorbed

and inscribed among the literary greats of her day, though she did help keep the door open for women writers through history. What we cannot fail to understand now is how and why Lucy blinded herself to her own hypocrisy when she went on to become the ruthless business woman from the in-between station of governess. What she criticised in Madame Beck, she became herself, even adopting the same career of school teacher and principle. What she and Brontë have done is no different from the slow adaptation I was making to even my own accent in order to be accepted into the literary arena of the text. On the non-fictional level, I, like Brontë, have had to make similar adaptations in order ever to be admitted to the world of literary study. My native Hiberno-English dialect would not have permitted me entry, even into the academic and literary institutions, of Ireland. We see also that a similar adaptation occurs to the Homes and Bretton families, so that my apparent diversion here may be very relevant to the plot and theme of Brontë's novel. Both these families have changed their surnames as if they were on the run , they even speak a new language, Graham being caught in the act by Lucy whom he doesn't recognise as being from his own country. It cannot be denied that a substantial level of repression will have taken place in both readers and characters in order for all this action to take place. Where we wonder, have the real readers and characters gone? When we try to visualise old Lucy we get no further than chronicler as form , a static construct. Looking back at Lucy as character, we fare no better. She moves in a body, yet she's absent from our senses, while infinitely present as a form. My own ear is less acute to any idividual accent in her voice, since all

the style is strange to me; that is to say that 'standard' English or the literary is as foreign to me as any dialect other than my own. Her accent seems, to me, to be impersonal, toneless, and indistinct. Her body is sinisterly effaced and yet she remains as an interpretable object, a sort of invisible woman. She is so engrossed in maintaining whatever image she has, that she interprets only partially, just enough to reproduce that same image over and again, living in one context of herself. Her absence from life is increased therefore since the editing, lack of physical substance and her own defensiveness turn her into a formal construct even as character. We look for the missing Lucy in possible transferences of herself onto her fellow personae. By this process we're drawn closer onto the stage of the text until finally Lucy manages to transfer part of herself onto us. The process causes us so many growing pains, among them the realisation that we represent the Lucy she, herself finds unspeakable, and with that, we discover that we could all too easily do a Lucy in our journey through life. We've already caught ourselves at it.

This text provides a frightening example of how the norm becomes just that, however blatantly corrupt. Lucy exists self-consciously as a construct wedged between two poles of herself, the actress, symbolised by the Vashti role, (the textual performer), and on the other hand the older manipulating story-teller, symbolised by the school mistress she becomes in later life. Three blatant gaps in the novel allow possibilities of deconstructing the plot: the missing child Lucy which I maintain we act out; the switch from Graham as lover to

M. Paul, which allows us to enter Lucy's ability to shield herself from the truth; and the ambiguous ending which allows us to interpret ourselves and our reading forward through that open-endedness. The final episode is as if, under cross examination, her memorised version of events breaks down and she's admitting that she needed and so used us, to voice what she couldn't say directly about herself, but which is deciphered anyway in a deconstruction of her account. If anything tells us to look for the missing truths in the novel it's the irony at the end where the reader is convinced of the sad rather than the happy ending. We can forgive her her deceit since we shared her values, if only temporarily and unconsciously. The spell cast upon us to act out the Lucy role was the defensiveness with which I engaged the task on hand. I mistrusted the world of "Villette" from the start and continued to do so throughout the reading. That world turned my disadvantaged, defensive position against me to hold me largely immobile throughout. The process has been an interesting revelation of the consequences of our sense of being seen, our defence of image and fear of being absorbed, all topics which will present themselves in other texts for further consideration. Old Lucy's "confession" predicates us out of childish ignorance, a battle has ended when we finish the book eventually, and what we learn will affect the "inferences" (spoken of in Eco's work on "inter-textual frames" already mentioned), and predictions we make in future readings. We may have cured Lucy out of the constricting 'form' into which she embedded herself, while experiencing its weight ourselves, a dilemma we'll be again exposed to in "realist" texts. Losing our fixation with self image allows us to

grow and avoid the danger of being displaced by the imposition of one identity over another. We are not separate role playing units, our lives individually are not quantities of scenarios each separated and disjointed, but one progressing action. Reading the separated acts of Villette is a process of predicating and performing the disjointed Lucy into a fuller version of herself, and of being ourselves interpreted into newer meaning. This text is acknowledged to be a comprehensive account of the constriction a woman had to impose on her own identity in order to exercise some control over her own life. Free play of passion left women more vulnerable to social power. My own experience of reading Villette has foregrounded for me my own psychic strategy of withdrawal. The examination of these defensive responses reveals to me how very inscribed into the institution of discourse and literature those strategies of defence and repression are. I suggested that Villette could have two possible audiences; one, comprising Brontë's contemporaries, which will allow itself to be buried into the enclosing power of the plot to close the text at the end; the second audience of the eighties is more likely to survive the killing potential of the book to go on to allow Villette to remain open. This text does have a "closed" project for its reader, but it may also have a hidden "model" readership. One reading, that of Brontë's contemporaries allows this seemingly "open" text to enclose both reader and text, usurping the autonomy of the reader. So we cannot say that even the "open" text is always opening. The reader of Brontë's day has developed into the "open" reader of today to rescue the opening potential of Villette .

INTRODUCTION TO THE INTRODUCTION

We've spoken often in this reading of what we perceived of Villette as a stage setting. Various events, even Lucy's missing childhood, are so blatantly poised as to send us looking behind each 'act'. We mentioned also Eco's idea of inter-textuality, and my displaced "Introduction" to this dissertation is designed to foreground a link between these two points. Neither Villette, nor indeed my commentary on it, are isolated pieces of writing which my reader can digest in isolation from every other piece of script she/he will have read. These few pages can only take on a link to the stream of interpretation going on in my reader's mind, just as Villette, for me, is not the "introduction" to any kind of interpretation. This is just part of a process of interpretation going on continuously in readers' and writers' minds. There will be no "start", "middle" and "end" to this thesis, since my argument is that such notions are just constructions handed to us in our system of institutionalised meaning. The "introduction" occurred long ago, when first we became conscious of ourselves as differentiated from the world around us. Neither does meaning flow along in any kind of straight lines, but reproduces itself dialectically and dynamically. As the acts in Villette suggest, there are always meanings behind meanings. Unfortunately traditional criticism is inclined to detect and pursue some preconceived unitary truth thought to lie behind or above experience. Certainly meaning is everywhere, and moving in all directions, but we cannot hope to find the truth in any isolated place or abstracted theory. The acts around which we look for more meaning, are not isolated from the overall stage performance of Villette. Neither should theory be isolated from the dramatisation

of the work or text itself. There will, however be different responses at different times, and even responses to our responses. The following pages consist largely of deductions being processed from my look around the acts of my own reading. Behind my reading roles and performances there is more interpretation. As time goes by, I hope to accustom my reader to reading all my responses in the direct and immediate arena of the textual reading. For the moment, there is much by way of theoretical ground which I want to explain, and the priority must be upon clarity. For that reason I'll deliver this range of information at a slightly more distant remove from the text. In time, I hope that theory can be largely expounded in the immediate reading experience. I accept that my method in this area may not be very usual and so I want to allow time for my reader to hopefully develop some kind of rapport with my writing habits .

Having long ago been introduced to Villette and to the institution of literature, I'd like to develop upon this institution's differing treatment of readers. Some texts will relate to the reading as a 'thing', rather than as the dynamic and active event it is. "Reading as a thing" implies that the reader experiences him/herself as if readers were things. What I wish to examine in what I understand to be this institution of literature are what Michael Foucault calls "methods which made possible the meticulous control of the operations" (of the mind) "which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed on them a relation of docility-utility" (Discipline and Punish p.137). He was referring to the manipulation

of bodies, and the methods he considers are later to be described by him as 'disciplines', comparable, I argue, to what we call habits of interpreting our world. The reader's inclusion of her/his own responses as textual content, often highlights the habitual quality of our beliefs. Our inclusion of responses will not compromise the autonomy of the text. The position will rather be that the reader's role in the literary work will not be compromised. I hope my reader will have been struck by the considerable gain involved in the inclusion of responses in earlier pages of this dissertation. It seems to me that abundant loss is endured by us habitually, because we isolate the processing of interpretation from our theoretical analysis of its composition. I hope to have begun exposing this disadvantage by indicating the contrastingly rewarding effects of studying meaning in its process, or of simply, processing the process of criticism. Readers start to emerge from the usual subservient position of marginalised observers of the text, where they were scarcely tolerated as objects with a utility function. The common experience of alienation can be turned into a challenge to dismantle the structure of a text in order to reach its more primary construction. By taking back the power to create within the work, readers subvert these feelings of alienation commonly experienced before and after reading. I might have come to the reading of Villette with a view to avoiding the sight of my immediate surroundings. Again I might have finished the book feeling left out of its micro fantasy world. The reverse is the case, not for the obvious reason that I would rather be in jail than in what I see as the arch dungeon of Villette . I am neither alienated from my 'real'

surroundings nor from this fantasy world by my reading, but rather I'm left with a satisfied sense of having taken from the text's power, to learn something of how the real is organised and how I might or might not allow it to suppress me. The knowledge I gained left me better equipped to tackle a comparable power structure outside of the text. This is to remind my reader of, what I suggested earlier to be, the importance of allowing readings to be responsively reflexive, in order to learn and advance on the extra literary level. Texts can be said to embrace micro texts to form the greater text, just as fiction finds a place in, or link to the reality of most lives. We don't read all the meanings at once, but in stages though time. From the earliest point Villette presented a relatively 'open' structure with a "closed" project. The open invitation to question the cause of a repressed childhood provoked the reader to investigate repression in general. The immediate source material for that enquiry will have been the reader's own bank of experience, intertextual and social. A Black, Feminist, Gay or poor reader will predictably introduce their own individual hobbyhorse, but not to the detriment of what is clearly present in the book. Nevertheless, I do not agree with Norman Holland in his analysis of reading behaviour, when he argues that readers create their own interpretation according to whatever identity theme most preoccupies them. That would be to suggest that readers have more authority over a text than the actual author. That can be proven untrue even in the reader's fare in Villette . What is in a literary work cannot be replaced. It can be added to or rearranged within the dictates of the text, so as to expose related, though unmentioned meanings.

The seemingly open start of the book presents the closed project. What arises already, and what is of interest to me, is the possible predictions or inferences my own reader will make as to the opening power of some written structures. I wish to persuade, and to do so must consider the process of learning . It will have occurred to me that my reader may tick differently than I, just as it occurs to all writers. Depending upon the ideological commitment of the reader, or rather its strength, the reader will be either concerned to liberate themselves as interpreters, or to suppress and/or enlist others into their ideological bloc. The area we are dealing with in literature is that of power and repression. I want to return to how repression materialises in Lucy's experiences. In chapter 4 Lucy uses her own repressed condition to repress us. She blatantly recalls the initial gap surrounding her childhood, saying "Picture me then idle, basking, plump...I too well remember a long time of cold, of danger, of contention". She repeats this provoking game with us at the apparently 'open' ending of the book. It's as if she struggles to reassert herself as heroine and focal point of the text, so that this incident will be remembered by the reader. She mocks us, it seems, at this point. She would appear to have a kind of bone of contention in relation to us, which she picks at intermittently throughout. I recognise that resentment as resembling my own disgruntled sense of having to compromise and repress my actual reading/speaking accent, my reaction to Lucy's manipulation and my uneasy feeling of restraining my true feelings to survive the actual reading itself to the end. I didn't immediately see myself do exactly what I condemned in Lucy. She contained her feelings with regard to Madame Beck's spying acts, in order to keep her position in the

school. Lucy's repressed state passed onto me, since I have been enrolled onto the Villette stage to act out those aspects of herself she would willingly repress. She says of Madame Beck that "she perfectly knew the quality of the tools she used, and while she would not scruple to handle the dirtiest for a dirty occasion - flinging this sort from her like refuse rind, after the orange had been duly squeezed - I have known her fastidious in seeking pure metal for clean uses". (Villette p.136). This seems to me to resemble Lucy's own strategy, however involuntarily, with her world and her reader. A feeling that I might have, in fact, absorbed the Lucy role, in so far as I share her defensive and ruthless will to resist the text's systematic power to control me, sent me in search of the source of this unconscious repression. It was then that I remembered Freud's theory that the unconscious is non-originary. My sense of having absorbed Lucy derives from the role the text allowed me. I was to live and read in her unconscious. The latter having no origin leaves me no landmark to which I might look in order to be reassured that Lucy began in my life at some point, and so must end on the closing of the book. I was to take her with me forever. In traditional texts the pattern of identifying with the offered heroine is so domineering that we become buried under the assigned role. We literally misrecognise ourselves. The traumatic fear, foregrounded to me by my responses, that I had become what I very much disliked, sent me to investigate my earliest memory of feeling thus planted. Like Freud's patient, I later discovered that what I thought was the earliest evidence of that problem, was preceded by an earlier occasion of the same incident. Where I differ

with Freud is in that I don't proceed to contradict his theory, as he does himself. If the unconscious is non-originary, how can anyone locate a specific source of a pattern of behaviour? If we do name the source, we must allow that this named source, society or whatever, is in itself non-originary and ever moving and growing. Analogies of misrecognition will be found to precede any recognised occurrence of it. What might be done is to deconstruct the process surrounding a repressed or acknowledged interpretation. The reading unconscious too is non-originary. What develops as my misrecognition of myself as Lucy, is no more than an interaction of textual and added reading material. I encounter and respond to Lucy in a dynamic way, even if her narrative does not allow for any direct dialogue with the reader. Language itself, with its rules and constructs sets its users up as recepticles for its meaning, as if we are to be loaded with understandings without hope of ever ejecting assigned labels, or formulating a better title for ourselves. It's as if once repressed, always repressed. But language itself, communication that is, is non-originary. Can we say at what moment it occurred to human or beast to relate to 'another'? Language itself is as dynamic as my encounter with Lucy, or any reader's relating to a text. However, we do not always perceive language in this way. Its rules form our 'habits' of understanding, and its rules, in all their constricting power, are products of a hierarchical system that extends to our entire society and culture. Because this text resists a reader does not mean that a reader is powerless to continue interpreting in the manner consistent with the mind's active pattern and power to create meaning. To create a home-made term, as we

did earlier, we might become "open" and "closed" readers, according to our ideological intentions. Traditional suppositions regarding meaning perceive the world of understanding as being based upon kinds of "binary oppositions", to quote Greimas as cited by T. Hawkes (Structuralism and Semiotics p.90). Considering the hierarchical structure of our society, it is understandable that the establishment would wish to maintain a belief that there can be no other system for the organisation of meaning other than the one they advance. A structure which excludes all but a relation of subject and object in each and every aspect of life, is based on the standing rule that one of two blocs will be suppressed. A reader who continued to read defensively could not do other than parallel the system they read, as was my experience of Villette , since the reader would be willingly slotting into one of two oppositional groups. The pleasure principle cultivated in much romance and fantasy literature; is one presenting the promise of being favoured by the power bloc, and finally accepted by it. There will of course always be the oppressed , who will be encouraged to resist, in a way preordained by the status quo, our role as scape-goat . More people than they themselves imagine, are of the oppressed . Like texts, the establishment draws up a "model" rebel, which is used to authorise increasingly repressive texts. It is obvious that a change in the traditional kind of resistance used is required, as is an alternative habit of understanding our world.

The opening power of the reader can be used to dissolve the brainwashing effect of such exploitative literature. Looking at the

process by which we come to identify with the foregrounded protagonist, will allow us to learn something of how we come to be persuaded or even confused. We might use that knowledge of the learning process to write up new and more freeing habits and tastes in reading. We often come to a text in the expectation of finding an alternative identity. The game becomes serious when our responses are primed to pick up these identity vibrations, with a serious view to allowing our reading roles to become part of our ideological diet. If I seriously dislike what a text seems to be moulding out of me, I'll be motivated to find out more of the methods used to do so. Likewise with my own reader, who may feel that I'm bringing out something in them they dislike, all the more motivated will they be to pursue this enquiry where I leave off. Authors may usefully implant a negative response in the reader in the furtherance of their own theme. We might say that Brontë built in the high level of oppression we noted into the structure of the reading arena, so as to reinforce her point to any future readers who may have underestimated that oppression. A hidden text lay behind the immediate version. While I had the consolation in the Villette experience of eventually seeing that I am not Lucy, I must still face the fact that much of my ability to deconstruct her motives springs from a personal recognition of some of her traits in myself. Even fiction is not all fiction. There is value in allowing ourselves the opportunity of recognising many different, and often repressed, aspects in ourselves, as we identify with reading roles. In a way, we can never reject a text entirely without rejecting some aspect of even our potential selves. We can, however, deconstruct ourselves

into different reading roles, which will take on the dynamic challenge that we, as open readers, recognise in literature. What we recognise as dialectical parallels to our own characters can, more usefully, be broken down, than in the usual categorisations we make regarding the personae of a work. Often we look for villains, heroes and fools, in order to distance ourselves from, or identify with the individual role. Expecting to see myself enhanced, before myself, in the heroine of Villette led me through a mini trauma. I wasn't improved by the attachment, until I linked my responses to the textual content.

We are expected to carry the weight of the repressed Lucy, who at best emerges as a very mediocre heroine. She is hardly the stuff of Greimas's "actant", (cited by Terence Hawkes explains that agent in Structuralism and Semiotics, pp 84-95). Where he deals with Greimas' concept of 'actantial model', he gives me to understand that these 'models' are the basic structures from which surface structures in a story emerge. An actant can be presented as a character, or in the function of a number of characters, in relation to their common role in a story. He states Cordelia and the fool as examples taken from King Lear. Frederick Jameson expands on the idea when he describes how Heathcliffe functions, in Wuthering Heights, as "impersonal process", rather than as individual (The Political Unconscious, p.126). He is thus seen as a kind of "mediator" dressed up as a character, who is there to take the action through to the end. This idea of the "actant" reminds me of another of the incentives the modern reader will feel, to take on the role allotted to us in Villette. Lucy lacks both the heroic and the actantial

qualities. The pursuit of gratification common to Brontë's class and day would have had the reader searching for heroes; today we believe less in a predicated notion of the admirable. We want to identify with what will give us at least the sense of being mobile and active individuals. Lucy is too passive, so the woman of the eighties jumps in headlong into the role with a view to doing something with it and retrieving woman's pride. In a manner, the text has even by its very structure, managed to divide and conquer the identity process. We either reject or identify with Lucy, yet we have the situation where our own choices in this matter are subverted, when we find ourselves in competition with either ourselves as Lucy, or with an identity we thought as modern woman, we had discarded. This shows how the text makes unseen and relentless impacts on our less conscious reading selves. Accepting or rejecting Lucy will each leave us on a defensive. There are two possible reactions to this sense of being swamped by the power of the text. One is to become a kind of paranoid reader who can be summarily hounded into any preordained position, and the other one is to take the possibility of infinite response on board as a positive stimulation of ideation. The reader of Villette should apply what we've learned from Lucy's errors, to do the opposite. She is the essence of defensiveness and like any such power bloc, be it a solidarity of the oppressed or the oppressors, it can allow its entire system to collapse with one mistake, because both are built on similarly constructed hierarchical value systems. Each dialectically opposes the other in this pair of hierarchies, two different groupings of the same structural format. They merely contain different values. Both are combinations of the

overall subject-object relation of binary oppositions. For example, Madame Beck and Lucy compete for one position within the text and society. Both love M. Paul and both have social aspirations, however much Lucy tries to hide hers. What she does is to move through her existence in a highly defensive way, leaving the risks for other people. She's a "looker on at life", and as such she tries to push the more dangerous "actantial" roles onto others. She allows herself the experience only in fiction when she uses the Vashti role in quite the same way as response readers use reading roles. Polly is the text's childhood event, though Lucy tries to drain off the reward by implying that she is the fount of all innocence in the story. Madame Marchant carries out the unattractive old Lucy experience. We know Lucy is capable of being old, yet she hides it. Mrs Bretton escapes criticism from even the child Polly and is perhaps the safe position Lucy would like to fall back on. Madame Beck's antics have nothing up on Lucy's own related skills, yet we are expected to look for the stone in the former's eye. Lucy is careful to arrange it so that nobody else in the story will gain from our sympathies on the grounds of age, sex or social status, other than herself. Mrs Sweeny might have threatened Lucy's ambitions in relation to securing, not just a job, but our compassion too. Lucy is as ruthless in one matter as in the other. Mrs Sweeny is portrayed as deceitful, inefficient and drunken. Inconsistently Lucy extends the description by saying she was Irish. The latter is another example of how texts carelessly or intentionally alienate an entire nation of readers, telling us how elitist and insular writers of Brontë's day were. Their prejudice hardly needs exposing. Considering how the actantial role

is cast onto all but the heroine, it is not surprising that the reader is affected. T. Hawkes tells us that Greimas saw "binary opposition" as the basic "human conceptual mode" (Structuralism and Semiotics p.89). Two actants can be worked in either an oppositional mode, or the reverse, "moving on the surface level, as separation and union, struggle and reconciliation". A quality can be transferred from one actant to another in a narrative movement. This recalls the processing of rejection or its reverse; identification; the actants in and outside the text can carry the narrative from the text through the reader and back into another textual actant. We can visualise an in and out movement reminding us of the inter-dependence existing between writer and reader. Our own responses are often direct reflections of what is actually going on in a text. A deconstruction of our own responses then, can reveal the structure and technique used by an author. Texts require themselves to discipline the reader into performing the role accurately. The survival of its system depends upon our performing or not performing, at the text's pleasure. To refuse to do what Lucy arranged for us to do, is to take control of the quality of our role, and to open the "closed project". Lucy resists the possibility of becoming the actant of the work and spends her role in a battle to sustain a long sought for self image. However, she shows the reader how we too might take her choice, as she once did in the Vashti role. There she wore the woman's clothing while performing the authorative male part, and performed as she desired. She became the actant in fantasy. What we can do is to apply Lucy's choice here of the passive performer in her 'real' life, to our ultra fictional role in the reading. We would

therefore return Lucy's shirked responsibility and unconscious to her. This is what we do when we view the performance and experience of our "mock reading" selves in the text. From this distance, the real reader outside the text is able to write up an active, actual reading alternative. In doing so, we learn from the text's structure while simultaneously breaking down that system to arrange one that includes the reader, woman, black or Irish repressed self. We then manage to allow our unconscious to participate in our consciousness. The less repression, the less unconsciousness. What is being discussed here is a brand of readers' intentionality that is different from the more common rejection or acceptance model. We are trying to move between the poles of reader/text, resistance/oppression, author/reader etc. to break down a hierarchical and oppositional straight-jacket and to develop a more revolutionary approach to reading.

Brontë became what she would very likely have criticised more blatantly if she had had the courage. She became part of the system which had long prevented her from writing freely. Lucy became another Madame Beck. I became absorbed by a text that initially revolted me. With the advantage of knowing that my responses could point to some of the information the text was not providing, I feel I was able to gain greatly from the reading. Something the text is very much concerned with is the effects of being seen and our self consciousness. These factors arise in later texts, and we will find that we will not be closing the cover on Villette , that the book will travel with us to further readings. For the moment I want to

"interrupt" the reading process to respond to a growing bank of terminology I've been using, and to clarify some uses to which these terms will be put. I will also comment on some factors I think might be relevant to my particular perspective, use of and cultivation of idiom, and to my reading environment.

INTERRUPTION

Convinced as I am that literature has much in common with institutions, I'm inclined towards a very defensive analysis of its components. Knowing how paranoic such an approach can be, I've become alert to the kind of condensing and strangling impression it can have on one's responses. We saw in the 'Villette' reading how caution can create the neurotic response I refer to above, yet error and side-effect can be revealing. Our goal then should be less one of reaching relative reading invulnerability, than one of gleaning information from the offending textual stimuli. I have enlisted my 'responding self as a kind of counsellor in order to diagnose a perfunctory quality to my original reading habits. I have, in a manner, inscribed much of myself into this dissertation, becoming, as a consequence, part of its case history. Increasingly I've become aware of the transient nature of the reading act I perform throughout. Reading, as I hope to make clear in my own examples, is entirely 'in process', and I am as much processing and creating my own present as I am absorbing the dissertation's innovative lexicon. Not surprisingly, there are no entirely artless readers, as we've gathered from the notion of 'reader's intention' already discussed. What we develop through our readings in these 50,000 words is the change of expectation and habit in reading which will permit us protracted autonomy over ourselves as interpreters. A sequence of naive responses in our chain of reasoning allow us to grow from the 'Villette idiot' to become a shrewd and more inspired participant in the event of reading. The transient growing pains, revealed in readings, will star in much of the content of this dissertation, where I intend to dramatise my own responses on the institutional stage of fiction.

Part of the processing of interpretations in this study has consisted of my absorbtion of certain repeated terms, often, though not always, borrowed from sources I'll quote presently. My preference for expounding terminology within the reading arena of the various texts will become increasingly clear. For instance we found that Freud's "primary response" notion applied to Villette , and I hope that the notion has become clearer as a result of the application of textual material around it. I'm loathe to discuss theory in isolation from its subject literature, but consider that my use of terminology, along with the manner in which it's illustrated, needs commentary, if only for the sake of ensuring clarity. It will be noticeable in these chapters that I, in a sense, form another hierarchy of terms, a 'lingo' to replace the old. This could suggest a reactionary and conservative trend in my writing unless I explain further. What I seek to do is to give this new jargon a strong house within which to lie. I am not merely replacing one institution with another, because the front and back doors of my house are open. My reader will have entered this dissertation without having to breach any introductory fortress, and she/he will neither be enclosed within, nor, hopefully, will they close the ending of my interpretation. This is not to underestimate the work a reader would need to do to participate in the work of writing these chapters, but rather to foreground the role my reader will have in their materialization. For the sake of an 'image' of what I hope to set in motion, let us pretend that instead of reading a series of books/chapters as if they were side by side with endings and starts separating them, that we read through the 'middle' of the lot. It's as if we find the holes and gaps in each, into which we create, as we travel throughout the reading

landscape. I hope my reader will experience something of what we have earlier referred to as Eco's "Open" text. As Barthes in "S/Z" suggests, we readers are already ourselves "a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite", or as Culler puts it, we are "a virtual site of intertextuality", (The Pursuit of Signs p.38).

Culler quotes Barthes saying that "the text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (O.D. p.32). On page 38 he quotes Barthes further to say that "the stakes of literary work (of literature as work) are to make the reader no longer the consumer but the producer of the text". This is one of my ambitions for my reader. Barthes pronounced that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" ("Image, Music, Text"). I am not about to commit linguistic suicide, but intend rather to rearrange the hierarchical relationship between reader and author , so that all can 'live' fully within the work. However disinclined one may be to accept on face value the Barthesian assassination of the author, we cannot but find significance in his distinction between what he calls the 'lisible' and 'scriptible' text. This pair is comparable to two terms I come to use frequently in my readings, "rhetorical" and "dialectical" texts. Fish's notion of the "rhetorical" text is similar to Barthes's 'readerly' version. Culler says that "the lisible (readerly) is that which accords with the codes and which we know how to read, the scriptible (writerly) that which resists reading and can only be written" (O.D. p.32). Elizabeth

Freund tells us that "For Fish a "rhetorical" representation refers to a mode which satisfies the needs and expectations of its readers; it mirrors for them, and presents for their approval, the opinions they already hold". Again she says that "In opposition to this self-satisfying style of representation, the 'dialectical' mode unsettles, disturbs and "de-certainizes" our expectations" (T.R.R. p.98). Generally we can detect in ourselves, as we grow through various readings, an advancing desire for an alternative . Already, when we observe these few early divergent terms become part of our 'linguistic furniture', we notice a change of 'intention' develop from our initial moments in Villette . I am detailing, in this 'interruption', only those terms that have become for me part of 'everypage' discourse. The rest will be explained as they arise.

We've already, in the Villette reading, discussed the notion of the hypothetical opening reader , and we'll be confronting the very real enclosing reader in the next chapter. There is a growing family of nomenclature continually emerging from the study of "reader response" criticism. I hope to reassure my reader that this family does not have to become merely a variation on the logocentric norm we know too well. Page 34 of On Deconstruction illustrates admirably something of the range of terms existing in relation to types of readers. It is obvious that I've found Culler very useful in this exposit of terminology, but I must confirm that it'll be necessary to apply to the original works and authors later for a more effective impression of what's involved. On page 34 the "narrattee" as defined by Gerald Prince is depicted as one addressed by the narrator to

distinguish it from the "ideal" reader an author could imagine who would be in full appreciation of every aspect of the work. Wolfgang Iser talks of "the implied reader", a structure of the text incorporating "those predispositions necessary for the literary work to exercise its effect". I will develop upon these various readers and audiences if relevant to individual texts, as I've already done with the 'model reader'. Freund tells us about Riffaterre's 'super-reader' who embodies "a system of intertextuality whose relevance to the undertstanding of the (poem) must be incorporated into the analysis". "The super-reader is like a palimpsest of available textual commentary on the (poem) which may include the author's statements or corrections, translations, dictionaries..." (T.R.R. p.76).

The micro society represented on the stage of fiction permits us to see how we perform in relation to our world, when we send various agents, or what Walker Gibson calls "mock readers" onto that stage for our own observation. These borrowed reading roles allow us to multiply our interpreting positions and to make more space for ourselves in the reading process. A reader can assign to these agents various reading tasks while the *real* reader outside the text watches his/her delegates argue, question, detect, grow and change. In this way we participate actively in the pretend-game of fiction, while getting a very serious perspective on how we might, or actually do respond to different real experiences. The fictional aspect encourages us to play while our responsive participation in the game subverts that very fictionality when we see that we

really create something of our own present reading. The event is a real one. "Once he has actualised the discursive level, the reader knows what happens in a given text. He is now able to summarise it, therefore reaching a series of levels of abstraction by expressing one or more macropropositions. In order to understand this progressive abstractive process, let us retain an old opposition, still valid as a first approach to the question: the difference proposed by Russian formalists between fabula (story) and sjuzet (plot or discourse)" (T.R.R. p.27; my emphases). Eco talks about 'Forecasts and Inferential walks', saying that "the fabula is the result of a continuous series of abductions made during the course of the reading. Therefore the fabula is always experienced step by step" (T.R.R. p.27). We've addressed ourselves to this issue of the reader's active prediction of the next step of their reading, so Eco confirms what we've already said. Eco, like other "masters" of the world of criticism have been very useful to me in my attempt to understand more of my given field. Nevertheless, it is my own writing "intention" to reassure my reader that brings me to call forth these giants. It cannot go unnoticed that the terminology I use is quite simplified. This is not entirely attributable to my own relative simplicity, but has also to do with a sort of 'parting of ways' taking place between myself and other commentators on reading in relation to personal discourse. I've waded through reams of critical works only to observe that they are elitist in that the lexicon used marginalises many potential readers who might be less educated than themselves. I cannot assume intellectual snobbery, and if I could I wouldn't. Apart altogether from the intellectual aspect, there is an

obvious bias on the grounds of gender visible in much criticism. Can it really slander English syntax to insert an extra she, her or woman where possible? By his/her use of jargon shall you know them I believe, and I am interested to hear what the jargon ensuing from my own writing will tell of me. Perhaps I, like Brontë, may adapt to the most 'impressive' or conservative "standard". I can certainly understand the temptation.

The process of reading one's own responses, as indeed all acts of reading, *is* seen to be as subjective as they are objective. We can deny neither of these binarily opposed elements. We discover, through the inspection of our responses, that some texts write up the reader's lot through their systematic organisation. Through the process of reading ourselves read , we observe the very definite role we have in the exercise of a text's "intensions". Reading about reading is a reflexive act, reminding us of the seeming self possession of some texts, which seem to contain themselves independently of the reader. We learn that texts are not so independent and that readers have as much autonomy as the written word if only the reader is aware of that fact. As Culler says, "But the relation deconstruction reveals is not the transparency of the text to itself in an act of reflexive self-possession; it is rather an uncanny neatness that generates paradox, a self reference that ultimately brings out the inability of any discourse to account for itself" (O.D. p.201). We see here something of the function of what is called 'deconstruction', though it will take many chapters to illustrate even reasonably the extent of its implications. On the issue

of reflexivity· however, it is clear that self reference generates paradox, as my reader will observe in relation to my writing. We've already recognised that I seem to substitute one hierarchy of terminology for another, surely paradoxical. But we must also see that neither reading nor writing are closeable· since neither are self contained. Neither are the terms I foreground as ''alternatives'' self sufficient, and my own reader will doubtless find 'alternatives for the alternatives , hopefully not mere reversions back to the 'original' hierarchy. By 'hierarchy' I mean to refer to the arrangegment of ideas and understandings in an accepted rank as sustained by the dominant social system, ie Patriarchy. That is a term I use almost interchangeable with hierarchy though the emphasis is upon the type of system involved. Something ''deconstruction'' will be seen to be involved with is the rearrangement or undoing of hierarchies, an activity pursued by most Feminist writers. When I substitute accepted ideas or terms for others, I at least undo hierarchy by asserting its fallibility, and the presence of 'otherness'. The stress therefore is taken away both from the traditional terms of reference and from those references located at polar oppositions to the ''norm''. For instance in relation to the term "difference" Culler reminds us that "The past is a former present, the future an anticipated present...But it turns out that the present instant can serve as ground only in so far as it is not a pure and autonomous given...If motion is to be present, presence must already be marked by difference and deferral...The notion of presence and of present is derived: and affect of differences" (O.D. p.95). The opposite to ''difference'' might be sameness or the 'norm'. However, in the

definition just quoted difference is seen to contain something of its opposite, and indeed it contains features of every other meaning. The texts I select for this study for instance say something about my view of texts unmentioned. Culler tells us, in relation to the hierarchical opposition "presence/absence", that a deconstruction of this pair would involve demonstrating that for presence to function as it is said to, it must have the qualities that supposedly belong to its opposite "absence". Thus instead of defining absence in terms of its negative, we can treat 'presence' as the effect of a generalised absence or, as we shall see shortly, of difference". He goes on to show how, even when we search for the origin of language itself, we find that "prior organisation, prior differentiation" is involved. The hierarchy I seem to exchange for my own solidarity of terms is itself a substitute for other terms. I am merely releasing a different set of criteria long buried in the writings of traditional authors, while using the exercise to unlock interpretations long silenced in myself as reader. The discussion of difference ought to clarify another word I use often in these chapters, 'supplement', which exists not just as a marginal entity, but as a necessary addition to a somewhat lacking, or silenced earlier version. "Logocentric idealization sets aside" (O.D. p.126) what are called 'parasites' or 'supplements' to the 'central' norm. But this "could not occur if they (parasites and supplements) did not belong to the structure of the phenomenon in question" (O.D. p.126). 'Supplement', when examined, draws attention to the simultaneous centrality of the marginalised.

I have selected the texts mentioned in these chapters because, in

various ways, they indicate how women writers have attempted to return the female author to the stage of literature. There exists a kind of curriculum of reading currently being offered to women's "groups" involved both in educational and social activities. From a random, yet wide reading of samples from this "curriculum", I've selected certain texts which I found most fit to accommodate my own "writing intentions". However, I must add that those 'intentions' were affected and influenced by my encounter with those novels criticised in this dissertation, as was the entire thesis itself. Texts and I worked together to create this work, but with a very definite consideration for the wider audience making up my own readers/correctors. In fact you readers must participate in the dramatisation of a shared reading journey in order for these chapters to 'work' at all. Each book is a landmark of experience and, hopefully change, and the entire 50,000 words work intersubjectively to create a reading drama in which texts, readers and the wider audience have equally creative roles. While I enact my reading performance, you create, from your 'responses to my response', yet more interpretation. Your failure or success at playing your part will depend upon my ability to open a space both in my text and in your reading patterns, from where you can create. If these chapters don't inspire growth in you, it can only be because I will have failed to provide the required room/womb.

Since I have not placed my introduction in the expected place, it will hardly be anticipated that I form a typically presented conclusion either. I have already said that I've observed a kind of linguistic

snobbery in traces of critical works. This too is very much a part of the workings of an institution. For my part, I've had the dubious advantage of reading from the 'real' institution of prison, which has foregrounded for me, an ongoing negotiation of repression and resistance. One practical, attestable conclusion I've reached is that something of this intellectual snobbery has already been deconstructed and shifted, as proven by the fact that an academic institution has breached its frontiers to include an untypical student. That's a start.

HIGH REALISM Part 1.

The struggle of the Reader in Braided Lives .

Marge Piercy.

On the third page Jill suggests that she may be a surrogate for someone else, the author perhaps, when she says "she is all right, allright - I am striding. From tie to tie between tracks orange with ruse while on my left run the shiny tracks..." Simultaneously she is alerting us to the fact that, for her, the narrating process has been a painful one. She introduces herself therefore, as a kind of "mock-author" in the act of recreating herself as a "narratee". With our usual conscious, or otherwise, intention of finding an identity in the text, we watch to see how she negotiates the distressing task of opening the vaults of her past so that, by analogy, we too can find a way to read a "young self face to face". On the same page 8, the second of the book, Jill says that what she wants is a "long view back", and she does write her story looking back from a tolerable distance. To do so, she needs always to be ahead of herself, to see herself coming, or to blind herself, and us from what does not fit into the constructed space she struggles to maintain between her young and her writing 'present' self. As we'll see, this commitment to holding herself between polarised images of herself, can be stagnifying at least. However, the act of thus condensing oneself as interpreters only appears 'normal'. due to our interpretative habits. Our behaviour as interpreters only becomes clear to us when it is in some way rendered strange or unfamiliar.

Again on the second page, she says, of her young self that it was "mother of what I am now", reminding us that she is always ahead of, and behind us, in the text, and we are primed for the process of

constantly alternating our own point of view. Every time we confront what might be the adult Jill, mothering herself along the text, we realise that she is equally child at the same time. This kind of separation is encouraged in language, where the meaning of an object is located on a given ''ground'' of itself. As Eco says a "ground" is a meaning component and "an attribute of the object as far as it (the object) has been selected in a certain way and only some of its attributes have been made pertinent" (T.R.R. p.182). What is a continuous 'meaning' process is divided to seem like quantifiable objects, as in the case of the meaning of Jill. Language is riddled with contradictions, accepted rules that are equally normalised and yet constantly at loggerheads. A meaning that is, on the one hand condensed under the sign of "Jill', is sub-divided into countable units of Jill. So inscribed is this set of contradictions into our psyches, that we constantly condense and seek to itemise ourselves into numbers of selves, at the same time. To me, this pattern is a version of the habit of subjectifying and objectifying objects of interpretations. The sign of Jill is too close to herself to permit her to apply what she perceives as the controlling power of objectivity, to herself. She therefore sends herself into units of herself, which she can later add up again to reach the reassuring sign of "Jill". We see her do this as she looks back to a Jill she herself gives birth to at the start of her life as interpreter of her world. At the same moment, when she commences the narrative, she reconstructs her earliest relationship with her mother. So far two Jills are born, really one Jill born twice. This double birth leads into her journey through the text as mother of herself.

While we are assured from this behaviour in Jill, that to interpret, read and write are similar, seeing that the sign of Jill develops according to the image of herself she draws up for her own reading, we should be concerned about how she and we use that apparent liberty. The impression we get of there being many Jills under the one sign will doubtless leave us with the impression of there being many readers under our own sign. Coupled with the early warning regarding a potentially upsetting content, is the threatening notion that we are to be split from ourselves as readers. The temptation to go on the reading defensive is obvious. However, earlier encounters with Feminist/realist texts have taught us nothing if not the worthlessness of the defensive type of approach. We saw that resisting Luch Snowe left us very manipulable. However I think most readers will have to grow through this reaction in practically every text. Not to allow ourselves to respond, even dangerously, would mean we were constantly defending against our own acts of interpretation. We would, in other words, be paranoid readers, having been inscribed with the very "norm" we wish to change. Our first glance at this text leaves us with a general notion of there being two texts in one. Jill appears disjointed into italicised Jill and the shallow youth. We feel driven and seen coming, and we resent what we perceive as an attempt to scatter ourselves as readers. What we are looking at, at this stage of our reading, is/was the structure of the text and we must question, "are we blanking some other part of the reading"? We gradually learn how to find our 'self' in the work "face to face" from the errors Jill made.

On the first page she talks of how she expected a poem "to issue

from this curious itch". She had just celebrated her most recent birthday, and she desribes a kind of rebirth. She felt "curiously cut loose" from her Mother's prediction that she would "die between the ages of thirty eight and forty". There is a connection here I think, between a joy at separation as in the division of herself we already witnessed, and with her concurrent positioning of herself as mother. It is possible that the joy she seems to experience on this "cutting loose" has to do as much with a vision of herself as her own mother, cutting herself, the mother, loose from the foetus, by expelling it. In examining Jill's own responses throughout this text, we must remember that she is writing as a divided narrator. Has she spiralled her way back to participate in the pleasure she later shows a taste for, that of expelling the undesirable to reach a desirable relief? She moves behind the lines of her own birth, finding a way of lifting what by common standards is the unknowable, onto the dynamic level. "Dynamic object", narrating Jill, following Pierce's model, moulds the sigh Jill to itself and onto the 'outer' level. Eco defines "immediate objects" as "a semiotic construction" which "should be recognised as a mere object of the inner world" (T.R.R. p.193). Other 'interpretants', that is signs, should be used to describe this inner world. Jill has brought the inner world of the experience of being born, onto the dynamic level, not to mention the feat of having expressed something of the unknown entity of giving birth to herself. She achieved this relief by dividing herself as 'object'. Expulsion was required in order for her to touch a part of herself, for her own personal ideas to surface. On a broad basis there is an experience, common in

oppressed people, of invisibility or silence. A part of themselves remains unrepresented by our current modes of expression, particularly language. The fluid sign "woman" is associated with a threat to the stable order of signification. Pierce and Eco are evidence of a patriarchal and traditional view of meaning as divided between inner and outer world. Adhering to this mode of perceiving meaning leaves an inevitable desire to expell energetically in order to reach what is seen as another layer, the "immediate object". To rid oneself of something, it must be condensed under some objectified form. On the second page Jill says that "it is not a mirror" she wants, but yet she uses a reflection of her own birth and identity formation to provide her with an extra perspective on her past. Despite the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign, people tend to think of signs as co-relating to images, and the image in the mirror will have existed for Jill as one sign of herself, which can braid into another "ground" of the sign. Again the contradiction we spoke of earlier, in relation to the mutually antagonistic rules of language, appears. Jill wants to move onto the "immediate object" of herself, via a braiding of the sign of "Jill". Yet that very movement is what she most fears, as I'll demonstrate later. Resisting movement and yet expelling the sign is the pattern clearly at work in language and in Jill's experience.

Motherhood is the arch sign of the "dynamic object". Conceived ideas need mothering onto the dynamic outer level. Jill's separation of herself into newborn versions, is a pattern reflected throughout the narration. She mothers herself in italics, while she has already

mothered herself to the point where we meet her, in her later life, depicted at the start of the book. She is mothered from each end of the book, and at the same time, she is child from both ends. Our sense of direction and of time is disordered by this and we are driven by circumstances to divide ourselves in order to keep an eye on the other direction. We perceive that there is a process which is not directly exposed in a linear pattern for us to read, so we start to make moves to reach this 'immediate' object and end up doing just what Jill did. In a very interesting article dealing with the 'opening up of the carnivalesque', Clair Wills has the following to say: "It's important not to look to individual texts by women to alter literary norms, abstracted from the need to control the way that texts are received" ("Upsetting the Public; Carnival, Hysteria and Women's Texts"). Here the reader is sensibly viewed as 'institution', and her point is proven by our common habit of reproducing in our reading, the structural system of the text. Resisting the text can lead to the very condition resisted, but clearly the content of realist literature reconstructs issues of structure and institution sufficiently often for us to assume that 'the system' incarnates the pain and misery we've groaned under in many of these readings. Her comment also asserts us readers as potentially the source of this pain, so it becomes imperative that the reader pursues a change of habit in the act of interpretation. Jill is both getting younger and older, and at the start and the end of the book, she is at the same stage of her life. Interestingly our usual sense of having left a past behind is not present here because the constant repeats become new signs. Already a change is occurring where process takes precedence over

end result. It's as if only more present is being created. The double birth, which is repeated before the reader's eyes symbolically in chapter 18, affects our sense of location within the work and we are constantly displaced from the positions we predict for ourselves. In the same article, Claire Wills discusses 'anachronisms' as connected to 'the discourse and representations of the hysteric'. She refers to Freud's explanation of how 'anachronisms' "live on in the psyche of the hysteric as a failure of translation" and to his saying that "The memory behaves as though it were some current event" (Origins of Psychoanalysis). For the hysteric then, the crises of the past live on, "in some separate part of the psyche". Not only might we say that Jill is continuing to live some early crises, but it would seem that we, the readers have been involved in some calamitious experience, because our memories have shown signs of having the relevant symptoms. We repeat and relive some, as yet, unrecognised experience, in conjunction with the narrator who is repeating the self-mothering act. Reviewing Jill's life, it would appear that her neurotic condition festered from conditions common to the heroines of very many feminist texts. She is in the constant and harrowing battle for control of herself and her meaning. The habit of interpreting our world in divided and dividing argumentation and contradiction, is gradually absorbed into the psyche as our way of thinking, the thinking style of the western world. No synthesis occurs, for those oppressed to the point of seeing their entire world as a contradiction. For women, contradiction is experienced to such an extreme extent socially, that it cannot be taken on board without obvious strain. Nothing like the sense of control experienced by

those more advantaged, will enter the lives of the oppressed in this thinking system , and so just about everything seems outside of their control, except what they can monopolise, count, or hold between binary oppositions within themselves. These are some of the background case historical features of the potential hysteric, but hardly the immediate causes for some of the hysterical symptoms in the reader. There are more pressing reasons, as we'll see later.

The first paragraph of page 174 reflects the overall drama of the plot. On the "dynamic" path of the story's action, Jill is mothered from two directions, just as she is 'daughtered' from both sides. In this first paragraph of chapter 18, Jill seems to me to be trapped within and yet around herself. She is possessed from within by the unwanted foetus, and simultaneously encased in a womb. The bathroom becomes her body as she sits in a foetal position "on the toilet seat staring at my belly". The image of birth connects with the notion of being inside and yet outside the given 'world' of the body, and reminds one of comments often made by feminists in connection to women's position within, and at the margins of society. However, the way in which the signs of "mother", "birth" and "abortion" are used in this text, suggest some kind of less than average, or even deviant, arrangements of woman as object. Jill has done something peculiar in this passage, which coincides with the odd location and chronology in the work. A type of reversal is taking place, when as I've said, Jill appears to be both mother and encased foetus, all in one. Something of her past, her own birth, is relived right throughout the story. Women and the oppressed are

marginalised from society and yet at its centre as labourers and reproducers. The depiction of Jill's ongoing birth in the story foregrounds the idea that Jill is actually trying to turn the arrangement inside out. The social system is being deconstructed symbolically before our eyes. We feel we see right into her womb, following it with our gaze as it shockingly expells itself onto the outer layer. Not only does the act of expulsion take place, but the object she wishes to repress, her womb, remains tied to her. The repressed never separates itself, but merely remains shaded for a time, like the steam clouded mirror.

Jill's reluctances to have a child suggests that, for some reason, she feels that something is to be lost from such an event. I think she fears losing her mother, since that is her main preoccupation while we know her. Almost every page mentions her mother. Having a child would not only alter her relation to her mother, but also her relation to herself. On that relation of images, depends her relation to herself, since her self-image will be dicated by her impression of otherness. Lacan deals with the area around infants' recognition of the phenomenon of otherness, the other, M/other etc. (Sexual/Textual Politics p.100).
The issue is relevant to Jill's narrative, in that she uses the reflection of her past to cast an extra dimension upon herself. It's as if she gets a mirror to cast an extra dimension upon herself, and then takes an extra mirror to provide herself with a side view. This experiment depends upon her having one fixed mirror, like dead Howie, or her mother, directly in front of her. Death and birth are the safety nets which hold meaning into some kind of conceivable

context. Death is obviously not part of anyone's memorable past, and in this case another is the mirror, a metaphor related to a past event that preoccupies her. All her encounters with the reconstruction she makes of her past, are made in either a mothering or mothered relation to herself. To introduce another sign, a child, would destabilise the image of herself, in relation to her mother. It's as if a sentence of meaning would be deconstructed and the sign Jill predicated onto another, otherwise meaningful sentence. The "Pearl" sign would move and she would lose sight of the only self image she is able to recognise. While she wants to move signs about in order to see the different patterns of meaning they show of herself, she can only face the extent of variation allowed within what can be juggled about, within that same system. This reminds us of the set of divisions that took place in the opening of the text, where the concise sign of Jill is broken down into units of itself, merely to be recollected into the single version again. This is the mode of movement in which Jill seems locked.

As I've hinted before, much of the interest of this novel stems from the side effects of this kind of straining between polarised oppositions of herself. Returning again to Clair Wills article, it is interesting to see some common features between the behaviour of the hysteric and the narrator of Braided Lives . Clair wonders if the hysteric is bound to the Victorian past, or bound to the past due to a habit of reminiscence. She says that the hysteric experiences a "cyclical return to the crises of her personal history, which she repeats in the symptoms". Clair also refers to the hysteric's

capacity "for turning...upside down" the "relationship of popular festive forms to the past". She is comparing the power to do just that with the potential in the carnivalesque to do the same. She later says "Celebratory claims for the power of the carnivalesque to undo hierarchies are merely fetishising of the repressed, a repetition of the desire for the lost domain". Certainly Jill repeatedly bemoans some absent desired condition. Jill is dependent upon repetition of closed and recognisable familiar interpretative activities, though she nevertheless shows signs of wanting to break out of that oppressed state. Perhaps it's the pure pressure of her self bursting forth. While we see that this desire to break out of her own personal institution makes up a lot of the theme or tension of the work, we also see that she cannot write or interpret outside of her prison, just as readers and writers all interpret within the institution of language. Her movement through the text via the polarised mother/mothered structure, allowed and insisted that she would be ahead of, and at a distance from herself. She didn't use the third person narrative technique to provide that distance, because the core of her life story revolves around the condition of her own sense of imprisonment. Her very method of movement serves to illustrate the repression she and anyone feels, when they divide and alienate themselves from their extendable selves. The actual structure of the binary relation she has assimilated, becomes as important to her self image as the sign "Pearl". If one pole of the binary pair moves, her sense of self is threatened. The system or style of her thinking is like a sign in itself. It is important to consider why people have come to reach for the fossil of our interpretative world in order to

extract some sense of meaning in one's self. Chapter 18 foregrounds the preoccupation with the structural relation to herself that Jill is trying to break out of. What we, the readers, will question, is how we come to have some of the symptoms of the hysteric, while Jill is the one who seems to be under the sort of pressures within herself that could make her hysterical. If we agree that she is not clinically hysterical by present norms, we will search for what has apparently kept her sane, while we seem somewhat neurotic in our misrecognition of the past, accepting it as the present, in a way typical of the hysteric. It seems to me that what has kept Jill technically sane is her maintenance of the walls of binary opposition around herself. We might reasonably argue that she was neurotic in her obsessional desire to hold her self image in a fixed and recognisable form. The sense of power this control over the walls around her interpretative system gave her, was more than she ever experienced in her actual life. Moving ahead of herself, she instinctively perceives herself as her own mother and she takes the power that comes with that position. As mother of the text, she decides what is said, unsaid, or what we readers will be saying, before we even know it ourselves.

On the model provided for me by the heroine, or disguised author, I too had initially selected what made comfortable reading. I mothered my own reading. I knew I had blanked various unpleasant parts of the book or alternatively condensed much of the unpleasant content under signs like "relationships" and more relationships. I used a sign in order to turn a landscape of pain into an expellable object, a "sign". However, I felt the repression of myself in what I have

described as a sense of incompleteness. To release the repressed object, I had to look at it in a projected version, as provided in chapter 18.

As we have already seen in the contexts of other reading, repression is both repressing and repressed. The side effect of my blanking of the unpleasant content of Braided Lives, was the feeling of incompleteness, the voice of the repressed past reading. To repress means to be repressed, occupied by that condition. "Steam clouds the mirror", we are told at the start of the paragraph in chapter 18, meaning that while Jill tries to repress the sign of the "child", she is, in a sense, aborting herself. The mobile sign she is trying to lock into a fixed relationship to herself, preferable at an expelled distance, affects the vividness of her own sign. She is afraid of the mobility of the sign, since it threatens to deconstruct the system on which she is dependent. We can't help feeling that Jill is in some ways aware of this fixed positioning of herself. She is in the contradictory position of being afraid to take what she wants. While she is pregnant and another potential "dark-haired girl child" exists, her relation to her own fixed "mirror", her mother, is shaken.
She cannot see herself at this point and horror and fear set in at this image of her own dissolution. The paragraph describes Jill in terms more like the grotesque, witchcraft, or indeed the hysteric, than as a normal figure. Where her image should be, on the mirror, there is a "yellow wall" with water running down it, like tears. Already movement is involved, though significantly a circular movement, where the water, in which she submerges herself, rises in

steam that blinds us to her image, and falls down again along the wall. The sign of "Jill" is moving around in circles in front of her, and she is looking at her predicament from the side view she provided for herself. I think her awareness of her condition here sends her into the business of searching for a break or gap in the structure of her interpretative patterns.

The word "coalescing" reminds me of the notion of cells in the inside-out womb coming together after some shattering, scattering experience, or indeed like the various divided signs of Jill adding themselves up again to make one sign "Jill". In that sense, it's as if the signs have power of movement in themselves, and can only be held in a given position by force. "Rivulets" sound roughly like riveting daggers, rather than like streams of smooth flowing water. The "ets" ending has haunting connotations of smallness, ringlets, and child life. The 'steam' is the all mothering presence that takes life too, "running", and repressed not only Jill's picture of herself, but also tries to control the swarm of life in the exposed domain of the foetus. The womb is in conflict with the mother, and Jill struggles to find a gap through which she might emerge to create an alternative pattern of relating, for herself and her readers. "Steam" or motherhood blinds Jill and yet they release her from the sign of "child" which is competing for her space on the ground of meaning. Death is used to give life, as Jill suggests in her idea of the cat which "always returns from the eight deaths before the last" (B.L. p.445): the last words of the book. We are bound to wonder who is to die in order for Jill to reach her goal, that of meeting her

younger self "face to face". Sitting on the toilet, it's as if she were trapped outside the womb, as the tub containing an alternative Jill, fills up, waiting for her to get into it. The steam that flows down the walls after her submergence into the hot water, will bear something of herself like ashes after cremation. This "steam swirling hot from the tub smothers me" she says, drawing our attention to the entire episode as more than the struggle of an unwilling mother to abort her child.

The notion of "struggle" as foregrounded by the title "The Agon", may cast more light on what it is that Jill is involved with. I've already said that I feel she is caught between contradictory forces, as symbolised by the womb and the mother. Again Claire Wills is of interest to me here when she poses a question as "how to make public the disruptive potential of this experience of a crisis (on the part of the hysteric) so that it doesn't stay enclosed in the familiar arena". Jill could be said to symbolise the attempt to do just that, when she makes even her womb public. Claire says that for Bakhtin, "the extended, protruding, secreting grotesque body was able to resist and destabilise the monumental, static, classical body precisely because of its openness". Jill's image of herself as a Hamlet, a Trotsky or a Donne, is replaced by another festering image of herself as "an envelope of guts", as if the image grasped her from within. The classic and the grotesque are in conflict here, and Jill's conscious dilemma is to find a way of releasing herself from the confines of an argument over which she feels she has no control, and which she sees is in danger of driving her hysterical. To be fe/male

(mail), is to be trapped in this envelope where one is to "deliver" another sign other than the one she had initially written on that envelope. She is being readdressed by and for an unfamiliar reading audience and I think she tries to redress the situation by writing us into a very specific reading role. In Villette we lived out Lucy's unconscious. Jill's role for us is different. That role, she hopes will solve most of her problems, as I'll explain later, when we are to carry the weight of semantic meaning she cannot shoulder. "This sac" of deliverable signs is what she wishes to control. She wants to be the one to decide when it will open and what will emerge. She, the reader of her own experience, wants to take back some of the power to write her own meaning. She is in the role of the traditionally marginalised reader, and she is using her own responses, to what she clearly sees of her predicament, to relieve herself of that suppressed condition. We will soon her that she, in fact, repeats something of the pattern of our earlier reading, when we blanked much of the unpleasant reading content, abandoning Jill to her lot. She, in turn, will try to offload her role onto us, her active expulsion or aborting of her repressed self.

Firstly she must encourage in us the readers, the same desperate desire to relieve ourselves of the tension she can assume that we by now share with her. "The Agon", while meaning "struggle", undoubtedly will call "agony" to the minds of most less informed readers. The classical and the "vulgar" are joined by the ecclesiastical, in the reminder of the "agony in the garden". Three institutions, the ideological, the social and the academic, are

juxtaposed in struggle. Gradually the imagery used takes us outward, in conjunction with the notion already expressed of the womb turning itself inside out. The "mirror" becomes an outdoor sign of water under the "clouds", and "running" rain. The 'steam' then takes on the significance of blinding fog, carrying something of Jill, who blinds herself with herself. Locked in repressed and repressing binary oppositions of herself, she is able to entertain the illusion of control of one thing, her pain. This process of externalising her conflict, reminds us of the desire Clair expressed regarding the possibility and value of releasing the deconstructing power of the hysteric from the family. Perhaps Piercy was driven by something of the same intention. Workers and the oppressed, deluded themselves that they had the meaning and pain of their labour to control and live on. It isn't and wasn't ever their own, and to show them that, would have the effect of either revolutionising them, or of turning them into owners of other people's pain and labour. Jill takes the latter road, as we'll see to our own cost later. There are three braided appendages to this incident now, the outside 'garden' of social oppression, the domestic and psychological one of "The great Devouring Mother" (p.15), and the threatening "spongy fist" that might wrench Jill away from all that she knows of herself, for good. The consequences of the latter fate, are indicated in the passage throughout, where the 'tub' starts to remind us of a witches' cauldron which Mother, the super witch, 'scrubs' furiously, while Jill is "sweeping the floor" with a broom, of course. "The cannibal pot" is the womb/room outside of Jill into which the uncanny "changeling" tries to emerge. We are almost

relieved that some unknown monster has not been unleashed onto the page.

Already we share her pain and fear, and want to go into battle with the alien foetus. The violence of the child's "fist" is muddled with the notion of the soft "spongy" innocent infant. The contradiction here parallels a kind of crisis going on in Jill's life. The "spongy fist" takes on the ugly connotations of a kind of water creature, grotesque when juxtaposed against the sea gem "Pearl". The personified womb 'lurks' from within, while Pumpkin, cat, broom and cauldron replace Jill's familiar image of herself. Under occupation from within, she loses the normal sense of herself, and we readers feel threatened by an impending and shattering 'opening'. When the fist unlocks itself, we don't know what will emerge. Jill has managed to put us in her own situation, and now we are afraid of 'moving signs'. Jill's body is about to open, and our fear in relation to that event suggests that we are to be immediately affected, as a consequence. We recall Willis's reference to "the disruptive potential of this experience of crises" and Bakhtin's view that the "grotesque body" was able to destabilise the 'static classical body precisely because of its openness'. She had been considering the "state of the hysteric". Our fear of the moving sign, as represented by the image of the water creature, causes us to question which side we are really on, that of the potentially radical deviant, or the "classical body". However, we have already guessed that she will have to lose her self-image in order to keep it, as is suggested by the temporarily steam clouded mirror. She, in fact, forces the expulsion and

movement of the "child" sign, in order to turn the "Jill" sign inside out. "Child" will move towards the position of the "Jill" sign, though she blanks it, leaving space in its place, before it can be seen, written and have dynamic meaning.

Fear of the moving sign may be a strong symboliser of a peculiarly female "condition". However if we consider the point made by Frank Lentricchia in Criticism and Social Change , we may want to extend our investigation of the causes of that female fear. He says that "Capitalism, therefore, directly needs the Marxist image of the causes of that degradation; where Marxism say 'exploitation', capitalism says a 'condition'" (Criticism and Social Change p.30). I think the female/feminist "fear" is in danger of remaining a more fundamental fear amongst the oppressed. Basic "exploitation" may be white-washed in the name of feminism. The image of fluidity is commonly linked with femininity. In the paragraph we're looking at, the moving image which so frightens us, floats amongst a fleet of images resident in the amniotic stream. Returning again to Clare's article, she says that "The cultural has a zone for what it excludes", which comprises those who are "afflicted with a dangerous symbolic mobility", and she mentions such examples as neurotics. Women in themselves are the arch symbol of "symbolic mobility", but they are not alone as "excluded". The sign of "woman" has taken the place of "oppressed". We are looking in books like Braided Lives , at a micro version of the broader "exploitation" of people, and we are closer to the middle class, or traditional view than we desire since we condense social ills into 'conditions'. This reflects the exploitation of

the oppressed which takes place when they are used as a marketable quantity, to sidetrack a potentially revolutionary force. Clare Willis's article bemoans the restriction of the destructive power of the hysteric to the family unit. On a broader basis the deconstructive and radical power of women is restricted to the domestic scene of their own bodies and minds. To correct the broader social ills will entail correcting all varieties of oppression, just as Jill must face the pain of abortion, in order to avoid having a baby. Being locked into her defensive subject-object relation to herself, is as personally painful as what would be endured by facing the opposition of the 'state'. She must break through her personal prison, in order to break open the walls of the wider hierarchical jail.

Women then, experience themselves as signs of dangerous mobility. They 'are' what society fears because of their "fluidity", so to speak. Jill fears and tries to control this aspect of herself. Yet to 'still' her self-image, her own sign, she must become active in the expulsion of an inner sign. Jill, the "angel of words" becomes the witch of craft. Movement in this text is based upon an inherent negativity since Jill must divide herself, over and over, like the cancer-like cells in the fist which "divide and divide". in order to experience movement at all. Growth and death are symbolically linked in the pregnancy event. Symbolic movement is potentially killing, as Clare points out, and in Jill's case bodes chaos and powerlessness even in relation to her view of herself. To remain "normal", mobility must be heavily controlled. We are made anxious by our own inclusion in the process, when we see that the book is 'struggling'

with us, taking us through contractions of our own birth as readers. Her lowering of herself "into the scalding tub, groan, heave out, plop back" is much like our experience when we submit ourselves to the reading. We go through stages of mothering ourselves against our own anxiety, and all that is painful in the story. We even have a stage of rebelling against what we perceive as the great 'devouring mother'/author, who engages us in this dangerous mobility act. We start to guard our own sign as reader . Jill says of her mother, that her words were "always in italics" (B.L. p.15) and I believe that in trying to race ahead of herself in the narrative, she assumed her mother's tone. By analogy, we start to take on Jill's tone which leaves us somewhat engaged in a kind of distancing of ourselves from ourselves. Jill is the little girl in straight print, who sometimes tries on her mother's high tone when the game suits. She tells us, in italics, that "I cannot include a receipe for action that is likely to kill you" (B.L. p.179). The only way Jill can conceive of killing us is if we are unborn, so we suspect that her intentions regarding us are safe enough, unless of course she intends pushing us into her womb. Her womb is, of course, open and gaping at us from the page, and we are more and more inclined to take on her tone. There's a sense of our being inhaled into Jill, being moved despite ourselves, by some kind of suction, or vacuum, rather than by attraction. We are the reversal of the foetus who resists imposed and constructed movement. We seem to be in the situation of being aborted from the reading 'position' outside the text.

Nevertheless, at this stage our sense of Jill as mother, leaves us

believing that she "knows best", though the rebellious child in us starts to look closer for clues as to what she leaves unsaid. We have an eye alerted for the sign and projection of the act of "abortion". Later we notice that she did not tell us much about Josh and we suspect the reason for this is that she is too close to him, he is still 'in' her life and she can only talk about herself at a distance. She did not tell him when she showed Karlie Howie's letters. We more and more suspect that "mother" is not telling us everything. Jill says that she liked her poems because they were in her own voice and of course we see that poetry symbolises her relation to life, it neither directly says its meaning, nor leaves a silence. Poetry is held and locked within itself like the image of Eco's "immediate object", (The Role of the Reader), which, he says, depends upon other "interpretants" to release it onto the 'dynamic' level. Poetry manages to silence and speak, all at once, just as Jill's account of herself has done throughout, both to herself, and as we'll later see, she silences us too. Words are arranged, by any expert, or ordinary speaker, on the same principle. This is the real voice of Jill, but many braided voices say differently, the same thing. They say that she can "be", however repressed, or stop "being", if she loosens herself from the jailed-in concept of herself. Our relationship with meaning is based upon our participation in our own institutionalisation within its rules, as voiced in language. Losing the ability to interpret is what we fear in madness or death. Something happens to Jill, which she describes on the first page. She falls out of the institution when she finds that the spell of language breaks and her mother's words were powerless. She sees

that she is potentially symbolically mobile due to her insight into that myth once presented to her in language, and, in a sense, she spends the rest of her life trying to contain that mobility. She wants to remain in some version of the safe institution.

Ironically, her staying alive, despite her mother's predictions, is what most exposes her to danger, in that she is symbolically assigned to a separate, braided off life. She sees, what mother thought best for her not to see. Mother is no longer entirely as she seemed. Jill interprets beyond death and before life and is therefore outside of the safety net we mentioned earlier. She sees that she is becoming 'deviant'. Howie lived in a graveyard, we are told on page 12 and he is thought of in terms of death, as Jill illustrates, when she says "After somebody's dead you think of them as always dead" (B.L. p.380). We read Howie back from the dead, as we read Jill along from her rebirth. She uses us in some way to reinscribe her back into the normal interpretative system. However, we are being exposed to all the contradictions she has noticed in her interpretative life. What are we to do with our own growing sense of deviance? We are reading ourselves into the womb of the textual experiences which almost force us to blank or abort ourselves out of them later. So far we've had a sense of our being sucked into the text or aborted out of our reading role outside the text. With that there is the contradictory notion of our being forced out of the painful encounters in the text. We have been placed into a position similar to that of the foetus, though interestingly both our predicaments parallel that of Jill herself. We are neither inside nor

outside of the text. Jill is neither inside nor outside of the cultural norm, and the foetus is neither inside life nor outside of death. Whatever 'condition' she suffers, it seems to be catching. What it seems to me that this situation reflects, is the social nature of much (so called) psychological deviance. A separate community of, might be, neurotics is being built, which might, on reflection, be the less voiced norm. It is at least possible that it could become a norm. In other words, the exertions Jill goes through to return to and remain within the norm, are no more neurotic than the type of self containment enacted by most people in order to accept the rules of the system of language, law and society. Most people are not so attuned to the causes of their sense of contradiction in life. If they were shown their own condition more clearly there is no reason to believe that they would not 'catch' this symptom of hysteria, neurosis or whatever. There is an all mothering fallback for us readers in this text however, because Jill holds us under her mothering presence, much like the way society provides its own safety nets. The "hysterical" sense of confused chronology we spoke of feeling earlier, has its source in the book's repeats which give the impression that the earliest incident of a series of similar events, is as recent as the one we are just reading. Even Josh who is "present" at her time of writing, is no more present to us than Mike of earlier days. We are simply surrounded by the affairs of Jill. We are (s)mothered by her many voices in poetry, prose and italics. We are inside and outside of her womb, as she alternates between mothering and being mothered by us. The text is a stretched out version of the passage in chapter 18, except that our mother Jill

actually exposes us to a stretched out illustration of our own abortion. Her mother showed her how to abort, so that we know she can do it. Jill plants herself in and around us to the point where we cannot see ourselves. We realise this when we find ourselves silenced and repressed by the text. We are the 'seen' abortions who go unheard in the text.

Having been drawn into her own condition of 'hysteria' or emotional deviance, we, like her, search for an opening in the womb of the text, and we try to learn from Jill how to force it open. Our dilemma is without precedent in that Jill uses us, the readers, to, in a way, penetrate the text. She is hardly a typical feminist heroine, in fact she tries impulsively to be as conservative as she can be. Where are the child readers who will allow 'us' to 'walk out' in this text? To achieve the openness we're looking for involves our creating a stand-by reader, again a sort of "mock reader" who will govern our development in the reading. To date, a hypothetical critic of my response would say that I was using a guardian reader, an extension of myself, to see me read. The divisions Jill has created in me as divided reader, are dialectically paced by a sort of solidarity of resisting and responding readers in my own mind.

Jill does not tell us how to abort and like typical children of the work, we lust after what is inaccessible to us. The silence on the issue of how to abort suggests that at this point the narrator "dissolves", as Barthes in S/Z puts it. Jill dissolves because she cannot say something without distancing herself from her own

environment in the event. She is the mother who encloses us in the gut of her text and then aborts us into silence. The acts of giving birth and excreting are condensed into a single transaction. The process is ongoing and addictive. She is compelled to expel us at every point, in order for her to enjoy the release of the tension emerging from her continuous straining for control. She yearns to break out of the binary opposition in which she finds herself, but doesn't dare to actually face that challenge. Her narrative technique is geared around the maintenance of a strict schedule of temporary release, where she leaves a gap for the reader, our role, which we will act out for her and write into the braided drama. The text is the abortion of the reader's voice. We are the victims of Jill's dependence upon the relieving act of expulsion. The predicament of readers of many feminist texts is one of being the involuntary vehicles for, and victims of, women's need to 'get it all out' of their systems. It will be remembered that at the start of the book Jill, or indeed Piercy in wraps, was addressing the ambiguous audience of "Ladies and gentlemen". We are the ever available public convenience, the readers, on whom the waste of oppression and misery are, often unconstructively, piled. In fact it would seem that Jill has no intention of allowing us to be heard as she conducts her exposition in the best interviewee tactics. In other words, she speaks so much that she cannot be asked any questions.

Karlie gets closer than anyone to asking pertinent questions and seems, to me, to be a symbol of the sort of mock reader I spoke of earlier. She is a less silenced version of us, the reader that got

away. She might be a narattee reminding us of the vast silences until her arrival and questioning of Jill. We are sensitive to the fact that, as narattee, she is different from the reader and will not have asked our questions. Because of that we are even more aware of even unimagined silences, the spaces that we do not see. Certain invisibilities are actually perceivable. The text is so full of issues, we are able to relate to the plight of the reader as receptacle, that I cannot help thinking, and hoping, that Piercy had more in mind in writing this book than bemoaning the female "condition". It seems to me that she wishes the reader to be aware of how literature handles readers in serious and powerful ways. In "The Agon" (B.L. p.174), Jill says of the potential infant that "It would love me, poor bastard; it would have to". Being mothered is a risky business. We might emerge as reading illegitimates who depend upon the all-mothering world of the institution fed out to us, since outside that institution it is difficult, and with consequences, to take the courage to name our world and ourselves. Nevertheless, the devouring system that oppresses, will have to abort the many braiding voices of those who dismantle its codes. To silence us, it must remain silent itself, as Jill did on the abortion issue. Silences can be heard, and often what is not told to us, can be seen and heard in what is happening around us. In that sense, all we need to do is to stop and listen to the silence, or watch the spaces. Jill can face herself and see herself in what is our experience as readers of the text. We are the extra mirror which provides her with "A long look back". The angle is shifted to allow the image to appear multiplied and as such apparently moving. When we are used to breach a wall which she

herself has not the courage to dent, we allow her the sense of freedom involved in habitual release techniques. In that sense the nine lives of the cat are like the nine months of pregnancy before a rebirth of a once almost obliterated reader.

HIGH REALISM Part 2

The Victimised Reader of Praxis

Fay Weldon.

From the first line, this text links looking to its treatment of space and alienation. The book is stamped with alternating black and white areas since each paragraph is bordered by blank space. The first paragraph, depicting the circumstances immediately surrounding the taking of a photograph, allows us to watch someone looking. Already we start to feel like intruders. The words "At the age of five" plant a notion of Praxis as being in some way over, far in the past and thus inactive, contradicting the very lively description of the typical child, "Round angel face, yellow curls, puffed sleeves, white socks and little white shoes". Photographs are constructed images of a past, a fact foregrounded by those five words just quoted. We are doubly aware of space in time and place between us and the event under focus. The incessant references to cameras throughout remind us that as readers, we are shown only what the original viewer or author wishes to reveal. The rest we must trace ourselves, and it's as if Praxis shows us her carefully compiled photograph album.

A suspicion derived from the title of the book that the "five year old" Praxis is the narrator of the story, causes us to perceive this photographed child image as old enough to have been taken before prints were developed into colour, a thought advanced by the chess-board like appearance of the pages themselves. Already a contradiction arises in our vision of the setting when, on the one hand words are used to describe the 'yellow and white and pink'

reality of the occasion, and on the other hand words are grouped so that the black and white image seems to be the inaccessable historical norm. A sort of wall seems to exist along where the reader is placed in relation to the textual proceedings. Our walled out condition is introduced for our attention at the earliest opportunity, and is symbolised by the vulnerable child image with which we identify, if only in pity. Like that child/object of Henry's gaze, we are alienated from the start. For instance, not only are these more primitive colourless prints linked to a past we sense we will not be able to 'live' in the reading, but I felt that the spaces formed part of that unbreachable image too.

So another of the contradictions we must negotiate in this reading is one created by regular spaces, which to the reader usually promise possibilities for participation in the story. However, in Praxis , as in novels like Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale , we are seeing the usurpation of space. We've been allotted a kind of refugee status in an environment that seems other worldly while recognisably modern. It's as if the narrator is placing a psychological 'no entry' sign before our minds. We already sense the competition for space in the life of this text, and we start to look out for villains in the plot who send out these hostile sensations. Hypatia not only persists in being a textual nasty throughout, we tend also to associate her early on with our feelings of alienation. Like unwanted readers, our mock reading selves react to her "refusal to appear on the same piece of card as her ill-shod sister". We are already trying to salvage our solidarity with Praxis whom we

predict to be the heroine and narrator of the book. The notion of cards as intellectual stepping stones by which we are expected to "Watch Praxis" and "Then, as they say to children cross over" (' P. p.105) cautions us to realise that it is something in the construction of the images and signs that cause feelings of alienation to distance the reader. This particular photographic style imposes our estrangement from the plot and we know that the image of the family picnic is a manipulation of our interpretative faculties. What we see on the printed page appears less like the black and white norm of primitive photographic techniques, but more like an image which has had the colour filtered out. We start to believe that our interpretative environment has been tampered with and that our reading is being fixed. We therefore send our mock reader out ahead of us to absorb any shock waves laid upon our reading field.

The notorious words "At the age of five" plant a concept of Praxis as being in some way over, a 'thing' of the past and thus inactive. We know differently however because we witnessed the creation of that photographic image. In reality it is obvious that I, like all readers, return from the end of a reading to criticise or reflect upon my responses throughout, in order to fathom how these responses were orchestrated. I mirror in my reading technique Weldon's deconstruction of the creation of the child image. Therefore it follows that it is not only significant how we receive and collate information about our textual and social environment, but how we use that information is very important too. Like many feminists, Weldon knows much about the oppression of women, and even of readers.

However, I hope to illustrate that she makes detrimental use of her knowledge. While I dwell upon the first two pages initially, I reconstruct the ensuing responses through the lens of my more recently developed way of looking. In other words, my 'looking' habits have been affected by all parts of the book, and my reading of the last page will affect how I re-read the first page. We look back at early events through the modified lens of later experience, which is no different to what we do generally when we apply our responses to participate in a given work. The relative progressiveness of that approach will become clear when we note how stagnant Praxis's and Weldon's mode becomes. They, like many feminist writers of 'realist' novels, seem locked in a sub-culture of the victim. Traditional fears that one could rewrite history or the text are absurd when one remembers that we can merely influence the textual material, and only within the dictates of its structure. Responsive readings can rather reactivate past events or writings just as Praxis might have given life to her former self. Instead she treats herself as an 'object' before which she carries her current interpretative eye like a camera. She, in fact, stills her past entirely, slotting it into single pictorial images. She says, "My manuscript is carefully sorted and safely between plastic folders" (P. p.268), reminding us of the starts and ends stilling and dividing traditional literature. Seeing our world in this way allows us to blind ourselves to the meanings between words, texts and images. Praxis's divided gaze leaves her with a kind of tunnel vision which the reader is in danger of inheriting as we'll soon see.

The particular dissolution of the Praxis image into black and white shadows of the living entity, sends us in search of the absent qualities of her personality. We look for the colour and to find the missing pieces we need to get closer to the narrator and to see through her individual viewing channel. This is what happens, less consciously, to us in every text, though Weldon's novel foregrounds the process. We are offered Henry's perspective when the picnic scene he found so 'romantic' is set up. The reader is temporarily planted by his way of looking, until on the second page we are shocked out of that role as we read of his desire to "belt her one". We detach ourselves long enough to see that this is merely an extension of a wider version of the same 'tunnel' vision we recognised earlier. A couple of lines down the page we discover that "Lucy Duveen, sitting on the pebbly beach with her hamper, her parasol, and her two little girls, made for him a romantic image". While the narrator seems to be as conscious as we are of the heterosexual structure orchestrating the child Praxis image, she seems unable to resist inhaling that method of image formation, even at the expense of treating her child-self as an object. She allows us to see that the photograph represents an impression produced as a result of Henry's and Lucy's exchanged glances. Henry is not really looking at Praxis as he takes the photo, but at Lucy. The entire photographic style of the book implies that the narrator too is looking across at some invisible object, rather than at the reality of herself as object. She evades acknowledging her part in her victimisation. We are confused by her sideways glance at herself via Henry, into thinking that she is looking at a second or even a third object in the book. Instead of speaking to us, we feel she addresses

two other, very separately treated narratees. One narratee reflects her attitude to her own image, and thus to us readers who identify with that vulnerable infant. We get an increasing sense of being demeaned in this reading, as we have in many traditional texts, feeling treated as utensils much as narratees can be used by authors to get a point across to an audience. The second narratee is treated so differently as to increase our sense of being used even further. That narratee is the invisible Deity she tries to make visible, while progressively assigning us to invisibility. She says "a deity, some kind of force which turns the wheels of action and reaction" (P. p.269). It's as if she looks across the text to salute invisible entities like Betelgeuse, or God. We feel ourselves to be the arch victim positioned right under God, Betelgeuse, Henry, invisibility and Praxis as we see that she too is a 'patriarchal' gazer.

This feeling of being somehow 'demeaned' by the narrator's gaze at us has an interesting parallel when Praxis describes how she felt under Willy's gaze. The narrator, whom we still only assume to be Praxis, compares Willy to Henry saying she had "a feeling that her life had lapsed out of colour into black and white: as if she too were now some part of Philip's imagination. What she saw lacked solidity: as if Philip were making an eternal square with his two hands and framing her through them; able at will to cut to the next square, to edit and delete" (P. p.201). This filming technique seems to match what we felt to be the style of the narrator from the first page, and her responses to Philip's look mirrors our responses to a similar treatment at her hands. What we saw on the first page was a sort

of cutting from one square into another, though in two directions. Firstly we were shown the photographed image directly in front of us, then we were moved backwards from the narrower focal point of the photograph to see the surrounding scene, the photographer's back, and the whole seeming like a series of squares boxed into each other. From that first page, there has been a sense of inactive Praxis, whose memory was being called out of some archive by an unseen third party. However, we are aware, on reconstructing our responses, that there is some difference involved between the contrasting direction of the two focuses. The backwards movement out from the image on that page, allows us to penetrate the past of the earliest event of the text. It's as if we get a slow-motion deconstruction of the formation of that image. We are allowed into the pre-history of Praxis . There is an idea of someone taking a video of Henry while he takes the photo, and then the video would seem to be reversed. Weldon might be deconstructing the workings of the media and allowing us to see how personal identities are "framed, edited and deleted" into a given state. We have already seen that the Praxis/child image is inaccurate. We've seen her memory squashed into black and white ideas of herself. The reversal of the hypothetical 'video' causes us to wonder if, again, her memory is being tampered with, being set back a step or two into the past, in order to be recalled again in the form of Praxis's misrecognition of herself. It becomes increasingly obvious that she is telling her own story, and we cannot but see that anyone is capable of dissolving their own history in order to rewrite it, instead of responding to it in a creative and enlightening way. We have been allowed to witness

the packaging and unpacking of her history and we're aware that the same could happen to us.

Just as Henry was not looking at Praxis but at Lucy, we too, appearing to look solely at Praxis, are really interested in seeing the narrator. We know that we have been planted with Henry's gaze as he viewed the child on the first page, an uncomfortable predicament given our knowledge of how that image was constructed. We've therefore been lodged with a guilt complex, while simultaneously feeling like victims of that gaze ourselves. Feeling that we have treated the child Praxis as an object, we seek out the director of this unwanted habit of looking. We prepare to actually confront Praxis. To find and blame narrating Praxis we must take the camera into our own hands, and travel even further through Henry's line of vision in order to reach the space 'behind' him where we envisage the narrator as being. This reminds us of the necessity of reading our response. In order to see the workings of a textual construct, we must take on the available roles, observing our responses in order to learn from them. The motivation for seeking out the 'director' here stems from our feelings of being ourselves watched by some unseen looker. In his book Foucault describes how "Visibility is a trap" (D and P p.200) in relation to control as administered in prisons. Having lived both within and without the English jail system, I've noted that much of what he says can be applied to the control of the public in the broader institution of society, not forgetting its relevance to the reader. Certainly surveillance is a central feature of prison life, but so too is it rapidly becoming the

norm outside detention centres. Foucault describes Bentham's "Panopticon" as that which is based on the following structure: "at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring". Centrality therefore, is noticeably what is perceived as the locus of sight, the unseen viewer (voyeur) seeing or not at its pleasure. The habit of searching for and locating the source of power in a text at its centre is one most feminists try to subvert. Yet Weldon seems to subject us to this very imprisoning structure. Foucault's insights tell us much of the effect being seen has on our behaviour, and in the light of my prison experience I can say that it is a factor that goes a long way towards institutionalising prisoners. One acts a set role for the prying "Panopticon" until one actually unconsciously risks absorbing that role. Locating this voyeur is an occupation we're very involved with in this early part of Praxis, as if finding him/her will tell us where to direct some defensive adopted role. Knowing where the camera is would allow us to perform while holding a "secret self" elsewhere. Praxis, as we'll see, does not facilitate the performance of any single role though, and we find our defences rapidly deteriorate under the weight of its onslaught upon us. To reach even Henry's point of view, we must move in front of his gaze, thereby blinding him in order to look back through his lens to the space we envisage as laying behind him. In this process, we project ourselves onto the Praxis photo image, thereby taking on the victim role, just as she did herself. It seems that our best efforts to find a safe haven from which to tackle this reading, only lead us further into its constraining web.

On reaching the victimised Praxis role, we become aware that we are to compete, even with ourselves, for space in this text. Judith Mayne covers this notion of woman as the object of the male gaze in her article "Feminist Theory and Women at the Movies" (Modern Language Association of America). She refers to Gloria Steinham's book on Marilyn Monroe which is also made up of photos, or "iconised" representations of its object, as Mary Doane would describe them. Judith takes up on Mary Doane's discussion of "the over presence of the image", where women themselves are said to be the desired image. Freudian theory holds that children desire the mother connection and while boys can continue to gaze at the mother, from a gap, girls grow up to become that desired object. The third line of "Praxis" suggests to us that we are the over present image of ourselves in the text. We've moved into the child/object position and this extreme epitome of the child image is fast emerging into, if not a coded version of, the emerging woman with "white shoes - one on, one off". Mary Doane develops on Joan Riviers's idea of the masquerade. Doane describes womanliness as a mask since "The masquerade's resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence to itself, as precisely, imagistic" (Film and the Masquerade : Screen nos 3-4 1982 p.74-82). To hold the feminine image at a distance, Praxis must flaunt it, accounting for her compulsive involvement in heterosexual relationship, with Philip, Willy, Ivor and even her own father. To test the authenticity of this masquerade theory we need only read on, since we have already projected ourselves onto the child Praxis role, if only through pity and in order to see out

through Henry's lens. We do find that this over presence to our assumed identity promises to nurture us into the adult Praxis role, the masquerading woman. Far from finding the defensive role we spoke of earlier, that would allow us to perform a safe reading of the text, the condition of being the object of a universal male gaze causes us to project ourselves into many versions of a masquerading self. The "mask" we assume is in order to see at all, rather than serving to allow us to assign our real selves to some secret gap. We can only see through the mask, and therefore our world view and identities are moulded out of that assumed role or mask. Predictably after a gap between chapters 9 and 10, we find ourselves suddenly seeing that we have been absorbed into the house at 'Holden Road' watching "Mr Robinson the childrens' officer" approach us. We have "crossed over" on Praxis's invitation. This developing identification with the heroine not only frightens us for the obvious reason that her life is in a mess, but we will discover that the masquerade to which women and the reader are driven has other side-effects too. For the moment let us consider where our own identities may have gone. Having been enticed into the Praxis role we find that the sign reader is being scattered. We've noted already that realist texts like this and Braided Lives do not cater for the dynamic and elusive, moving nature of the sign. Praxis does everything all along to try to still her own image. It seems to me that a kind of compromise is offered us. Praxis and we are in the same blinded position and she offers us a way out. She invited and even manipulates us into sharing the child/object from the start, as a kind of mutually held 'mock object', a stilled focal point allowing us a

ground from which to project and masquerade through the reading. We can use this focal point also as a fixed location from which to see and negotiate with each other so that we have an illusion of being on an equal footing. Thinking that we see the "Panopticion" allows us to assign ourselves an illusory identity to deal with her, just as she assumes the name Pattie. Later we are to discover that, like her, it is very difficult to scrap this temporary role when we find ourselves unable to surmount its inherent features of victimisation.

At this early point we believe that we are really negotiating cleverly with a manipulative but surmountable authority within the text. Our "compromise" calls to mind what Culler says about Susan Horton's analysis of interpretation. She's quoted as saying that "everything else in that hermeneutic circle, not just the reader is in motion at the same time", to which Culler adds the notion that "any element can be put in movement by holding another element firm" (The Pursuit of Signs p.4). We are reminded that the authority and field into which we've compromised ourselves is essentially a competitive institution. Our society and language are built on the same hierarchical structures. The stilled object, child/Praxis, is posited as a norm which we soon forget to be no more than a derivative of previous interpretation, black and white images constructed out of a very different and colourful reality. We have already forfeited our position as readers looking into the text, to become objects looking out from it as photographed Praxis did.

We are mirroring, on the reading level, a movement we observed

earlier in relation to the illustration of the taking of a photo. The narrative therefore seemed to push us back from the image in order for us to see more, just as our attempt to look through that camera's lens caused us to project ourselves onto the photo image. We have looked from both directions, just as Praxis does. She looks out from her child self to travel towards the desired adult woman role, while she also moves in reverse to unwind the processing of her adult image. Weldon demonstrates much insight into the formation of image, probably due to her experience of the media world. The structure of the text is linked to the thematic in their joint manipulation of the reader. Moves we make in order to see in the story, change us from neutral observers of Praxis and her fate, to the villain role, and from there to the victim role. The weight of seeing so much of the heroine's pain causes us to feel guilty. We feel that she is telling us all her problems and almost accusing us. Ironically therefore we carry both villain role as associated with Henry's way of looking which we've absorbed, and the victim role connected to our projection onto the object of that gaze. We are Praxis and suffer with her, yet we treat a child image which codes both Praxis and us, as an object. Praxis too is both villain and victim though instead of claiming responsibility for her part in her self abasement, she chooses the victim role. The victim part is easier to play, even at the cost of her assuming some kind of debilitated condition, in order to claim inculpability. Earlier she suggests that Lucy may have faked madness, and she says "I am alone in the reality I have created for myself. In my mind I invented old age, illness, grief and now I'm stuck with them and serve me right" (P. p.79). The "and

serve me right" indicates the traces of guilt mixed up in her self abasement. This guilt reinforces the need for the victim role which is the nearest she comes to an identity in the structure/society of the text. Since she cannot as heroine find a better role in the story, it is hardly surprising that the weight of the reality of her life leaves us intellectually clogged.

Hypatia is a more extreme version of Praxis's debilitated state, having reverted entirely into a sub-culture of illness. The story is of the imprisoning of Praxis and women like her, leaving them free, once imprisoned, to find their way forward, needing to shoulder no more responsibility than if they were, in fact, child/objects. The victim role that the authority in this story lives off, is one used by many oppressed authors to carry them through their "roles". I hope it will become very clear that this mere passing on of their miserable reality is not always helpful, and can even be damaging. Guilt is one basis for the structuring of incapacitating pain and imprisonment of the intellect. There is a kind of pleasure to be had from the treatment of self as child, a pleasure many 'realist' texts actually pander to, without allowing readers much contact with reality. When we look at the book, we find that consistently, from the first chapter until what seemed to us like a gap between chapters 9 and 10, there is an alternating pattern between images and references to cameras/films, and references to suffering. On what we might call the screen of the 'live' action or slide-show, our mock reader interprets images of photography as on the first page (page 5) and in chapter 3 page 17 "showed him the photograph". "Henry emerged

from his developing room" in chapter 5, and in chapter 7 "Henry's photographic studio" is introduced. Between each of these chapters are chapter two with its reference to pain, "Now what kind of memory is that to comfort anyone-", "The memory of the afflicted child one was", and chapter 4 with more of the same, "this extreme of terror and horror". Then in chapter 6 she says "I ought to rejoice for the girl who stood upon my toe in the bus", and in chapter 8 "See how I am left alone". The two notions of seeing and emotional strain work together in the book to ultimately turn the reader into an object, and a rather miserable one at that. We feel guilty, we take the victim role, we blame Hypatia, Praxis, or the high level of 'realism' in the text, thereby increasing our sense of being the victim. We are masquerading Praxes ourselves who on discovering we've lost our identities search for the director of events, and in searching thus submerge ourselves fully into that objectified Praxis role. We are surrounded by masquerading selves as our mock readers try to tie down the progress of a heroine who is herself only a mock identity. She too has already lost her individuality and we are chasing a shadow.

We remember that on that first page we saw the image through Henry's gaze, then we were enticed to another focal point where we saw, apparently, behind his back. There is nothing exceptional about this gradual revelation of criteria, other than the form in which this developing data is presented to us. We see rather than read the events. Reading can give one a sense of participation in the revelation of criteria, as opposed to television viewing for instance,

which turns one into a spectator. This text seems to usurp even the illusion of reading creatively. We feel more alienated as a result since our role as readers has been rendered unnecessary. It's as if the story can carry on very well on its own, an impression fostered by much traditional literature. We seem required to only look. Even the degree of concentration demanded in order to look into this album of Praxis's life is minimal, since we get ample and frequent rest periods with the recurring blanks and spaces. We are being treated like zombies.

Praxis says "I can scarcely remember, on a hot summer's day, what it is like to be cold" (P. p.156), a theme which represents our detached relationship to the events of the novel. We see the phenomena but are not allowed to feel the experience. We know that our alienation from the dramatic level of the text parallels the narrator's equal distancing of herself from her own responses. In Villette we saw characters forfeit one identity for another. Here in Praxis we see the exchanges involved in the absorption of an entire world view, as Praxis becomes Pattie. She sees her past as blocks of meanings, photographed images, which can be added up to make the textual album. Presumably these images have been rearranged and re-ordered to facilitate her own intentions. The reader will have been struck by the events of page 90, starting at the top of the page, where drunken Praxis is watched by the narrator as "a space she had always considered her own" was entered by "total strangers". This seems like a repeated episode of the objectification of the child Praxis on the first, and by now she

has found a way of dealing with the inevitable ensuing pain. Her drunken condition is typical of the dazed style of looking used by Praxis in order to face her entirely sad life. We cannot but be shocked, yet her dazed way of looking at it all herself, makes it somehow easier for us to watch too. We are learning how to face pain, by only half looking at life. The idea of the occupation of her space suggests that she comes to project the spaces as well as her concrete image. Her space is part of herself and in her victim role, nothing of herself is of value to her. She flaunts herself and her space, to a distance in front of her, exchanging her 'real' space for an illusory mock space, a sort of 'secret self' in which she can enjoy an illusion of authority. She is becoming rapidly withdrawn in the way all marginalised people similarly forfeit their space and creativity. She says "Until the event occurred: the extraordinary happening, which divided her life into before and after" (P. p 134). When we read the words "I used to live in Brighton" (P. p.138), we know she will have to 'commit' incest. By now we are so desensitized that we read of this and of the death of Mary's child, as if we ourselves were drunk. We wonder if the incest event is offered as the "turning point, culmination" (P. p.8) she mentions in her synopsis of the name Praxis. It's as if the story folds over on its axis at this point about halfway through the text. The major change in the heroine is a structure-related one. That very structure had forced her to compromise the system she tried to survive in, thereby 'shooting itself in the foot' in a manner of speaking. She, like the reader, was driven to her masquerading feats in order to merely see herself within the constraints of Patriarchy. So active was she in

this masquerade that she didn't catch herself in time as she extended the feminine mask to her own father. She broke the central rule of the patriarchal system by having sex with him. She moved so close to the "desired" mother image that she became her father's spouse. This reminds us of how impossible and contradictory the rules of our society can be. To survive what she has done, "Incest she told herself, rapidly was merely another label; so, come to that, was father". But these labels are the fundamental symbols of the system she struggles to survive in, with so much difficulty that she was driven to an involuntary act of subversion. However, we discover that instead of advancing on this incidental act of revolt, Praxis goes on to mend the breach in the 'wall' that contains her, and to further and sustain the very laws that have made her miserable. In her suppressed state, she sells herself to the system entirely, suggesting to us that too much exposure to pain, however 'realistic', is not always conducive to progress.

She says "When the fit had passed I hobbled to the mirror and recognised myself. Not Pattie the prisoner, but Praxis. My hair was thicker than I thought; my eyes less rheumy. I saw that I might have a future, and I was afraid" (P. p.188). She seems to prefer illness to hope, as she says "Do I really have to put up with being Praxis?" After the usual space we read, on another line, the word "Children", and she goes on to reflect on that subject yet again. She has reverted back to her dazed style of thinking, which works as a distancing time lapse in relation to even her fears and emotions.

We remember that on page 78 she said "How much is fiction and how much is true?" The whole irrational process that takes up the heroine's life, suggests that she does things mechanically. Her discourse is like that of a machine, reminding us of the tape-recorded narrative of The Handmaid's Tale. Praxis says "But nothing I say is true", and "Truth lies in the gaps between sentences. That's what copy-writing is" (P. p.227). Indeed the vast amount of Praxes in the text and the divided pattern of textual presentation calls to mind a series of advertisements. Her distance from the events even of her own life reflects a similar distance experienced by the reader. It is noticeable to myself that my reading of Praxis seems quite removed from the 'intestines' of the text. I find myself addressing the structure or frame of the book, and my movements and interpretations have been monopolised by that structure in a very obvious way. I've found myself in a receptacle role in relation to its bountiful detail. I have looked and then looked again at the next photographic image the album pushed forward. The negativity of the theme will have distanced me from the drama of the work, but I think there are other, more significant aspects at work with that thematic alienation. Neither Praxis nor I participate enough in the creation of the meaning of our lives in this novel, and the events seem ironically unreal. We merely accept a series of images like advertisements. If each image, or advertisement, is representative of a kind of copy-writing sentence, then the truth does not exist, as she said, in the spaces she offers us. We said already that these spaces were part of her role too, and it seems that she tells as many lies in her spaces as she does in her photographic images. "Truth (tells) lies in the gaps between

sentences".(p.227)

Short spaces and silence come between advertisements in order for the viewer to inhale the given image, but these spaces will not be long enough for the viewer to deconstruct the making of the advertisement. One is merely planted with the idea, just as Praxis and the reader were planted with the object role. We do not choose our identities, but are issued with them in current social institutions. Far from thinking of how she might alter her state of affairs, or the institution in which she existed, she actually sustained that institution. When the climactic "culmination" arrived in her accidental subversion of the oppressive patriarchal system, she did not go into conflict with its codes in any kind of radical way. She actually stretches its repressive norms out to encompass and facilitate her own conservative habits, and to infect the reader with her way of seeing the world. She plants her ideology on us. Her debilitated condition, or exploited predicament, has its roots in the 'social' structure of the text. The oppression she suffers frightens her into a closer dependence upon the normalised victim role. She becomes the stooge for the system, doing its dirty work. A kind of blindness imposed by the society in which she, and we, live has taught her the benefits of not seeing reality, but an illusion of actuality.

Pain is associated with seeing in Praxis, and she places spaces or lies where the truth should be. She cannot face truth, "that demon, bat-winged hovering over her life". She would have us slotted into her predicament too, offering the illusion of freedom and truth in the

generous donations of space. We are being colonised by a kind of photographic memory to replace our own, so that we too will occupy and silence the gaps with what has been programmed into us from the novel. In effect, as I've said already, we re-read the story from the last page. It's worth noting that on that last page the 'new lens' I was given was designed to ferry me off on an alternative ideological journey to God. There is, of course, a great space after the last words of the book, "This is quite enough", and this is where my second reading began. I had had enough from quite early on. Realist texts like this one purport to show the oppressed images of themselves. Feeling planted with the pain of the heroine, we search for its invisible source. We do not choose to fill that space with deities, stars or emotionalism, but with our realistic observation that the oppressive power of the text "lies" in its structure. The system or society of the novel is the manipulative force. Praxis throws up some illuminating information but a lot depends on how that information is received by the reader. I can congratulate the many feminist writers who get so many facts and feelings onto paper, but cannot assure them that all of these texts tell their stories in the most helpful way. I've chosen to share my reading of this novel in order to illustrate how some very realist writings actually oppress the reader to the extent that they may not even be able to imagine alternative worlds, or find energy left to do anything but fall into the awaiting victim role. If Weldon's intention was to advance the feminist cause, it failed. In fact I would argue that 'Praxis' was not written either by or for the community it purports to describe, the oppressed. If it had been written more with a consideration as to

how it would have been read, it could not have been such a failure, that is unless Weldon's world view is of the opposite bloc to that of the oppressed. The group she may have been writing for might well have been inclined to follow Praxis to high Heaven. This is one reader who is not saved by the book, but one who wishes to save others from it.

CHANGING EXPECTATIONS: Part 1

A view on reading from Wide Sargasso Sea

Jean Rhys

In the Praxis reading from which I've just emerged, it was clear that my ability to imagine alternative worlds or futures was lessened by an over-exposure to a kind of mind pounding realism. We were deployed, as readers, in the task of keeping up with a racey sequence of events, being left with neither space nor enthusiasm for compounding new reading praxes. I believe that the structure of the work existed as a kind of unidentified participant in a plot to turn us into objects of itself. I came to name this unproclaimed villain as the society of the text, or the system by which it sustains itself and procreates. In Wide Sargasso Sea we locate a crack in the literary institution from where we can view and negotiate the discharge of a more assertive and versatile reading strategy.

The white European reader is displaced from the first line where we are unsure of the criteria surrounding our proposed reading environment. When we read "and so the white people did" and "because she pretty like pretty self", we forsee the emergence of an other textual milieu. In this foreign world where one "got used to a solitary life", we pursue an ally since we feel that "ranks" have been closed against us too. In these early pages Antoinette seems objective and rational, if only because we meet her in a chaotic situation. The fact that she too can see the mixed environmental bag of race, colour, national and psychic forces as deceiving of and facilitating mention makes her seem strong and credible. We feel that she marks a safe point from which to partake of the scenario

ourselves, and hers is the knowing mind to whose authoritative guidance we willingly submit because we are basically insecure. In those early days she is our omniscient navigator and we follow her in the belief that she will survive her predicament. By the end of the novel our assumptions about omniscence and reading generally, are frustrated in a way that awakens us to the implied criticism of Nineteenth Century novels like Jane Eyre with their inevitable happy endings. In fact our entire reading of Rhys's book exposes the conservative nature of our literary expectations when we find ourselves trying to impose closure on a text that disavows it.

A change occurs to our relations with this escort when we start to apply our native cultural values to our assessment of Antoinette and her world. Finding her somewhat illogical and subjective, we put it down to her youth and stay with her in the belief that she will learn, until gradually we start to suspect the integrity of her intentions. We are early warned of her tendency to blind herself to reality, when, on the second page she "ran away and did not speak" of the dead horse, as if silence could somehow change the facts, or words determine the reality of events. She does not promise to be the stuff of survival, at least not as considered from the light of the system we are familiar with. We shudder to think of how she would fare in the highly real worlds of Braided Lives or Praxis, and a shadow of doubt develops in response to her incongruous relation to our reading expectations. When textual events do not unfurl quite as we've surmised, and when the heroine doesn't respond to her environment as we predict, we fail to read her at all. We proceed to

conjecture and insert her hypothetical responses, while leaving unrecognised what she and the text say. It is only through the observation of this reading pattern in ourselves, that the message of the text manages to reach us. We are shown that we can be authoritative reading writers of our own experience.

By the second page we are already divided readers, with a mock reader travelling submissively with Antoinette as she elaborates on a mother who "had to hope every time she passed a looking glass", while another mock reader researches our initial reading. We are a little destabilised by that disjointed position, and consequently less sure of our real identities. We have a situation then where we are vulnerable to the nearest available other identity, Antoinette's, and yet ready to rewrite that assumed identity at the discovery of concrete evidence against her. We are ever ready to 'write off' an early reading in favour of a later version, consequently shifting and tampering with our fictional selves in the story. Our dashed expectations have caused us to be occupied with the provision of recognisable reading experience, to the extent that our reading selves outside the text allign us to Antoinette for support. We wear her identity since she is all we've got, yet we mistrust and are alienated from that characterisation because as readers we are too habit bound to understand the strange .

Antoinette says, of her mother, that "she changed. Suddenly, not gradually" (W.S.S. p.16), though to me it seemed that by part two Antoinette herself had changed. Between notions of the dominating

"patriarchal" voice rewriting and marginalising her story, and flash backs to other possibilities, I wasn't sure when this change could have happened to Antoinette. I thought I might have misjudged her from the start and wondered if she might indeed be given to denying reality. I pondered the possibility that the incident on page 38 where she showed signs of failing to identify Tia as 'other' than herself, was another indication that I was being lead by a narrator who, far from knowing the local cultural terrain, didn't even know her own identity. On that page she seemed to inhale Tia as part of herself, "We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking glass". She reflects, on the textual level, a misrecognition we act out in our traditional reading habits. It seems to me that Rhys expects us to see reflections of the readership in her work, as suggested by the abundant references to mirrors right throughout the text. We are shown an old traditional version of ourselves, yet allowed to mould out models of ourselves in an alternative rendering. Elizabeth Freund, as quoted in the "interruption" says that for Fish "a "rhetorical" representation refers to a mode which satisfies the needs and expectations of its readers; it mirrors for them, and presents for their approval, the opinions they hold". It must follow then that there is such a thing as a "rhetorical reader", that old-timer in us who wants to inhale all difference and otherness in our pursuit of a consistent and harmonious unity reflecting our own established views. Wide Sargasso Sea does not permit such satisfaction, and is more in line with what Freund refers to as the "dialectical" mode of discourse which "unsettles, disturbs and decertainizes our

expectations".

The "dialectical" quality of Wide Sargasso Sea is emphasised by the fact that the "rhetorical" reader in us clashes with the text's "decertainizing" effects, as evinced by the sort of reading acrobatics to which we subject ourselves. Just as my second mock reader was scrutinising the heroine for possible flaws, my first mock reader was stirred back into action in part two, as I again sided with the heroine against what I was construing to be Rochester's usurpation of narrative space which I wished filled with proceedings I'd anticipated. It was, hopefully, to be her story, and we have all heard enough of Rochester in Jane Eyre . The extent of certainty and expectation with which I approached the reading is indicated by the depth of a sort of personal fiction from which I was reading. I had steeped myself in self scrutiny as if the story were about me and not Antoinette when I reprimanded myself, in the present tense, for my over defensive stance against Rochester. In a very short space I had moved from doubting Antoinette's stability, to an attempt to behave more benevolently towards Rochester. Evidently there was something my real reading self outside the text was wishing to blind itself to, by moving from positions of subjectivity to objectivity without pause for thought. I was reminded of how Antoinette describes her second dream in the present tense, "I am wearing...". In the first and third dreams she uses the past tense, "I was walking...", and "I waited". The second dream episode is followed by a description, again in the present tense, of how "Sister Marie Augustine is leading me" (W.S.S. p.51), and then a few lines later,

she says that "Now the thought of her is mixed up with my dream". She was talking about her mother but we are conscious that she might as well be referring to us readers, since we too start to become subjectively mixed up in her dream. The present tense reminds me of how I was actually "speaking" to myself about my responses to Rochester, and it's as if Antoinette's dream, likewise is coming out of my mind. There is the suggestion that we are seeing into her mind and not only do we feel that we are hearing the truth, but we identify with her. However, it is obvious from the personal scrutiny I indulged in, that I'm in danger of usurping her dream into my own dream or fiction, and thus rewriting her story to measure it up to my expectations. A 'rhetorical" or 'closed' reader is capable of closing into a rewritten form, a potentially 'open' and individualistic text. Wide Sargasso Sea draws our attention to this flaw in our reading habits, as it occurs to us that we too might be mixing our position with the heroine's and that the change we noticed earlier may have taken place as a result of a misrecognition on our part. The dream, a fiction within a fiction, works towards causing us to delude ourselves into giving one brand of fiction credibility over another. Our whole subject/object relation with and in language, facilitates that situation where we set up a hierarchy of voices, tending to trust the authoritative, framing voice. The dream is no less fictional than the novel overall, which, in its turn, is no less fictional than the figurative nature of the sign-signified codes of language.

While the repeated processing of figurative acts involved in our

general interpretation of life, is represented in the theme and structure of this novel, it also deals with how these 'acts', like the dreams, move into each other. We are shown how an early interpretation is ousted in favour of another. After reading the second dream episode, just before part two, it strikes us that Antoinette, of the earlier pages, was once a very objective commentator on her own situation. I started to wonder if, at times, she might be addressing a narratee, and if I were actually overhearing one side of that discourse, accounting for its subjective and seemingly illogical quality. That suspicion is reinforced by the logical thought that while the relatively objective Rochester addresses himself to us, she must have been talking to someone. It doesn't, for reasons soon to be clarified, occur to us that Rochester might have been addressing anyone but us. We have, so far, a fixed position from which we read and listen to him. From the moment Antoinette describes, what I see as a kind of "inhaling" of Tia (W.S.S. p.38), Tia vanishes from the text, until the final dream where she recurs as a feature of Antoinette's vision (W.S.S. p.155) when she says "Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it". Again the notion of fiction within fiction occurs. She dreams that she sees a vision in her imagination. At a comparable point in her second dream when we confuse our own identities with Antoinette's, she vanishes for a time. In the interval we have time to assimilate the Antoinette role, becoming so much her that she cannot address us. There will always be a gap between Rochester and us so that we feel he directs himself at us. We are so subjectively involved with Antoinette that when she speaks it's as if

we speak too to that unseen "narratee" mentioned earlier. There is no narratee, it's just that we are accustomed to having our subjected reading selves addressed from an objective distance. It is likely that while we were busily engaging ourselves in all those alternating subject-object identities and positions, that we too vanish from some place of the text's actuality, or that the text carries on at a level we are not immediately conscious of. This suggests not only that we might miss some points in our interpretation of a given scenario, but that we cannot always pinpoint the hows and wherefores of meanings we do reach. Interpretation is a process, racey like the events of this and most texts. The difference between this and the 'highly real' texts discussed in the last chapter, is that we are brought to recognise the absurdity of trying to label and criticise the act of mean/ing into subjective and objective compartments. It seems to me that Rhys wrote a criticism of literary criticism as much as she wrote one of authors and readers. This reading, as it advances, will depict us in a state of heightened semiotic awareness, but what the text's climax asserts is that we contort that consciousness when we become neurotic in our search for clues and labels.

The heroine, as we've seen, continually mixes fictions about because, like ourselves in the acting role involved in reading all language, moments of imbalance occur in her subjective relation to events. We don't always notice the fiction hidden inside, or more subtly around fiction. I think the habit of dividing, however figuratively, interpretation into subjectivity and objectivity blinds us to the dynamic quality of the process. The 'gaps' referred to by feminist

critics are relevant here. Instead of taking all consciousness on board as part of our living experience, we dangerously shift from a state of objectivity to its opposite, each being of equal effect. The same result ensues from each, and one cannot be judged superior to the other. For instance, there is little difference between what we readers subconsciously do when we mixed ourselves up in Antoinette's dream (W.S.S. p.38), and what we gather she, equally subjectively, will do at the end when she says "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do". It is the relative lack of consciousness in each case that allows the subject to be led into illogical activities. Reading our responses helps us towards more consciousness, in a way that can even turn our traditional treatment of fiction to concrete advantage. This reading will allow us to see how fictional works offer us models of ourselves as sensitive and knowing beings, as we watch our selves being dramatised before us. In so far as Wide Sargasso Sea offers us an alternative 'selfhood', it is in the form of a self awakened to the hope and possibility of forming alternatives. We learn that there can be an 'other' interpretative strategy.

While Antoinette would seem to code the 'subjective' reading condition, and Rochester the 'objective', each state is shown to lead to the other. Having grown up, in a way, with Antoinette, survived one fire, lost a mother, shared school days with her and dreamt her dream, we feel that in denigrating and rewriting her history, Rochester does the same to us. I felt instictively prejudiced against his criticism of her, though I had to acknowledge the comparative

objectivity of his approach. Our traditional loyalties to that kind of detached analysis causes a mini crisis in us here. There's a sense of our feeling that he must be right because of the value we've learned to place on objectivity. Concern then moves from a personal loyalty to Antoinette, to a cultural tug of war. For my part I felt inclined to side with Antoinette's bloc, since I too am a foreigner to Rochester's class and culture. Besides, we've already matched him with the man in her dreams with the "face black with hatred". The dream version has the man say "not here not yet", and Rochester says "Not now. Not yet" (W.S.S. p.75). Coincidence or not, this theme of the uncanny makes us feel vulnerable against something above and beyond the text, and its characters. We can't close a book on the unnameable. Because we feel that among them all, Rochester, Antoinette, Christophine, Godfrey, Sass and Sandi there is one enemy at least, we become delirious in our search for clues. We move into a detecting role, the second mock reader in the text, who researches all the characters' statements. Noticing this, the real reader, myself outside the text, wondered when had my subjectivity changed into mild paranoia. I had a touch of it from the start because the quantity of detail from the first page had me expecting every item to harbour significance, as clues to some mystery about to unfold. By degrees the bulk of detail becomes a new norm and our defences wind down. We start again to read through the first, or subjective mock reading role for a while until, inevitably, we transfer to the objective perspective again later on.

Defences down temporarily, we read on in anticipation of Antoinette's

return. When she does turn up she says "I did not look up though I saw him at the window" (W.S.S. p.89). We wonder at the obvious contradiction in the sentence, though we're already aware that not all of the whys and wherefores of interpretation are easily revealed. It is, somehow after all possible to see something without facing it. However, the juxtaposition of "look" and "window" had me search for some sort of significance. I wondered if we were being persuaded that the heroine had some kind of strange, wizardly powers. We've seen Christophine gain from such a reputation, and her response to Rochester's comment "I would give my eyes never to have seen this damnable place" (W.S.S. p.132), seems enchanted, in view of the events of Jane Eyre . Christophine answers him, to our alarm, by saying "You choose what you give eh?" There are many areas in the book where we are drawn into a degree of intrigue, doubt turned mystical.

Blatant sophistry in the plot, with the sense that we are absent from some unseen parts of the book, have us preoccupied with the unseen of the work. Instead of acknowledging the possibility of there being other spaces where the reader abides occasionally, however unconsciously, we are inclined to allow ourselves to be haunted by fears of those textual experiences we do not understand well enough to name. While we detect our way through the whole of the book, we are vaguely aware of the ghosts of ourselves, parts we have written out of our history, which touch us occasionally through the tunnel of the plot. Just as the "tall candle" revealed "The woman with the streaming hair" on the third to last page, to be none other than

Antoinette, we know that the activities of textual personae reveal much about the responding reader. However, we know too that Antoinette didn't recognise that image of herself, and called it "the ghost". We wonder if Antoinette can see parts of ourselves left invisible to us. This notion is reinforced by the obvious difference between her seeing powers and ours as evinced in the "window scene". I became intrigued by this issue of what or how she could see, as I found that I could not with any certainty locate proof that Rochester was at the window at the time she said he was. The geography of the house becomes, unavoidably, an issue here. Is it the same house that was supposed to have been burnt down, or one rebuilt on the same model? If we could decide exactly upon a time when Rochester was at the window that would coincide with her comment, then many newly emerged problems would be solved, and with those the issue of chronology would be nicely sorted out too. Otherwise how was I going to theorise her illogical way of seeing except to say that she was telling lies?

This text, like the reader, insists upon its own redrafting, since many of its ideas immediately present us with completely contradictory notions, which we write into our reading. Antoinette's reference to her view of Rochester at the window is an example. What she said about that view presented me again with doubt, initially as to the credibility of Antoinette as narrator and person, doubt as to the author's consistency, and an even more weighty doubt as to the reliability or accuracy of my own reading. The issue is not simply another textual entry, but a whole offshoot of further

potential textual material which we watch ourselves write into the reading. We are not simply using our critical position to rewrite the text, rather it's a question of our habitual critical habits forming part of the work itself. We are extra conscious of this particular instance of our accumulating personal data as part of the work, because we are driven to desperate rounds in order to decide what or who to doubt in this instance. The issue around the window strongly asserts that there are writerly possibilities for the reader when it pushes us beyond the usual 'rhetorical' search for a reflection of normality. We are shown that normality is a very relative and unencloseable thing. Our usually unspoken responses become as much a creation of meaning, an event, as the discourse itself. This text draws our attention to the in between by the simple process of having it go missing. We do not move directly from Jane Eyre to Wide Sargasso Sea . There is an in between, gaps, and areas we inexplicably can't see, all haunting us in a way that foregrounds our distaste for incompleteness. The reluctance on our part to accept 'openness' is illustrated by the lengths we go to in order to find a source for the apparent treachery in the book. There is a persistent desire to maintain Antoinette as our heroine, and I spent much of the reading trying to find evidence of someone's guilt, anyone's but her own, in order to declare her innocent.

Finding the truth , or an acceptable version of it, about what she says about the window becomes very important therefore. On page 86 Rochester did look out of the window but it was "five minutes to three". On page 98 Baptiste says "The mistress pay a visit" when he

brought "coffee that morning". On page 111 Rochester asked Antoinette "When you went off this 'morning' where did you go?" "I went to see Christophine" she said. So even if it wasn't Antoinette in the bed on page 86, it is not likely that she sneaked out leaving a makeshift replacement because it was the wrong time of day anyway. On considering events on page 85, when Rochester leaves Antoinette to "dress like Christophine said", we find a possible explanation, but equally unprovable. He "waited a half hour" and perhaps Antoinette went out during that time. Meanwhile Rochester says that he saw Baptiste "sitting under the Seville orange tree at the end of the veranda". We wonder did he go to the window to see him. Then an image of structure of the house moves forward in our minds. On page 63 we're told that "wooden steps from the veranda led to another rough lawn, a Seville orange tree grew by the steps. I went back into the dressing room and looked out of the window". The window presumably provided him with a change of view, yielding a different perspective of the Seville orange tree from that emanating from the dressing room. We might presume then that when he saw Baptiste on page 85 he was not looking from the window, but from the dressing room or elsewhere. While I'm uncertain about how Antoinette could have seen Rochester at that time, I realised that other possibilities existed too. Increased self doubt resulted from the consideration that I might have missed a vital clue in my neurotic pursuit of statistics.

The reading gymnastics to which I drove myself in relation to the "window scene" were repeated by me again in relation to other of my

responses in the text, as I continued to perform a kind of inquest into the affairs of the personae. Antoinette says "I might be able to borrow money for that, not from him but I know how I might get it" (W.S.S. p.91). Again I started to suspect her of some sort of hidden purpose, and I had fleeting visions of her in some way compromising her integrity to gain money. I was about to indulge myself in another quest to find in her the source of evil in the plot when I remembered that she was given two rings of value by her aunt Cora. Obviously having secured Antoinette as my ally throughout much of the reading, I was glad not to have to part with her, and unwilling to press that 'money' issue further. Stricken as I was then by the fickleness of my loyalties I fell headlong into a greater alliance with her.

Believing more than ever in her, we scarcely raise a critical eyebrow at her intrinsic mystique or her bewildering comments. She told Christophine "I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains..." (W.S.S. p.92). We no longer declare this to be asburd nonsense as once we would have, and we take the notion on board as a sort of inexplicable premonition. We have no choice; the author has inserted this discourse, and besides we're by now too sympathetic towards her to declare her to be mad or bad. With that, we've already learned that Rhys is interested in foregrounding the irrational. I was in a process of growing, painfully, out of old tastes and reading ways, into newer ones. The old reader in me wanted to find a villain, unity, identity and closure. Despite the emerging newer reader in

me that told me to forget all that scenario, the pleasure principle on which I'm hooked won the day. The self blinding feature involved in our to and fro movement between "subject" and "object" detecting roles must be connected to that pleasure principle, or else the forfeiting of that old habit bodes distress and pain to us readers.

I carried on my "pleasant" read on three dimensions, the first mock reader reading in a subjective identification with each moment of the text; the second mock reader crossexamining each statement and my responses to them; and the real reader outside the text watching myself do these readings compulsively, not having the willpower to stop it. Antoinette enters Christophine's hut and sees "her bright patchwork counterpane" (W.S.S. p.97). I remembered having 'heard' of such a counterpane before and wondered had Christophine stolen it from someone. I reread the book until I found again the references to counterpanes. On page 47 Antoinette said that her aunt Cora was "working at a patchwork counterpane". I decided to investigate further before making assumptions in view of my blame-happy disposition to date. On page 26 I found Antoinette commenting, after her return from Coulibri, on Christophine's "bright patchwork counterpane", whcih she obviously had before Cora made hers. My reading was teaching the disadvantages of presuming anything.

I was still trying to enclose myself in the sort of reading habit that complied with my traditional notion of what is pleasurable, at whatever cost to this potentially "open" text. So subjectively

involved was I in my objective detecting role that I left little of myself outside the text, despite a persisting sense of the dangers the reading held. Like Antoinette walking towards the "stone", I was losing any sense of otherness, even the otherness of pain. Observing my increasing subjectivity, I was reminded again of the incident when the stone flung by Tia caused in herself the same physical and emotional reaction as it did in Antoinette. The blood covers the part of Antoinette's face where her tears would have been and parallels the flow of tears down Tia's face. The image reminds me of any reading experience where an event in the text can cause an identical responding action in the reader. I watched Antoinette inhale Tia into her psyche and unconsciously absorbed Antoinette in my turn. A misrecognition occurred between Antoinette as mock author and the character Tia she described, and between Antoinette as mock author and I the reader. This implies that Antoinette and I were coming under similar stimuli, she the reading author of the text, and I the writing reader outside. She wears Tia's dress, just as we wear Antoinette's identity. Soon after this "dress" event she has her first dream of which she says "nothing would be the same. It would change and go on changing". Something real changes in readers too as they borrow temporary reading identities, and we see that this text has us constantly shift from one role to another. It is not surprising that I was haunted by that "window scene", but chiefly the image suggested to me that, unlike the many mirrors in the story, this glass didn't reflect one unified self to me. Such was the shock of not finding that single unit of meaning, that I exerted massive efforts to find compensatory facts and clues in

later parts of my readings about 'counterpanes', "money" etc. What my reading was showing me was that I too, like all meaning, am in process. Wide Sargasso Sea is a kind of envoy for the genre of fiction in that it shows us readers in the act of assuming and applying ourselves to the negotiation of various fictional selves, learning much about what we could, might, should or would like to be, as a result. Possibilities of forming an alternative to our habitual world view present themselves, and we see that nothing is predetermined, fixed or closed forever.

Conversely, we may, as I already suggested, want to blind ourselves to some of what we learn in this way. I maintained such blindness by my rigorous subject to object movements throughout a detecting role I pursued. Similarly Rochester applies himself to a kind of witch hunt in response to a fear of Antoinette's and woman's unshackled sexuality. He says, "She'll moan and cry and give herself as no sane woman would - or could. Or could" (W.S.S. p.136). I'm increasingly seeing more of my 'old reading self' in this unlikeable man. The hypnotising outburst of accusations to which he is exposed on pages 126 and 127, reminds me of how I was swept off my objective footing outside the text by the pace and quantity of detail and events. With that, the many reading responses I unleashed came so close upon each other that what I could see of myself was a view of me as a moving and changing reader. I did not have the facilities in which to order, argue and unite myself into a single, static entity again. I had been deconstructed. As Rochester said, "Desire, Hatred, Life, and Death come very close in the dark" (W.S.S. p.79),

and our traditional reading methods leave us very much 'in the dark' as to the real intersubjectivity of everything. Casting a brighter slant on our reading possibilities the window scene might be our image of the climaxing of a new set of reading expectations, as we discover the merits of all response. We should claim all our reading acts, good, bad, erronous or astute. We are all ignorant, wise, good, bad, subjectively objective reading writers of our interpretations.

Recalling the renowned "window scene" then, it starts to seem feasible that this gap may have been purposely planted to allow for the reader's speculation. On the other hand I may have made an erroneous reading, in which case I'll have written a gap into the text for my own reader to fill in. Either way, by the end of this arduous read I had to conclude that there were certain things that not Antoinette, Rochester, Jean Rhys nor I could, with absolute certainty, assert. For instance, by what means can we explain how Antoinette knew "that house where I will be cold, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains"? Later she describes how the room looked to her "between the bed and the fireplace, "but I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room" (W.S.S. p.153). The red dress against the fire is the red curtain around the bed. The "tree shivers. Shivers and gathers all its strength" is that of Antoinette's second dream, "The tree sways and jerks as if it is trying to throw" her off (W.S.S. p.50). On page 152 we discover another piece of surprising information. What Daniel had said of Sandi and Antoinette was true, reminding us that we must always, on interpreting, be prepared to be proven wrong.

The issues of mystery and uncertainty are foregrounded as thematic features of this novel. We know from the very design of the book that there are elements of relevant meaning we see without looking directly at them, as the heroine's view of the window suggests. Grace Poole's arrival reminds us that Jane Eyre will have started by the latter part of Wide Sargasso Sea which, in a way, is a kind of 'window' into the older novel. That earlier novel, like our earlier reading strategy, haunted us throughout this text. At the very end of the story we're locked into a situation similar to the stone incident between Tia and Antoinette. In that earlier case the two characters were reflecting each other's position from such a close range that Antoinette was not able to negotiate a difference between herself and Tia. It was as if Tia threw the stone to keep Antoinette back at a sufficient distance to allow Tia to see herself in her own established identity. It was that cultural and racial difference that caused the stone throwing atmosphere anyway, and we must remember that it is the hierarchy of subjectivity and objectivity with its inherent 'distance' or gaps that sustain cultural 'tugs of war'. Antoinette's inability to allow for the construction of an artificial space between herself and others made it impossible for her to go unscathed in a patriarchally dominated relationship. She was deviant and as such must be silenced and punished as many womens' voices have been. In fact Wide Sargasso Sea draws attention not only to the inherent silence of Jane Eyre, but to its silencing power too. We cannot see Jane Eyre from "Wide Sargasso Sea", but we were for a century blinded to what might have earlier been said about 'the first Mrs Rochester'.

Just as I failed to impose closure on this text, so too did Rochester fail to own and know the secret of Antoinette's many sides. While the stone to the head caused Antoinette to absorb Tia, the death threat at the end of the text has the effect of causing us to leap out of the Antoinette role. If we've read Jane Eyre we may sense that to move figuratively into that image of our futures would be to regress back into our 'older', traditional experience of pleasure, as Antoinette circled back figuratively to Tia and Coulibri in her dream at the end. Another alternative would be to do as Antoinette seems set on doing finally, and impose closure to the act of imagination we shared with her, by committing suicide and murder. This text has taught us that many possibilities exist for us other than the obvious 'visible' ones and that we are free to create our own ending. I allowed myself to enjoy moving out of two mock reading roles, and away from my former search for a compromised identity with Antoinette to see myself changed and enriched by all of the visions stimulated by the novel. I restored all my responses to their rightful place and brought many fictional and figurative reading responses to combine with the no less creative readings I make in life. In that sense I brought these readings in a reading, together into my personal, historical present. This new view of myself as authoratitive writer of all my experiences made me more independent. I will be agitating for more self determination and latitude in future readings. I'm in charge of the responding freedom I've just allowed myself, a position I'm already coming to enjoy. I don't have to know 'all' or pretend to control meaning. It is fundamentally uncontrollable, as this dynamic text suggests. I can just let myself

be touched from all sides by that "sea" of ideation which neither I, Antoinette nor anyone can hold in check.

CHANGING EXPECTATIONS: Part 2

The Ghosting of the Reader in The Grass is Singing

Doris Lessing

We are by now finely tuned to the signals which tell us, early on, what kind of mood a reading will advance in us, and the epigraph borrowed from the "author unknown" at the start of the book forebodes another despondent dispatch. The reference to "failures" and "misfits" recalls the derangement and debilitation of earlier heroines in Braided Lives and Praxis . We've already whimpered under the weight of 'high realism', engaging ourselves chiefly in a struggle to resist being levelled into silence. Wide Sargasso Sea augured some encouraging ambitions as we saw the hope of cultivating an alternative approach to interpretation. Antoinette's comment that "nothing would be the same. It would change and go on changing" (T.G.S. p.23) was the slogan of the autonomous and independent reader emerging from that reading. The heroine's act of misrecognition passed onto us when we too became 'mixed up in and by her dream'. Not only did Rhys's text open sufficiently to allow for our participation, but its "open window" spectre initiates a similar 'opening' in us, through which we might view the less explicit meanings in ourselves. We're encouraged to pursue and call upon creativity formerly relegated to a silenced unconscious, and greatly inspired with innovative enthusiasm. The closure we meet in The Grass is Singing so impedes our progress that we forfeit not just that recently engendered confidence, but much of the self esteem we've collated throughout our reading journey. The narrator says that "It is terrible to destroy a person's picture of himself in the interests of truth" (T.G.S. p.45) while proceeding to do just that to

the reader. The events of The Grass is Singing present us in such a poor light to ourselves that our assertiveness as readers is almost destroyed and we distance ourselves from our failings, taking shelter behind our former self-image as victims.

What carried us through the first three readings of this dissertation was our grounding in the school of what, according to Toril Moi, (S/T.P. -p105), Greimas calls "binary opposition" where terms are understood to find significance through their structurally opposed relation to one another. This obsessive compulsion to battle with the next element of meaning had a compensatory quality of allowing us to engross ourselves in a struggle for the dominant interpretative position, while binding ourselves to many unattractive aspects of ourselves. Lessing's text provides us with a closeup perspective on the alienating effects of that interpretative strategy when we see how we distance ourselves from an objective portrayal of the "oppressor" latent in us all. Tyrannical texts and manipulative authors provided the necessary opposition in the earlier readings in this thesis, as we scapegoated each in order to stay on top of their oppressive onslaught. We merely distanced ourselves from the entire texts in the "high realism" chapter. The Grass is singing shows us something of the mechanics of a society that can so alienate us from even ourselves, without our being conscious of the fact. While we thought we merely rejected some unimpressive novels, in fact we relegated potential self knowledge to the waste basket of our unconscious. Lessing disarms our usually belligerent approach to the text by providing us with a ready path into its plot on Tony's vacation of his reading role. Our

accustomed relationship of antagonism towards the other is deflected back onto ourselves as we find that we recoil from the reader as wimp role personified in Tony. His defection from the challenge "to achieve some kind of vision that would lift the murder above the confusions and complexities of the morning", provides an easy tilt for our psychic energies to flow when "He took the next train to the copper belt" at the end of the first chapter. "He tried desperately but he failed", implying that we're to be appointed his unattractive identity from the start.

In order to shoulder this commission, we displace our disfavour from ourselves as inferior textual participant, onto the narrator who we feel is also in the running for Tony's space, as if claiming that she/he could fill it more successfully than either Tony or the reader. Our preoccupation with underscoring the narrator's authority, distracts us from the stigmatised self image involved in the challenge to represent him who "should have stuck it out" (T.G.S. p.31). The narrator parades as one who can most effectively write the story which, Tony felt was "not something that can be said in black and white" (T.G.S. p.24). We're told that "he failed" to achieve the 'vision' which would make of the murder "a symbol, or a warning" (T.G.S. p.29). The ability to enclose "This damned country" in a symbol would have sheltered him from its 'brutality', but predictably, "It was too hot" and Lessing moves in to declare the novelist as one with strength to "blurt out the truth", since Tony, the token reader, was "too weak with repugnance against this ugly little house" (T.G.S. p.29), to hold his ground. The experience of reading her

"black and white" account of events, illustrates the unconscious strategy adapted by both writers and readers of 'binarily opposed' meaning, as our own reading performance dramatises the unconscious essentials of Lessing's approach to writing. An enigma arising out of an observation of the author's treatment of meaning leads to our discovery of repressed, unconscious interpretative habits common to readers and writers. Indeed, the next Lessing text we'll encounter in this dissertation suggests that she herself became aware of hitherto hidden and alienating tendencies relating to her negotiation of reality.

From the start, we despise the reading "failure" Tony who "washed his hands of it" (T.G.S. p.24), because he reflects badly upon readership. With that, he's in the wrong place at the wrong time, his being the space we must usurp in order to even enter the book. Instead of challenging and scapegoating an authoritative/authorial figure as is our trend, we're being coerced into victimising 'one of our own', a might have been reader. Not only do we experience a guilty unease on detecting the latent oppressor in us readers, but like Tony in his fear of the "Dark Continent", we have misgivings about a reading pursuit which promises so clear a view of ourselves. We're practically handed a role on Tony's exit and we're simultaneously drawn towards, and repelled, from the facilitated scrutiny of ourselves. What we are brought to notice in ourselves in The Grass is Singing ultimately returns us to the "victim" role, since we prefer to project any kind of self image rather than face the inescapable, immediate facts. As we start to see and read into

the formerly unconscious aspects of ourselves, we cannot so easily distract or displace our attention to projectable, distant identities. Typically we pursue what the novel denies us and set out to recreate that absent distance in a way that usefully illustrates such self alienating procedures. Lessing's text is the society that causes this act of self distancing, just as Southern Africa was the terrain which dictated a similar pattern of behaviour in the author.

The discovery of the hidden oppressor in us readers, dissolves our picture of ourselves as 'dignified oppressed'. On reflection, we see how, like Tony, we tried to make of our disadvantaged reading position a "symbol or a warning" as we felt ourselves be dogged and intimidated by the harsh reality of earlier texts. We maintained an image of ourselves, a kind of picture, in order to hide from "the truth" and now that we find that image dismantled, we feel threatened with the invisibility to which Tony was relegated at the end of chapter one. In fact those last lines of the first chapter might mark the end of an earlier failed text about a young man "from England who hadn't the guts to stand more than a few weeks of farming". It's as if the present narrator took over the space of an earlier dejected contender, just as we took Tony's spot. As we've already noted, the furrow layed open before us in the ready Tony role, soon threatens us with extinction and we're as tempted to revert to the life before 'The Grass is Singing' as we are to proceed forward. The further we move towards the view of ourselves provided in that role, the more inclined are we to recoil further back into ourselves, repressing what we increasingly

discover of ourselves, and coming to exist at a more unconscious relation to the novel. We distance ourselves from Lessing's text as we become less aware or less conscious. In fact there does seem to be a life before Tony's in The Grass is Singing as there was the first Mrs Rochester before Jane Eyre. Indeed the truth seeking Tony might well have been a reincarnation of the very serious minded Waldo in Olive Schreiner's Story of an African Farm. We find, as we read on to the end, that the injustice Lessing tried to express fails to illustrate the blatant victimisation of the Black population just as Schreiner's novel did. Lessing goes so far as to refer to the issue from a distance, but by the end, returns to as limited an account of "the truth" as Schreiner. Something about the attempt to move forward in the textual and social systems under observation in 'The Grass is Singing', causes one to ultimately regress a step further back than the spot from where one started.

Though we're compelled to resent the narrator as readers resent novelists, for their ability to "blurt out the facts", we begin to see the subtler points relating to our resentment. We are the disgruntled and subjected audience who too frequently find ourselves disarmed, confused and dejected by an over complication of response. We now know that, having for long been the sponge soaking up an overflow of realism in former texts, our understandable reaction was to pour equally realistic criticism back over the authors. As we understand more about what makes us tick as readers, our responses become even more complicated. We're every moment reminded of the oppressor in us by Slatter's presence, since, like us,

he doesn't scruple at colonising another's space. We're told that "his soil was played out, and he wanted more" (T.G.S. p 181), indicating that his plans for Dick match our expediency in relation to Tony's narrative ground. We can no longer simply and satisfactorily direct intolerance towards the oppressive narrator knowing ourselves to be no better in our ruthless struggle for power. Already we're losing our hold on a recognisable identity, and the ensuing chaos we experience creates a longing in us for some kind of familiar 'picture' of what it is to be 'the reader'.

The novelist and reader share a common mercenary spirit, a dark "side", or "continent," which, despite us, is periodically manifested in The Grass is Singing . Our attempted denial of that shadow side is facilitated by an abundance of roles which we can mould into the familiar victim model and use to distance ourselves from our lurking vices. We are the debilitated Mary since we too lived the highly real lives of Feminist heroines. We are the escapist Tony, repelled and disgusted by events, and willing ourselves towards the promised "murder" when we'll be able to do as he did when "He washed his hands of it" (T.G.S. p.24). We try to dilute the oppressor in us as personified by Slatter, arguing that he's helplessly dependent upon, and inscribed into a competitive approach to meaning. We're tempted to foreground the victim in these white characters as we're increasingly confronted by the corruption they reflect in us. Information like that provided about the children with "clusters of flies in the corners of their eyes" (T.G.S. p.101) reinforce our desire for a victim role since we cannot take what is being implied

about ourselves as potential Slatters. This plot seems to drive us in all directions in the attempt to evade ourselves because ironically we're equally disgusted by both victim and villain roles. We could hardly tolerate Tony any more than Slatter could bear "the half civilised native", and we cringe at the victim role we've hidden behind for so long as we see Dick "feel a thrill of satisfaction in his own abasement". Moses is the sinister darkness shadowing the drama, and we're increasingly tempted to offload the villain role onto him in our desperate desire for order and stability.

We're provided with a very different view of our reading antics in The Grass is Singing from that available in the texts discussed previously. Then reading was a matter, basically, of being in an objective relationship to the text, when the reader formed one literary grouping, while the text compounded itself into a binarily opposed unit. Rhys's text breached the gap between reader and literary work in a very positive and informing way. But Lessing's text seems to displace that oppositional encounter onto the reader's self. We see how that destructively competitive pattern of interpretation operates constantly in us, in response to our particular social structures. For us readers, the villain and victim roles have come close upon each other much as was Rochester's experience in Wide Sargasso Sea . Like him, our reaction will be shown to be one of desiring the victim role, by blinding ourselves to the real victim. He puts Antoinette out of his sight, locking her into The Mad Woman in The Attic role, as we ultimately distance ourselves from Mary by deeming her deranged, debilitated and

different/other than us. We are paralleling, on the reading level, something Mary and even Lessing seem to have done. Mary bewilders herself and becomes psychologically dazed rather than face her own cruelty, and Lessing almost spiritualises Moses in order to create a material difference or distance between her and a truth she seems unable to address about the black population. Like the reader, Mary chooses the victim role, and the "little girl frocks" and pastels image is redrawn into "two pictures", "One was of a chocolate-box lady" and "the other was of a child" (T.G.S. p.55). This symbolic splitting of the heroine recalls a kind of division going on in the reader, as I found myself trying simultaneously to reach an identity, and yet shirk the available reading roles. Every attempt to 'see' or know myself in this plot, reinforces a desire to hide from myself. Reverting to the victim role, as will become clear by the time we read another Lessing text, only leaves me with a disturbing sense of being haunted by another self somehow distanced from me. We cannot revert to the reading naivety we held at the start of this dissertation, since in The Grass is Singing we actually see how and why we repress aspects of ourselves. In fact what is happening is that we are becoming more and more aware of an ongoing process of self repression, discovering to what extent we've absorbed the systematic/social structures of traditional literature and society. In short, our readings in this dissertation have initiated a silent slow process of self cure, and we're gradually becoming more 'conscious'.

The Grass is Singing is very much a demonstration of reversion on the part of characters, readers and the author, so much so that part

of our reading experience involves watching the reader move in a circle. Soon after her arrival at Dick's farm, Mary reverts not only to the victim role, but to the "arid Feminism" picked up, without reflection, from her mother. This reversion was Mary's reaction to a feeling that "her father", from his grave, had sent out his will and forced her back into the kind of life he had made her mother lead". Her mother's "arid feminism" had similar roots, and the superficiality of their version of feminism matches that of our defensive reading strategy in the first three readings of this dissertation. Increased consciousness allows us to see how collapsible are both ours and Mary's ideological stance. We had not yet tackled the 'other' in a way that allowed our convictions to stand up to pressure, and on reflection our earlier deliberations on the subject of the oppressed are shown to be largely philanthropic. When driven to it, we too, manipulate and use the victim for our own ends. The reason for this state of affairs comes to be seen as we read on, to be intertwined in the whole issue of "otherness" and how we unconsciously fail to deal with it. Something in our reading/living environments sustains otherness, and, as we'll see survives off the maintenance of marginalised others.

We're looking at The Grass is Singing from the window opened in us in the Rhys text, as if the unconsciousness escaping through that frame is conflicting with and rejecting an on-going self repression initiated by the Lessing text. We've changed, and the recurring victim role, with its simplistic relationship of opposition and defensiveness highlights a gap somewhere in our interpreting lives.

Often we've hinted at a sense we've had of there being something wrong in relation to those reading habits of ours, and in this reading we catch glimpses, later to become very clear, of just what is lacking. Otherness, or our treatment of it, is the clue to this interpretative ailment, and our brief glimpse of what it is to become increasingly conscious, shows us just how unconscious we might gradually have become. Like Mary and other dazed heroines of realist texts, we're getting steadily unconscious on the one hand, though an observation of that response actually jerks us back into awareness again at a more advanced level. However, not everyone includes the analysis of what a text or a system is doing to them in their definition of meaning. What happens in those cases, is that text/society slowly corners them into withdrawal. We could reside almost totally in our unconsciousness in response to a habit of treating every one of the very many deplorable elements of our society as other. We would be other than Mary, the deranged, the depressed, the oppressed, and the "shadow". When she saw the human in Moses, Mary's system collapsed, and in her vulnerability, she reverted, like us, to a sub-culture of blindness, denying Moses his individuality and specifity in an attempt to make him invisible to her. He is presented as an awesome and inhuman force which plagues Mary and her white ranks. His personal prestige and authority is absorbed into the Patriarchal system when his potency is usurped under the foregrounded features of his masculinity, while his Blackness is white-washed. His material effectuality is attributed instead to nature as an incorporeal force, and we're told that "The bush avenged itself" (T.G.S. p.218), not the mere black man. While

Lessing successfully relays the repression endured by her heroine, even suggesting the misery endured by the blacks, it seems that she flinches at the challenge to fully face the exploitation in which her own colour and class indulged. Keeping in mind that The Grass is Singing was first published forty years ago, it is likely that she will have allowed social taboos to silence her, though I argue that her relegation of Moses to the silent margins of her plot, is quite an unconscious act, much as our own self repression occurs unconsciously. She can go so far as to imply Mary's transgression and breach of taboos, but she cannot go far enough to really tell the entire truth. Her narrative has something of the tension of the traditional poem, all the pressure to expound meaning, yet witholding that discourse in tightly constructed literary structures. The religious theme of "The Waste Land" spills over onto the Moses image, which is turned, likewise, into a kind of spiritualised symbol. References invoking the Eliot poem arise during the murder scene like "thunder", "collapsing in ruin" and "rain". Moses's specificity is being drained into the tightly structured essentials of Lessing's unconscious writing strategy, while his selfhood is obliterated. In a similar way, the contents of the drama are as if let out of the constraints of poem and epigraph only to be re-aligned (lined) in an even more sophisticatedly constrained system, all the more foreboding for its appearance as loose, free-flowing prose.

So we see that the drama between the second chapter and the end consists of a slow motion version of the same cycle of change in us. There are four cycles set in motion at the second chapter. Mary

starts her journey full circle to become the rural wife she tried to avoid becoming; Tony returns to the "paper work" he once shunned and travelled to Africa to escape, and the authorial narrator enters the drama on Tony's exit, writing on to finally round off Moses's story back into the silence he issued from. We're told that "Moses might have come from anywhere" (T.G.S. p.13). By the story's end, he still might be coming from anywhere for all we've been allowed to see from his perspective. Lessing indicates her awareness of how the voice of the black man goes unheard by white ears when she says "He walked up to them and said (or words to this effect): 'Here I am' (T.G.S. p.12). Yet if she saw any reason to relieve the silence of the accused, something, conscious or otherwise, stopped her. My guess is that she distanced herself from the contradiction inherent in her selection of white over black victim, by her unconscious cultivation of otherness. She retreated into the life and times of the heroine Mary, turning that plot into a semi-consciously enacted drama. The whole novel is infected with a less severe dose of Mary's bewildering self blindness, and the text takes its own release in the illusion of openness at the end. Mary dies as a protest, hers and Lessing's attempt to breach social taboos. Mary is punished by death for her relationship to Moses, and Lessing takes a feeble revenge for that execution by writing that unhappy ending. Again Lessing's inability to negotiate otherness causes her, like many authors, to blind herself to a consideration of the reader's response. She props her plot up, contradictions and all, forgetting that the reader's arrival will mark the deconstruction of her nicely packaged scenario. Far from securing our solidarity with Mary,

Lessing manages to initiate a distancing on our part, when we look upon the heroine as an other deranged, semi-conscious work of fiction. Unintentionally the author sets in motion the fourth cycle of the novel, that is our regression to the victim role and its accompanying reading habits which we hoped to forsake after the Rhys reading. The closure of Lessing's text causes the authoritative force injected from Wide Sargasso Sea to ricochet so that we're flung back into the victim role from where we proceed, telling ourselves like Tony on page 29 that "it wasn't so bad really".

Lessing elevates Moses to an almost spiritual level, even the physical deliniation assigned him, ("the broad back" T.G.S. p 171), is designed to cloud over his blatant blackness. I believe that this relegation of Moses's specificity to the margins is an unconscious act on the part of an author who unwittingly distances herself from a harsh reality in order to survive at all. We note her difficulty with the task of telling us certain parts of Mary's story. There is the suggestion that Mary's father abused her in some way when she is said to have smelt "the unwashed masculine smell she always associated with him" (T.G.S. p.173). It's as if Lessing finds the whole issue too difficult to spell out, so she incorporates it into the Moses symbol which she keeps at a distance from her. We're told that "they advanced together, one person, and she could smell, not the native smell, but the unwashed smell of her father" (T.G.S. p.175). While The Grass is Singing shows us how it is that authors and authorities exile their victims to the silences and spaces of their interpretative system, we also catch a glimpse at how it is that

readers, victims, women, authors, the oppressed and all participants in our traditional system of interpretation, actually submerge ourselves in spaces and silence. We create gaping distances between ourselves and a reality that is constructed around a competititve negotiation of otherness. Texts like The Grass is Singing are so involved in the pursuit of the author's pleasure and release that they don't accommodate the influence of the reader. The necessary opening in our minds doesn't take place in this Lessing text because she doesn't take the trouble to involve us in the creation of the work. We are merely other than textual material, and consequently Mary and her plight will always be "other" than us, a kind of semi-conscious, deranged oddity. We are as foreign to the author of this text as, I feel, the black population of South Africa was, and it's as if the novel carries on out of some kind of compulsion of its own, just as we readers did in 'Wide Sargasso Sea'. In the Rhys text we acted out of a desire to unveil some mystery, almost letting our detecting role run on to completely ignore some of the "other" messages of the text. The ghost of our long repressed interpreting selves come back to haunt us in 'The Grass is Singing' just as Antoinette's unconscious seemed to prevail over 'Wide Sargasso Sea'. We became vaguely aware of an 'other' self in the Rhys novel and in this Lessing text we're observed by our own unconsciousness from a window recently opened there. We left the Rhys reading with an acutely increased self awareness, and that opened consciousness is now part of a personal history which cannot be closed out of existence. Our reading of 'The Grass is Singing' dramatises the unconscious essentials of Lessing's writing technique, and those

essentials in turn throw light upon a social system that forced that strategy on her. We commence a process of self cure as we unleash much of the repressed reader through a window opened into the sick room of the unconscious. What gapes from that window is more than some "Waste Land", and what emerges is the spectre of an other self enticing us to rejoin it and its long silenced creativity.

REVIEW

Reviewing our reading road from The Left Hand of Darkness

Ursula Le Guin

The Grass is Singing showed us how author/ities exile their victims to the silences and spaces of our traditional interpretative system, and how readers and all participants in that system submerge ourselves in spaces and silences. We observed in that Lessing text that 'We create gaping distances between ourselves and a reality that is constructed around a competitive negotiation of otherness'. In The Grass is Singing we're observed by our own unconsciousness, from the window opened there by Wide Sargasso Sea , and what we see is the error inherent in our approach to the craved reading alternative Our competitive and repressive depreciation of otherness diverts us into a misplaced desire for 'a substitute' world, as opposed to a different one. Our inferior placement in the interpretative battle ground left us unconsciously estimating our reading input as an unnecessary extra. A 'different' realm was present to us all along, and it becomes increasingly clear that there is also more than one kind of presence.

In The Left Hand of Darkness the status quo, with all its institutions, literary and social, is heavily linked to the theme of survival. We read the tale-telling Ai preoccupy himself with physical and psychological subsistence. This is despite the fact that he is distinguished from, and eminently "visible" in an environment where he is conspicuous if only by the nature of his strangeness and marginality. Since we've already concluded in "Wide Sargasso Sea"

that the story-telling writer and reader's role are interchangeable in literature, it's imperative to look at the reasons for Ai's obsessive story-telling, and our own low self-esteem as readers. I've noted my own compulsion to put right all the curiosities and contradictions I read, and have come to see a similarity between mine and Ai's interpretative habits. If language is about ex/pressing silent meaning into visible and distinguishable words, why does the institution of literature enslave us in defensiveness? Ai helps us to answer these questions by occupying a position from where we can negotiate a difference.

He is a kind of surrogate writer, reader, character and boundary in that he's on the margins between text and reader. He is the creation of a feminist author who has modelled him on woman's own predicament in that we create alternative 'spaces' in which to distinguish ourselves, trying to turn our marginalised condition to advantage. However, we note from Ai, that a certain retrogressive desire to be 'normal' and orthodox denies us the facility to turn alternative spaces, Science Fictional and otherwise, into the difference we compulsively search for. We said earlier that there is more than one type of presence, and for Derrida signification is produced through a kind "of open-ended play between the presence of one signifier and the absence of others" (S.T.P. p.106). Indeed we discovered that the relatively absent Moses was the kind of presence which, when activated, initiated the creation of meaning in our reading. Previously we'd looked so longingly at the power we saw in the hands of the oppressors, that we failed to recognise the

dynamism of our own creativity.

We see that Ai is of the old school of "binary thought" we once adhered to unthinkingly, when we find him translating the marginalised "Gethenian Calendar and Clock" situated at the end, back into the Terran "Standard". He evaluates his world on a binarily opposed 'standard/deviant" basis, and proceeds to turn the strange into its opposite "standard". He does so by simply reversing the order of the months to coincide with what he's accustomed to. Chronology is central to traditional understanding of meaning, and is often the subject of subversive or Feminist writing. Centrality itself is an equally controversial factor for such authors and we often find a displacement of the norm as we do here in the marginalisation of time itself. Ai treats Winter's dissident chronology as a "supplement", something Culler defines as being "foreign to the 'essential' nature of that to which it is added" (O.D. p.103). What Ai's behaviour seems to suggest, and foreground as the theme of the novel, is feminists' unconscious conservatism. The marginalised Ai actually returns time to the centre of his narrative, just as, conversely, we almost supplemented our ability to create difference in the Lessing text. Freeing ourselves from the ghosted reader role in that text allowed us to expose a meaningful and instructive "difference" between the author's and our once absent or invisible analysis of events. We gained confidence as we realised that readers can add to texts that are lacking until we contribute to them.

This Le Guin story takes us back to The Grass is Singing where we noted the potential collaborator in us readers, when we willingly usurped Tony's narrative space. Now we see the marginalised Ai, the deviant presence on Winter, actually set out to absorb that "supplementary" planet. Culler tells us that "Deconstructive readings identify this paradoxical situation in which, on the one hand, logocentric positions contain their own undoing and on the other hand, the denial of logocentrism is carried out in logocentric terms" (O.D. p.155). Ai's treatment of "Winter" as object of his interpretation and narration, will be seen to be similar to Feminist adaptation of space. For instance in another futuristic text, Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale we see how invisibility can be moulded in order to frame supplementary sub-cultures. My first response on seeing the abundance of gaps in the organisation of chapters, sections and paragraphs in Atwood's novel, was to interpret them as signs of possible alternatives. Our experience of Praxis left us suspicious of the "photo-like" elements surrounding spaces. We construed words and language in that Weldon text as threatening 'forms' which we associated with danger and 'non-sense'. Invisibility we connected with freedom. That illusion is again enhanced by the mode through which Offred's life is shared with us. She is all memory and inference, and her Gillead era is no more present to us than is the life-style of those on the colonies, that of the eighties, or the one represented by the chauvinistic lecturers at the end.

In The Grass is Singing we've looked at our own reasons for distancing ourselves from the heroine and for rendering invisible what we cannot face. "The Handmaid's Tale" might be an image of

the process by which the direct maternal link, blatantly visible, fails to counteract the marginalisation of women. Patriarchy, with its invisible paternal link manages to 'Lord' over the maternal position which is relegated to oblivion. In Offred's case her physical function as producer was isolated from her intellectual self, just as the commander's wife was isolated from that same physical dimension. That physicality or concrete form is severed from Offred's life, and she is a "surrogate". The "wife" is also, logically surrogated since she will not conceive. The commander then remains as the only legitimate parent in the making. What we're watching is a gradual lead up to a position where women come to enjoy an illusion of visibility as the intellectual capacity becomes slowly formed into an artefact represented by the doubling of the Handmaid image. Always accompanied by one other Handmaid, it's as if the intellectual aspect is moulded into a kind of supervisory omniscient eye, while the material existence of these women is obliterated. Just as the sensual aspects of their lives have been blanked, so too have their minds been tampered with. Offred is doubly itemised since her productive faculties seem to replace her intellectual self, what is material is blanked and what is invisible is made concrete is an imprisoning illusion of omniscience, an illusion easily sustained because the sub-culture she moves in consists of only two minds. The binary system of thought is brought down to its most basic form, where one or other may betray the "opposite" number, and each delude themselves as to their own fundamental superiority. They are handed the symbolic omniscience of "Virgins," and "Handmaids of the lord", a privilege they might cling to in preference to the

colonies.

The Handmaids clung to invisibility in order to survive, seeking, like Offred to escape complete death in secret silences and spaces. Involuntarily her struggle to subsist sustains a system which relegates women to pockets of invisibility and space, and we see that space can be a double-edged sword. Ai shows a dangerous tendency to usurp the space on Winter into the constricting system of Terran, his own world, because he too is, as we noted, preoccupied 'with physical and psychological subsistence'.

Women, readers and Ai share a common supplemented 'condition', but in Le Guin's novel, as in The Handmaid's Tale we see that women and the marginalised regularly do to ourselves what we did to the equally oppressed Tony in the last reading. Again Culler says that "what has been relegated to the margins or set aside by previous interpreters may be important precisely for those reasons that led it to be set aside" (O.D. p.140). It would seem relevant therefore that we search for what it is we have supplemented in ourselves, considering that such information might reveal the whereabouts of Reader's power and initiative. On the first page Ai says "I'll make my report as if I told a story", and reading on, we find there are many tales, hearth tales and myths, each seeming to stand parallel to Ai's account, and all resembling each other. He says "it is all one story", and "not told by me alone". There is an implication that Ai may not have known as much as the reader is told by the text, a notion that could account for some strange tolerance on his part for

the peculiar aspects of the plot. On inspection though, there is evidence to show that he has read all the 'extra' folk-tales, though in the cases of "On Time and Darkness" and "An Orgots Creation Myth" we cannot be sure. The latter two, nevertheless, are of 'global' interest, and he would most likely have become familiar with them. The other 'supplementary' stories he has either himself recorded, or his initials are to be found at the top or bottom of the page. He demonstrates a knowledge of and interest in the issue of gender in "The Question of Sex" on Winter, and he will have had access to Therem's notes before he gave them to "Lord Estraven" at the end.

Yet despite the peculiarity of his surroundings, he doesn't ask the obvious questions I or the average reader would ask. For instance, why has he not tried to see if Therem of Stok had another son called Arek, who could account for the "son's son" Sorve at the end? We wonder if he is either witholding information from us or from himself. The excessive riddle-like quality of the plot arouses suspicion in us and it seems likely that Ai exploits our detecting habits as readers, offering us decoys while he avoids narrating another level of textual experience. We readers dwell on certain questions however, positing the notion that it is unlikely that the older son would have been called Arek. We make that judgement in the light of what's said on page 111 when we are told that Therem of Stok left home "until a year had passed", after which, he sent a child called Therem to the Estre gate with the message "This is Therem, the son's son of Estre". So we preoccupy ourselves with the task of deciphering whether the same, current Therem is the subject of the folk-tale, and if so, how

he came to have the older brother Arek. The story is overloaded with such hints and suggestions of vital traces to a secluded centre of meaning in the story. As in the Rhys novel, we see ourselves drift into a compulsion to assemble and enclose scattered strings of meaning in the plot. The overall maze of meaning suggests itself as part of a wider mystery, something Le Guin wants to say about readers' obsessive search for answers, and some authors' ruthless withholding of information. We wonder above at Ai's seeming reluctance to ask certain questions. He left so many curiosities un-commented upon, as if he treated, not only the additional folk-tales as "supplements", but those curiosities too. We've noted that he seems to represent many different roles in one, not least that of would be author, but we come to see that he may be more like her than he pretends. It seems most probable that one of his reasons for not asking those questions and not entertaining the inevitable conjectures the reading invites, is because he knows the answers already. His relative lack of attention to some of the features we've raised begins to look like faked ignorance. We might have said that he couldn't be a surrogate author because he seems not to know all 'his text', but maybe he does know it all. Perhaps, inside the male Ai, is the authoress Le Guin, the female world enclosed in male narrative. Looking at his performance and our own as readers to date, we see many comparisons. He resembles also the trend towards alternative spaces and worlds demonstrated by Feminist authors. He opts for an environment in which he will be distinguished , as women have been drawn into silences and invisibiity in order to find another field of expression or tale-telling . In response to the

question "Why do we tell tales?", Ursula Le Guin, quotes J Z Young as saying: "Living things act as they do because they are so organised as to take actions that prevent their dissolution into their surroundings ('Critical Inquiry). In other words, we tell tales, he implies, in order to survive, and this issue of survival is connected to the quest for 'supplementary' worlds or living space. Women's search for additional space suggests a lack inherent in the existing institution of meaning. Instead of releasing alternative meanings from those spaces, we're inclined to supplement these very spaces themselves, treating them as mere deviant, inessential additions. We compulsively and retrogressively 'centralise' them, around our preconceived notions of what it is to live/survive.

Two compulsions collide in The Left Hand of Darkness. Firstly Ai's which is comparable to Freud's 'repetition compulsion', and our's which reveals us in the practice of general correction. It's as if, in this dissertation, I have been compounding an archtype of reading rectification. I've seen myself erratically set out to make sense of all the complications of a given work, as if I were repeating on the reading level, a process going on at a more fundamental level. There may be a useful comparison to be made between this dialectical procedure and what we often find to be the case in reading. For instance, where Ai is most involved in the act of fixing a strange set of meanings is where I, as a reader, am most engaged in doing the same to the equally strange Ai. As he translates the peculiar chronology of winter into his own terms, I very energetically pursue the significance of this act. Failing to inscribe Ai into a comfortable

set of meanings for myself, I could be tempted to treat him as a "supplement", something interesting by the nature of his peculiarity, but nonetheless dispensable. In fact this seems to be his own attitude to, and treatment of the whole issue of contradiction in the plot. We noticed how he supplemented and neglected to raise some very obvious questions, and we're warned by this tendency in him against rushing into the same behaviour ourselves.

While we cannot say that Ai is actively involved 'in' the repetition apparent in the folk-tales, we must wonder if he is dependent upon the repeated narration of these very similar tales. While Freud's "repetition compulsion" led to his discovery of what he described as the "death instinct" inherent in human behaviour, closer inspection of Young's account of tale-telling reveals a death inherent in traditional literature. In The Essentials of Psychoanalysis[1], pp 218-268 under the discussion of "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", James Strachey translates Freud's ideas. He tells us that Freud observed that patients need to repeat a traumatic event in order to believe in its relevance to the given ailment. Freud discusses what he perceives as an almost instinctive drive to perform a certain ritualistically repeated sequence in order to reach a required end. Surely what Young describes as the survival technique of tale-telling has much in common with the repetition Freud observes. What seems like a healthy drive to "prevent their dissolution into their surrounding" often leads feminists to reabsorb deviance into the Status Quo.

Young and Ai's approach to tale-telling is a self blinding of the type

we observed in Feminists' treatment of space. In fact Ai doesn't survive in the narration role he claimed for himself at the start, as we'll see later. We recall that Ai is of the school of "binary thought", a system in which Cixous locates "death at work", according to Toril Moi's book. The 'binary pair' becomes a duel, at the end of which "victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity" ("Sexual/Textual/Politics" p.105). The conservatism of the Status Quo, instinctive or socially motivated, is based on a desire to survive at the expense of other participants in that system who are intellectually squashed. The Status Quo, like Young's deceptive account of "survival", lives off death. While activity in literature is confined to the author/ial pole, the reader will always be the passive half dead underdog. Even the vaguest inclusion of our responses as part of our literary analysis, allows us to make Ai redundant in his repetitive and constrictive delineation. As we saw in the last chapter of this dissertation, when readers move out of their inactive, invisible role in order to participate in the creation of writing, that old binary composed "death instinct" has nothing to destroy but itself, as will become increasingly clear. For the moment we must concern ourselves with the issue of why instinctual and/or social forces cause the marginalised to seek alternative worlds.

Something lacking in the Terran planet dictated its dispatchment of an enquiring "envoy". I have been more concerned with the social aspect of marginalisation in my enquiry into literature as institution. But a "repetition compulsion" has asserted itself, without doubt, in mine and Ai's behaviour, perhaps a symptom of the ailment I

consistently sensed and tried to correct in these chapters. The folk-takes, the "supplements" of the central story, are so interlapping thematically that we could read them backwards or fowards and yet feel their sequence to be normal. At the same time, the exercise of reading these tales in reverse showed me just how much a narrator must repress in order to give us an impression that he/she and we are learning the information at the same time. We know that Ai is merely narrating a story, but he is also 'acting' as a character with limited knowledge in the drama. To read the tales backwards or even to read the book a second time, involves my having to try to block out vast amounts of relevant information so as to share the sequence of the story. I could either be swamped into "dissolution" by the flashes backwards and forwards I'd make in order to trace Therem(s), or I would have to compress my awareness into a straight line, blanking a massive amount of consciousness.

The Left Hand of Darkness is not here being written off as an account of some man in space having a nervous breakdown. Rather I'm seeing the story as a model of the nervous breakdown that is required in order for anyone to strangle the multitude of their interpretative faculties into the lines and units of normal ideational patterns. We see that Ai almost does crack like the ice underneath him. He says that "tears came out and froze my eyelids together" (T.L.D. p.224). We can draw on Freud's "death instinct" here and compare Ai's debilitation with that of the status quo itself which regularly and systematically kills it's own ability to be creative. The active process of interpretative creativity is largely supplemented in

favour of repeated, standardised norms. The establishment of textual authority sustains this killing system in order to stay on top of readers, oppressed, and subordinated elements. The 'death at work' in binary thought is suggested on p.203 when Edondurath kills all his brothers. As Moi says "For one of the terms to acquire meaning,...it must destroy the other" (Sexual/Textual/Politics p.105). However, if the reader shifts ground to demand a more assertive role in reading, then the purpose of traditional, binarily structured texts must change too. We saw that finally "the youngest" brother "coupled" with Edondurath, as readers could relate responsively and creatively to a text (T.L.D. p.203). Of the brothers' coupling were born "the nations of men". When/if readers move out of their silent subordinate role traditional texts lose their oppressive relation to us, and sustaining their conservative and retrogressive formula can only lead to their own extinction. The readers' 'coupling' and shared creativity can save literature.

While we repeat these lines and units of normal discourse patterns, our creative potential is deployed and usurped, constraining us from reaching an alternative that would give us reading independence. It seems to me that Ursula Le Guin wishes to raise this issue of normal notions of what it is to mean . Reading the text is, of necessity, an experience of feeling one has read, or known it all before. This is so even on a first reading, because the supplementary tales are so alike. Those "supplements" therefore are ironically, central to our reading experience, and with them repetition must be studied more intensely to see what the author may want to

show us. It is useful to mention at this point that we find ourselves in the Le Guin reading back in the position we left in Wide Sargasso Sea. There, as now, we noticed ourselves being seduced into a detecting role which causes us to repeat and multiply the bulk of engrossing textual material. Then as now we were aware of the merits of ambiguity, deciding by the end that we didn't need to know everything. Both these texts cause us to consider issues related to a possibly psychological influence over our reading habits to date. We might usefully assess how psychoanalytic opinion may reinforce some of our observations, while these 'opinions' may compete with each other for our approval.

We've been looking at what I called the nervous breakdown required in order to compound what is, after all, a massive dynamics of meaning, into the lines and units we call language. Noting Ai's and our own compulsive conduct in relation to interpretation, it starts to seem feasible that, as readers of varying sorts, we are both unconsciously writing out an archetypye of self cure in response to this illness or incorrectness which we're increasingly aware of. We're also becoming very sensitive to a kind of second presence in the story, another "shadow" text behind Ai's words. The notion of sideline tales reinforces that idea to us, and the existence of Therem's own separate account causes us to view his narrative as something "different". In fact, being thus haunted by an extra dimension in the tale has the effect of making us feel that a dream has taken on realistic dimensions. We wonder do we dream that we have known this story before, or have we perhaps dreamt it.

Returning to the idea of 'supplement' it will be remembered that it is only possible to add on these extra items of meaning because they form something of what is lacking in the essential, central structure. The added factor will therefore be of the same substance as the main item. There Culler says that "Writing can be compensatory, a supplement to speech, only because speech is already marked by qualities generally predicated of writing: absence and misunderstanding" (O.D. p.103). We've seen that additional folk-tales were considered necessary 'supplements' to an inadequate story line. In fact these additions become paramount in the creation of our interpretation. Those supplementary tales bring with them a kind of dream consciousness, when we see little difference between the possibility of having dreamt the overall tale and having learnt its plot while fully conscious. Unconsciousness and consciousness begin to look like equally essential elements of one phenomenon. Here Jung's idea of an archetype transmitted to us in dream form strikes us, and the text's regular reference to 'shiftgrethor' or shadow reminds us of his work. Jung says "Matter suffers right up to the final disappearance of blackness, in psychological terms, the soul finds itself in the throes of melancholy, locked in a struggle with the shadow" (C.G. Jung Speaking p.22). He was working on a study of alchemy. In another interview he says "Because the father would not take on his shadow, his share in the imperfection of human nature, his children were compelled to live out the dark side which he ignored" (C.G. Jung Speaking p.161). The supplemented 'shadow' of the individual must, according to the logic we've advanced in relation to the additional folk-tales, be part of

the same human phenomenon, and in fact an essential addition to an otherwise lacking human entity.

In "An Orgota Creation Myth" we're told that Edondurath said "Why are my sons followed thus by darkness?" The answer he got was "Because they are born in the house of the flesh, therefore death follows at their heels...In the beginning there was the sun and the ice, and there was no shadow". Shadow then seems to represent the introduced death and/or evil we learn about in the Adam and Eve creation myth. In "On time and Darkness" Meshe says, in contradiction that "There is neither source...There is neither darkness nor death, for all things are, in the light of the present moment..." (T.L.D. p.142). As in the Lessing novel we noted the significance, not only of 'shadow' in the ideational habits of winter, but also a preoccupation with such philosophical issues. Again Jung discusses, the "whiteness" aspired to by Christians in their struggle to rid themselves of the blackness of their shadows. Jung tells us that such "whiteness" is only a "sort of abstract, ideal state", (C.G. Jung Speaking p.222) reminding us of the Buddha-like Meshe's comments and the whole spiritual and fictional aspect of that tale. A couple of pages later Jung discusses the Yahweh religion and goes on to say that "man must rediscover a deeper source of his own spiritual life. To do this he is obliged to struggle with evil, to confront his shadow". I'm reminded thus of Jung's ideas because the texts so suggests them. We recall Meshe's and Jung's words when Ai says "No shadows. An even "white", soundless sphere: we moved along inside a huge frosted-glass ball. There was nothing inside the

ball and nothing was outside it" (T.L.D. p.224). He goes on to say "Probe the invisible cracks through which one might fall". Here the Christian or traditional fear of and resistance to shadow is foregrounded in a way that recalls the common speaker's fear of falling out of the constraints or limits of language into meaninglessness or madness.

Jung would appear to be right, whiteness is an "ideal" state, rather than one based on what is commonly held to be concrete reality. Yet we are afraid to acknowledge that shadow side or 'darkness' we first recognised in ourselves in the Lessing text. This fear leaves us only capable of repeating the same lines, tales and worlds with which we are familiar and feel safe. Jung's views again bear significance to this text as he suggests the inevitable inheritance of shadow in the event of an elder not acknowledging his/her own "darkness". After all, the sons of Estraven the traitor seem to inherit his treachery and, in fact, this stigma appears to be allotted to the Therem we know, rather without justification. In the tale "Estraven the Traitor" we learn that the title "traitor" came about because "Within a year" Therem "ended the old feud" (T.L.D. p.113) between Estre and Stok, an ironically positive gesture to warrant the stigma of traitor. Shevek too in "The Dispossessed" seemed unfairly branded with the 'traitor' label, and there are other similarities between both of these Le Guin texts. The narrator of The Dispossessed left the reader with so strong a sense of his own objectivity that even the reader felt watched. There is an effect in common caused by both these narrators' unquestioning tone. They tend to leave a gap where the

investigative reader will likely jump in. However, we are made so conscious of this tone in the narrator that we withold our own tendency to be subjective. A fear of being scrutinised by the authoritative narrator causes us likewise to try to be objective. We are not encouraged to be responsive and I think Le Guin is trying to draw our attention to yet another slant from which repression is facilitated and even encouraged by language and narrative.

We note also that though both genders are one on Winter, the natives express astonishment and disgust at the sight of the female body which, to them, seems like one in a state of perpetual pregnancy. In The Dispossessed we saw that the narrator, and even the natives of Annares, persisted in translating the Pravic word "ammar", meaning brother/sister, into the masculine form "brotherhood". Le Guin consistently foregrounds the process by which the "supplementary" is absorbed into the norm, while yet being constrained to marginality. The concept of 'sister' is usurped into a general centrality but in a subordinated role. The wall image in The Dispossessed , is actually absorbed by the reader who finds him/herself talking about being walled into units, persistently struggling to find new spaces or contexts, and yet ironically turning new ground into units on the old model. These novels of hers deal with our conservative drive to take "different" intellectual terrain, and turn it into "supplementary" objects, absorbing it and yet leaving it and oneself in an inferior position. The Left Hand of Darkness is the more powerful of these two works I believe, and she injects the most extraordinary ideas into us, without our noticing. She subtly moves the usually central

features to the margin, while the deviant and supplemented go into our minds. She manages to take us behind the scenes of the plot, and away from a typical detecting role. We are allowed to see how even mormal enquiry can be placed in a supplementary role, and we're encouraged to ponder the sort of psychological forces that cause us to read and interpret. She succeeds in eluding the usual subject/object mode of teaching, in that we're practicing a desired new habit without our having set ourselves into an oppositional relation of objectivity to the lesson.

To clarify, let us look back to what we felt in "Wide Sargasso Sea" on discovering that 'we don't need to know everything'. I felt the time had come for an alternative habit of reading, and I sensed a double presence in the book, two worlds which Antoinette occupied, one which I could not see. I ventured into the exploration of space in my readings between The Grass is Singing and The Handmaid's Tale . In the Rhys text I noticed that I cannot pinpoint 'the hows and wherefores of interpretation', and that readers travel through areas of meaning quite unconsciously. In Le Guin's novel I find myself see into another level of the text to an ulterior reading that is going on without my consciously noticing. She uses the knowledge she must have of readers' responses to allow us to plunder onto the usual detecting arena, while, at the same time pumping a wider range of awareness into us. The sense that we have known the events in the folk tales previously, was created by simple repetition. Another type of repetition performed by ourselves causes us to recognise an ongoing trend in us towards a specific way of viewing our world.

We study how and why Ai/I leave(s) so much unsaid, and see his and our approach to supplementation as the mode typical of the Status Quo. When we read 'Ai' we might as well read 'I', and in fact Le Guin too might be using this coded reference to herself, to share her own views on what it is to interpret the world.

It has been suggested that the media may be in the process of colonising the unconscious and even our imagined Utopias. If we view the "Left" and "Right" hands of the story as depicting the artistic and intellectual sections of the mind respectively, that notion of colonisation takes on a more alarming edge. What if our analytical capacity usurped the artistic or imaginative element? Would we finally be unable to even envisage alternative worlds? These are some of the questions the lay person like myself will ponder, gleaning some basic insights into reader and human response in the process. Anyone interested in the advancement of an ideology will be concerned with how to persuade, and the writer often fits into this category of intention. Le Guin seems to me to have attended to such typical responses, and to have learned something of how to use our predictable responsiveness to the advantage of her own ideological bloc. As even the title of The Dispossessed suggests and The Left Hand of Darkness reasserts, her bloc seems to have to do with the marginalised, Feminist or otherwise. If we review some of the passing observations we've made regarding our responses to this text so far, we can collate them to postulate a source for Le Guin's "writerly" skills. She appears to use her knowledge of reading and readership to show us the manipulative

effects of traditional habits of interpretation, and simultaneously to make us aware of the 'extra' information our less conscious selves collect all the time. What is normally supplemented or marginalised in our reading is here forced before our minds.

In The Left Hand of Darkness we come to ask that question 'If language is about preventing us from falling into "dissolution", then why is it that the institution of literature enslaves us in a neurotic tradition of defensiveness?' Seeking to answer this we compare our own habit of supplementing massive amounts of meaning in order to read straight, with Ai's identical treatment of the mysteries of the plot. We become alert to an unconscious tendency in us to read analytical 'lines' across our spirally flowing imaginative potential. Further repression occurs in relation to our habitual notions of what is right and wrong, for instance in The Dispossessed where I found myself unable to subjectively enjoy Shevek, because of a feeling of being under the surveillance of the toneless, objective narrator. In The Grass is Singing we found ourselves feeling guilty over the usurpation of Tony's space and came to the conclusion that power corrupts, and so we cowered into the sort of silent sub-culture Offred lived out in The Handmaid's Tale. Reflecting again upon Ai's terror of falling into white nothingness, it seems likely that the author is illustrating to us the absurdity of trying to exist without our "shadow" side. Failing to negotiate this very material, non-spiritual part of ourselves leaves us inclined to divide ourselves in sections, pushing out the shadow and holding ourselves into white spaces. Avoiding "nothingness" throws us into a crack, as Ai almost

fell. He survived that death on the ice but only in the binarily locked system we want to subvert, semi-consciously repeating the same old story, compulsively regurgitating unoriginal material, "telling tales to prevent his dissolution into his environment". His shadow would be passed onto the reader but for the total deconstruction Le Guin has performed on his role. If we look again we see that he has had his central role taken away from the start. He looks like the hero, but his shallowness and constricted disposition is revealed when we see that he holds himself together by blanking and supplementing half the textual mystery. Sadly we find that we repeat on the reading level, the behaviour of the narrator, something which often happens in reading. We are so struck by the impossible complexity of detail, that we find ourselves taking wider images from the story.

So while we seem to neglect the detecting role, the author ensures that we perceive another set of messages she writes. "Two are One", and reversing the binary pair, One is Two suggesting that another, possibly hidden, text exists for the reader to unveil, and encourages to create difference out of the absent "right hand of darkness". Had we taken the bait to decipher the connections between one Therem and the next, we would be like the reader of The Handmaid's Tale , seeing spaces for us to fill, but like Offred too, in that we would allow Ai, the Status quo, or tradition to tell us what to fill in. We would supplement our own creativity. As "different" readers, changed in our view of "darkness" which we now find less repulsive to us, we're able to write the absent 'shadow' of Ai's narrative. Le Guin

helps us trace the whereabouts of readers power, showing us that much of our creative ability has been hidden in invisibility.

Returning to the idea that the text may be two, we could compare what Ai expects of the reader with what Lucy anticipated from us in Villette. She had a preordained role awaiting us. We saw the danger in The Left Hand of Darkness, and evaded it. The author herself seems to have another intention for us, again to write another part of her novel, but more in the "light" of returning to the text what has been supplemented into space and marginality. We are required to fill the spaces differently by this Feminist authority. In fact I hope my reader will be conscious of a similar alternative dissertation he/she is expected to write with my own. I mentioned that I'd felt myself getting more and more conscious of myself in the process of trying to correct something I felt to be wrong about my own reading and interpretative habits. Le Guin goes a long way towards showing us that the construction of supplement, or fear of shadow sides, is a major force in our curtailment and constriction into the lines and units of language and meaning. The text refers to women as being in the 'middle' or womb of the typical citizen of Winter. The marginalised of today are simultaneously in the middle of traditional conservatism, and we will be the offspring of that tradition. The oppressor is a type of daemonic ancestor, who wishes to plant us with either his or her own shadow, or the compulsion to avoid that shadow. Our simultaneous location at the margins of that tradition allow us to see the deficiency in the literary and social institutions, an insight which currently motivates our search for the

aspired to "alternative".

Women are literally "middle" on Winter, and what the Kemmerings give birth to is middleness, or process. The author, Le Guin, seems to break out of the mock author Ai. A kind of birth is in question, which returns us to question Culler's view that everything is negotiated around the issue of centralism. In adding a new dimension to any text or any thing, we call the new "different", implying that there is already a central item from which the new differs. But isn't the process one of "deferral", to quote Derrida, and isn't meaning "only constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to other, absent signifiers?", as suggested by Moi ('Sexual/Textual/Politics' p.106). As we noted, the behaviour of Therem which was labelled treacherous, could just as easily have been called heroic. He, after all, ended a feud to the satisfaction of those involved at the time. Growth and difference is what turned the term hero into the "word' traitor. With hindsight his performance took on new meaning, proving unpatriotic when confronted by later, following 'terms'. So while the author's approach to the delivery of her message in this text, involves our relating to 'centres' of meaning, we are allowed to see our act of 'meaning' in process. Logocentrism then becomes a utensil of ours and the writer. Presumably we will have to use this utensil until we 'grow' out of a need for it, when it will burn itself out.

For now we see a way in which that mode of meaning, with which we're stuck, can serve us, as it does the Status Quo. We can take

back the power to speak and write our readings, and it is up to us whether we call ourselves victim or victor. Philosophers of old considered language, and especially writing as a hindrance to the direct conception of a thought or the truth. But we cannot express truth in isolation from language, not even internal dialogue. If there is no language then there is no truth, and if there is truth there is language as part of that truth. We may be confined to defining our world around truths, and in language, but the power to use language is common to everyone, and so we all have equal access to the truth, though we may not always feel confident of such power in ourselves. In fact it seems to be this power and creativity, our shadowed potential, that we most fear. Culler mentions a "principled distinction between two classes of utterance", and "a difference within each speech act that had been treated as a difference between speech acts" (O.D. p.133). We seem to have stumbled upon a difference within The Left Hand of Darkness , and we created that difference, thereby sharing a combined authorship with Le Guin. Supplemented has become synonymous with marginalised, even in the best efforts of some Feminists. Le Guin's readers have been weaned out of that subordinated role, and we're learning to search for difference and the power to create implied by differentiation. The alternative we sought for was one which might allow us such autonomy, the freedom to write our own norms. We used Ai's compulsive behaviour to write a difference in our own. Just as the text allows us Ai's interpretative role from which to write a difference, so too does Le Guin allow us a new view of what it is to tell tales. What she tells us can help us to start taking pleasure both from our reading and

from an awareness that we're breaking through restrictive boundaries to advance the authority we glimpsed in ourselves back in Wide Sargasso Sea .

PASSING THROUGH BOUNDARIES: Part 1

The Reader as Villain in The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five .

Doris Lessing

While the dazed, crazed and deranged tone of Praxis leaked through to the Rhys and earlier Lessing texts, we've noted how Wide Sargasso Sea marked a new departure for the reader as we glimpsed an unaccustomed self determination and authority in our potential writerly skills. The alienating effect of high realism is replaced in these two later novels by the authors' attempt to open up, and consequently subvert the limits of reality. We see that while Rhys succeeds in creating a space, or window through which we can see possible alternative reading futures, Lessing actually re-encloses her fictional heroine in a way that throws us back again to the distance, to the victim role. While we do 'leap out of the Antoinette role' at the end of the Rhys text, we do so as a matter of choice permitted us by the novel's open ending. The "window" remained open long enough to show us that we "don't have to know all or pretend to control meaning". Lessing's work, for reasons already explained, almost slams that "window" shut again before we manage a deeper look into the unconscious realm more recently exposed in The Left Hand of Darkness .

Though much of the violence and severity of Antoinette's activity and discourse went on at an obscure level, that very obscurity served to inform us that much meaning is beyond immediate "detection". It's as if some of the heroine's plight transmitted itself to us at an unconscious level. However, the author's creation of space for the reader, promised an opening or window into unconscious

interpretation which could lead to our improved understanding of what goes on at a semi-conscious level in our own lives. Lessing's reversion to an enclosing approach to meaning left us with no more than a sense of Mary as ill, bewildered and deranged, and of her text as the illustration of a semi-real misadventure. That text failed to take us in, and consequently, abated the potential vitality and urgency of our response. Never having "believed" in Mary, we yielded a rather 'half-cocked' reaction to the pain, shock and silence of the plot, because we could so easily distance ourselves from the deviant and deranged heroine. Our experiences in The Marriages Between Zones, Three, Four and Five are so emotionally jarring that we search for the assertive villain who so affects turmoil in us. When the prime mover of events turns out to be ourselves, reading reprobates of the text, we're jolted into a kind of reading realism so far unencountered by us. This second Lessing text opens the window again, even wider than before, so that we cross boundaries to actually touch the "shadow" housed in our own unconscious.

The chronicler(s) draws us into the mythic world of Zone Three, which is currently engaged in a fabulous decipherment of 'rumour'. Though there may be more than one narrator, as suggested by the cover of the book (as narrated by the chroniclers of Zone Three), Lusik is the personality we gradually come to know. He starts to take on a "shady" aspect when it looks like he's setting the "providers" up for subversion. He tells us that he's "not permitted to actively criticize" their "dispensations", while inconsistently taking "the liberty of doubting" them (T.M.Z. p.19). Later we come to

recognise something of the same duplicity of character in Al.Ith when she talks over Ben Ata's head to Dabeeb. The text exploits our attention for ambiguities by dragging us into its submerging emotional turmoil, while we're left to suspect that, like Ben Ata, information is being witheld from us. The ensuing sense of alienation is increased by a notion that the omniscient narrator is talking across to some narattee. Indignant at our exclusion from the drama, we plunge energetically into what turns out to be a most stormy reading agenda. Shock treatment is administered by sudden mood adjusting exposures, from the comic to the highly serious. Al.Ith seemed estranged and vulnerable in her new environment as she "rocked back and forth, trying to remember what had just fled past her" mind (T.M.Z. p.60). How many times have we readers "almost understood something" under the gaze of omniscient and unhelpful narrators? The relatively finite dimensions of mortal minds are foregrounded here in a way that creates a sense of intellect as target or mind as endangered object. Lusik seems to enjoy a private joke with his narattee at the expense of the tantalised reader, to whom the humour appears "black" in view of a rising fear for our mental well being. Like Al.Ith, to this "mind father" we're no more than "fallen creatures" for whom, as with Dabeeb, "there's always a pull and a tug from within these armours of watchfulness, patience, humour, of a terrible want". The chronicler/reader is viewing us much as we perceived the "deranged" heroines of earlier texts. He's, for some reason, trying to distance himself from us.

The human plight seems to be elevated for ridicule again when Ben

Ata says of Zone Four "Yes, it is as bad as that" and Al.Ith is moved to comment on the insular lethargy of her own zone saying "our people never look beyond our borders". We readers conjure up dreadful premonitions consequent on these revelations, when the whole sketch is undermined by an apparently farcical debate about "Al.Ith's Tear". We're frustrated both by the interruption and by a suspicion that we're not being taken seriously. That moodiness weakens us against the next onslaught when our heroine confesses to the Chronicler Lusik, "I don't know myself" (T.M.Z. p.106). From this doleful statement the book moves on to where an amusing confusion over vocabulary occurs. Like the words 'jealousy', "impertinence" and "plan", the word "cold", meant metaphorically, is taken literally by Al.Ith who says "Cold I certainly am, I am frozen" (T.M.Z. p.117). A few pages later we're submerged in a mood of grief when, "Melancholy caused sympathy" and "groans and cries from both of them at the mismanagement of absolutely everything" (T.M.Z. p.121). Like Al.Ith, we start to be ground down.

Having spun us into this climate of weakened resistance, we're exposed then to passages of emotional persecution, which send us looking for the villain in order to locate the source of evil to a tolerable distance from us. The chronicler narrator has earned the position of prime suspect, from the point of view of our angered dispositions. We by now want to see him as the source of cruelty in the text, and so we wish to distance ourselves from him just as he for some reason earlier showed similar tendencies in relation to us. The passage on page 202 flows from delight and joy to the sort of

confusion which sends shock waves onto the notion of wanting to eat a baby. Words like 'gold', 'rose', 'snow', 'swaddling', 'licking', 'nuzzling' and 'gently' move abruptly onto the concept of 'dismay', 'surprise' and back again to 'a loving spell'; from 'responded' to 'blood', 'possession', 'uneasy', 'ought' and 'wanting'. This juxtaposition of opposing moods is so disorientating that the idea that "she could eat him all up" starts to seem feasible, if only in the environs of an alien world. Derangement is added to anguish as we read on to hear her ask "Where was Ben Ata?" The words 'betray', 'abandon', 'starve', 'monster' and 'needed' batter us into a feeling of being unjustly wounded. The ceaseless change in the novel's emotional life keeps us in a state of subjective involvement, as unpredictably we're suddenly cheered by Ben Ata's glee at being a father. However, the smile is, just as abruptly, swept away by his reaction in the love scene following the birth, when he is dogged by an idea of the "child pushing out to his pushing in". We're giving up hopes of solace from this text when we're granted a temporary respite as they heal their relationship to experience "A lightness, an impulsiveness...a grace again".

Typically we find it's a pleasant 'silence' following that scene which introduces a storm of grief and misery, when the drum stops beating and they must separate. This is a harsher abuse of our tattered emotions than the similar play of contrasting sensations on page 55. Then, we were told that "A wave of brutality almost conquered him. But he felt her small hand in his and he was utterly stupefied by it". The separation scene seems again to mock us in all its tragic

and formalised presentation. The chronicler says "To be separated now", followed by the distressed lady type gasp no. The passage follows on with an inevitable demonstration of woe in "at the moment", "some awful thing", "the pounding of their hearts told them". We react to Lusik's apparent cynicism as Ben Ata did on seeing the bruise beside Al.Ith's mouth. We become enraged. We're so touchy by now that even the chronicler's wording, the essence of his textual presence, incurs our disfavour. We despise him, even in his role as narrator, as earlier he perceived us as "deranged" and "fallen" readers. The separation passage continues in due course with words like 'cruel' and 'punish' until the reader reaches a state of appreciative agreement when the narrator says "Dabeeb's face showed she was stricken, hurt on their behalf". We're told also that Dabeeb was "at the same time uplifted" suggesting that humans don't scruple at where our encounters with the sublime emanate from. Tragedy or farce, evil or good; the source and route of human pleasure is shown to be a very dark alleyway indeed. Zone Five is the source of the separation tidings, as suggested by a reference to "the child went off down the hill". By now the narrator is taking on satanic proportions for the reader and his soothing hints that things "seen at this time as bad tidings" might improve, make him seem all the more devious.

Even on page 242 when the narrator turns round to address us directly we depreciate his narrative skill in our preoccupation with the drama we know must carry on behind his voice. While he speaks there's the logical sense of his being out of tune with the recurring

moments of experience shared by the characters. He seems outdated at least and we condemn his objective synopsis for the interruption it is. Our impatience to rejoin the dramatic arena awakens us to the extent to which we've become subjectively engrossed in the plot. We're in no position to denounce the extreme emotional turmoil into which we've read ourselves, since that would be a rejection of part of our reading history. We realise that we've absorbed the experiences of others and that roles have been reversed so that we're in the novel. From here on we begin to read ourselves from within and outside the work, and we start to see ourselves in the life of the text.

We defend our subjective stance, considering that to be the precondition of experience, and what keeps us in touch with the drama. This helped us to deal with newer relations to the work in our deviant role as self conscious participants in a deviant enough plot. Deviance and derangement are no longer distant and distancing features of objectified heroines and we're coming increasingly to occupy what seemed to be the sem-consciously enacted role of the earlier Lessing heroines. We might rationalise our submergence in the unfamiliar world of "zones" by the idea that there is no norm, abnormal nor objectivity other than those based on subjective experience. Lessing's treatment of ritual in this text highlights the ritual of language, where thoughts gain credibility and reality through the confidence aroused through metaphor. Our subjective relationship to this novel makes its drama all the more real to us, as gradually we lose the incredulity that kept textual turmoil at a

comfortable distance in The Grass is Singing. We gradually come to see much of the chronicler in ourselves and as if he similarly sees our resemblance to himself, he seems to try to distance us, as if we were mere fictional objects. Even his synopses are as if designed to throw us out of the drama periodically. His defensive confession that the notion of the "very low" feeding the 'very high' is "not a thought I can easily accommodate or that I wish to write much about" (T.M.Z. p. 244), is really an accusation directed at the reader. It's as if, all along, he has been trying to offload or transfer the villain role onto us just as we too searched for and found scapegoats in the heroines of earlier texts, and in him too. Two pages before the latter comment he raises his voice to tactlessly remind us that we've been submerged, planted and that there's no 'I', just "the we of equals". We don't want to be associated with this potential scapegoat, but we realise that in rejecting him as a unifying force in the work, we took the bait of Al.Ith as identity He, the chronicler, is "mind Father" to Al.Ith and to Murti. He goes on to say "I am woman with her", "I am Ben Ata when I summon him", "I am what I am at the moment I am that". At this point we recognise ourselves as villain since we've imagined such a role, though we tried to project it onto Lusik.

However, he likewise tried to project the shadow onto the reader. We are as reflections of each other, narrator moved into reader's role and reader as narrator. We seem to penetrate boundaries in and through each other. At the moment we recognise ourselves as villains it is clear to all textual participants that we have shown

those tendencies in our responses. The very high feeds off the very low, and doubtless Lusik would have acknowledged the villain in himself too. We awaken an unconsciousness in each other, as if we each form and reveal something of the other's spirituality. Readers are the text's unconscious waiting to reveal more hidden literary content. Likewise texts are reader's unconscious waiting to stimulate us into an awareness of an 'other' in ourselves, a long silenced area we've been afraid to even acknowledge. Having once confronted that "villain", a certain joy ensues. Not only have we conquered fear and habit, but tuned into an interpretative channel formerly closed out from our reading habits. From this second Lessing text we've gained courage and intuition useful to our pursuit of our desired alternative. Lusik tells us that "the ordinary, the decent...these are nothing without the hidden powers that pour forth...from their shadow side" (T.M.Z p.243). In fact, comparatively speaking, none of our earlier readings seem quite to have touched us with a sense of the 'ordinary', because we could so easily objectify the recurring theme of derangement and deviance, lacking any 'real' recognition of those qualities in ourselves.

PASSING THROUGH BOUNDARIES : part 2

Readers as subject in Burger's Daughter

Nadine Gordimer.

Though this text begins with a third person narration, it is one which very soon attends to the possible impressions of the viewer. The commentator is conscious of the possibility of the scene outside the jail being watched from a passing bus, and he/she incorporates that awareness into the contents of the story. The text seems to make space for its readership from the first paragraph where we read that "Certain buses used to pass that way then and passengers looking out will have noticed a schoolgirl". Typical questions most readers would ask are raised like "Who are all those people, anyway?" Seeing our question asked in this way, we wonder if the reader's role is being displaced, or if we are to be offered a model of the reader as participant in a text. It seems feasible that the speaker is addressing someone directly, if only the travelling audience in the bus. Already our narrator appears less introverted and "closed" against us than were earlier versions. We're conscious of her/his directing discourse to some onlooker, as if an unseen reader or view is present other than ourselves. This, in turn, has the effect of making us more conscious of 'otherness' however invisible from our particular perspective. There is a sense of our watching a "mock author" in frank, open discussion with, and about, a 'mock audience'.

The narrator tells an audience which includes us, that "The schoolgirl stood neither in the first rank before the prison doors nor hung back", as if that intermediate location was of some significance. We've noted before that a direct address from narrator to reader

causes us to see the speaker as existing on a kind of boundary between textual and viewing worlds. We increasingly suspect that this particular commentator is a part-time reader. It's as if he/she occupies a position between and within both a micro text in the book and a micro audience. That idea reinforces our notion that we're to look upon the narrator, if not ourselves, as in some way a part of the plot, and upon Burger's Daughter as housing more than one text. The opening pages alone incorporate two, separately titled booklets. However, this mock author doesn't present itself as the objective representation of the real author, but rather as one working in co-operation with the latter. It's as if the mock addresses the real author in a discussion on how to set up a realistic arena in which to develop the opening scene of the plot. He/she might be weighing up the feasibility of the common image of a view from a bus. The two writers appear to be in league, rather than the real version seeming to use an interpreting narrator as a useful object either convenient for the depiction of textual material, or for the mirroring of the author's self. The 'real' writer, the subject, treats the mock version as a subject of his/herself, 'a subject of a subject'.

Another description of that process is to say that both work intersubjectively. Interpreting narrator is as much writer as the real author is reader of an unconsciously shared discourse. An author addresses a reader in him/herself, though writers differ in their awareness of that addressee housed within them. Looking at Rosa's own performance, the situation should become clearer. She

borrows the additional intellectual vision of three addressees in her search for a new habit of interpretation, as we readers have done in our use of "mock readers". She recalls two potential selves from the dead, and a third from a different social environment. Rosa carefully avoids using real readers as objects of her intentions, much as the narrator showed more than average egalitarianism when dealing with the mock audience. We're not being navigated by a standard omniscient voice, but one with an eye for the reader's potential response. Recalling the performance of mock and real authors, we might consider the possibility that these addressees of Rosa's are subjects of herself, ghosts of a silenced Rosa. Like the author then, she has placed a trio of mock selves within the work in order to become a subject of herself, another subject of a subject.

Once again we readers wonder if our role has been displaced since we're neither objects of the third person narration, nor of the first person. We're accustomed to being the subordinate object, if only of ourselves, sort of objects of an object. Nevertheless our recent encounter with the worst and darkest in ourselves as personified by Lusik, somewhat abates our fear of looking at ourselves. We've confronted our shadow and lived to tell the tale. Looking at Rosa's treatment of herself as subject of her own narrative, suggests ways to us in which we too might abandon our reclusive victim complex, and address the so far sheltered subject of the reader's self. The scenario from the earliest pages of Burger's Daughter is one where a pair of authors work intersubjectively, and a set of Rosas interpret in similar co-operation. "I am the place in which something has

occurred" is the name of the first booklet or text within a text. We read to find that texts too live intersubjectively in Burger's Daughter as do occurrences and places which are equally foregrounded as semantic structures in the presentation of the plot. We're somehow conscious of every textual feature as part of a wider community of interpretation in this novel, detracting from our association of literary power with the author/reader opposition. Rosa might have picked up that first booklet as we did, reading and interpreting, again just as we did so that her narrational role exactly mirrors that of the reader. After a space of a page we move into what might be another text entitled "When they saw me outside the prison what did they see?" She shows something of the reading dissatisfaction which has assailed us throughout this dissertation, when she dismisses the first booklet saying "I shall never know. It's all concocted". Two pages later she reveals the similarity between readers' and writers' occupational discontent when, on page 16, she again scraps even her own attempt to illustrate what was seen or unseen of her "outside the prison". She says "My version and theirs. And if this were being written down, both would seem equally concocted". Not only can we see that, for Rosa, writing and reading the "stranger to oneself" is one and the same process, but with that, we see that she is looking for an alternative literary method. She perceives the existence of that "stranger" self which has not yet been clearly communicated to her. She seems to think that something connecting mind to discourse has prevented her from knowing herself.

She says "And if I were telling, instead of talking to you in my mind the way I find I do", and "One is never talking to oneself, always one is addressing to someone" (B.D. p.16). This observation recalls what seemed to be the third person narrator's awareness of the 'mock audience'. We overheard the discourse going on between mock and real authors, narrator and audience, as we do Rosa's internal discourse. If she is talking "in her mind" then we too must occupy some relation to her, in her mind. While everyone participates in these internal dialogues with imagined "objects", Rosa tells us that for her "it never happened before", as far as she was aware. The shock realisation of this phenomenon displaces the object in her mind as she notes her subjective involvement in an ongoing process of interpretation. Having once read the opening address from third person narrator to the hypothetical mock audience, we too were consciously enlisted in a growing web of meaning. Interpretation is not exclusive to writing, and on encountering the opening symbols in the book, we enroll ourselves in the active creation of her work. Conversely the text lends to the materialisation of our role. What is peculiar in Burger's Daughter is that the narrator was conscious of that interdependence from the start. This text manages to inform us of our writerly responsibilities. We'll go on to discover that this extra piece of awareness is a bridge between a basic split in our interpretative habits. We come to dissolve the wall between a detachable object of interpretation and the interpretative act itself. Already we've diluted the customary antagonistic relationship between subject and object in ourselves. Copying Rosa and the initial narrator, we marginalise our old oppositional approach to the self as object, to greet the subject of ourselves on a subjective basis. This

tuning into the quieter intrinsic voices in us mirrors not only Rosa's similar self awareness but a gradual growth of consciousness on our part. Not only has the reflexive quality of reader response criticism enhanced our self knowledge, but from those responses we learn why our unconscious fears and desires failed to surface. Something happened to us in "The Marriages..." reading which alerted us to our common cause with the heroines of the Rhys and earlier Lessing texts. Our objective relation to these seemingly deviant women shifts in accordance with a gradual opening of our own unconsciousness. Having confronted the 'other'/shadow side of ourselves in Lusik we've acknowledged that dark domain as the lass aired partner to our more conscious and 'standard' interpretative faculties.

We grasp that it's a lover Rosa is "talking to in her mind" when, she adds to what the narrator has told us about Conrad, saying "That was how it was Conrad" (B.D. p.32). We know that, so far in the story, Conrad, Rosa and subsequently the reader are the only ones privy to certain knowledge about her. We suspect for instance, that she purposely avoids holding direct conversation on certain issues. However it is more likely that the addressee she is most shy of in this respect is herself "the stranger to oneself". She says "If you knew I was talking to you I wouldn't be able to talk" (B.D. p.17), as if directing that revelation to Conrad, but she adds "you know that about me". She might as well be talking to herself, a view enhanced by the fact that he is presumed dead, as is her father, another target of her internal discourse. We learn that Rosa associates freedom with the ability to see herself from without, to get

outside the institution of self. To breach the frontier surrounding her familiar identity, she dissolves herself into many different particles of self, as if melting down the fixed, unitary self image she has inherited from her father. She infiltrates the nothingness and insubstantiality of death in order to dislocate herself from the prison of identity. Katya too has a role in her drive to be free which Rosa asserts to be a matter of becoming "a stranger to oneself: the nearest I'll ever get to seeing what they saw outside the prison". "If I could have seen that", she declares, "I could have seen that other father, the stranger to myself". Her 'other' father in whom she believes her other self to exist, leads her to Katya as Lionel's first wife and might have been mother to herself. Nevertheless, family connections aside Katya, once Collette, is used by the heroine as a means of indulging some half surfaced desires. While the ghosts of dead men permit Rosa's access to a ghost region of herself, Katya allows her to participate in the play of passions unaccommodated in her native surroundings. In fact we might wonder if her apparent preoccupation with the father sign is not a decoy for personal desires which she can only address and see indirectly. She implies that in order to see her other self she must find her other father and she makes a kind of semantic link between the signs "father" and self. It's as if the sign father must be turned around to reveal the sign Lionel, and she believes that in turning that sign inside out, the sign Rosa will swing too to reveal her repressed and internal self. Her aspiration is an inadvertent recipe for subversion, in that by collapsing the law of the father her freedom can be attained. That 'law of the father' is what stands between herself and even the

acknowledgement and negotiation of her desires. We will see how she uses the dissident Katya to vent those desires from a comfortable and safe distance.

Confirming this suspicion regarding the heroine's intentions, is the exposition of contradiction in her conception of meaning itself. Her progressive concept of signs, like "Rosa" and "Lionel" existing intersubjectively to constitute the next 'other' meaningful sign, indicates a view of both signs as equally creative. However, her preconceptions as to where her "other" self can be located contradicts the semblance of radicalism just asserted. It does not look like Rosa has completely shunned or evaded the influence of Patriarchy, and the contradiction between the revolutionary Rosa and the reverse in her is so clear that we can assume this contradiction to be part of the message of the novel. The cover of the book itself suggests a kind of tension between what is familiar and yet antagonistic between the two signs in the Burger interpretative arena. Rosa's displacement of the object , which she replaces with a subjective version of herself, seems like an attempt to subvert the traditional order with which we habitually view and decipher our world. She strategically avoids treating interpretation to the usual subject/object programme though at the cost of confronting more fundamental contradictions revealed in her subjective 'selves'. Like the response reader, she seems to be searching for, and experimenting with, a different approach to meaning. The subject Rosa which she places where the third person narrator earlier placed an 'objectified' version, is a kind of mock self, like the mock readers

we delegate to the task of dealing with different levels of our reading ventures. We too treat ourselves as subjects of subjects which, like Rosa, we observe from outside the text. In those booklets within a book Rosa too manages to see herself in different and unaccustomed roles. Our own experience as readers tells us that somewhere else, in some other place, a real Rosa exists who uses us as alterative writers of her story. We know that authors help us to create new and imaginative arenas in which we might experiment as if in the process of creating our life stories on the literary stage. Writers make more space for us, and it's as if Rosa uses us, as she does the other textual participants, to extend her horizons. We are granted free access to her mind, the freedom to become co-authors of her tale. The relationship works both ways, since we too gain the facility to be a Rosa, a Lionel or a Katya. What's hers is ours and for once it looks like we've struck upon a relationship of sharing and equality with a text.

From the start we notice booklets within a book and narrators within an omniscient narrative. This would-be omniscient voice is being subverted from the moment Rosa involves herself in the discourse. In addressing other voices in her mind, be they dead or living, she lends them power to influence the advance of her story. Even dead Lionel will dictate much of what the real reader outside the text comes to understand. In this way the text allows us to see the radical quality of our own use of mock readers who filter back extra information to us which would otherwise have remained dormant under the weight of a single narrative voice. Rosa and her three

'ghosts' foreground the rather limited powers of that so called omniscient commentator in a way that entices us to get in there and apply our own writerly skills. However demeaned this mock author/narrator is in Burger's Daughter, his/her voice is sustained and allowed to remain like a memory which recurs now and then. Like the other elements of the plot, the narrator becomes a kind of event or place which never stops existing, however forgotten or ignored at times. Indeed, as with all memories, there must be a kind of personal relationship between Rosa and this narrator, as there is, by now, between us and that speaker. We see Rosa recall Conrad, an addressee which she comes to outgrow, yet never disguard. She says "When we spoke to each other there was the clandestine quality of talking to oneself; the taunting and tempting of mutual culpability" (B.D. p.64). Conrad's memory forms part of her current internal dialogue as it likewise influences our own current reading of Rosa's thoughts. It's as if he is a borrowed voice through which the heroine addresses us, reminding us that she can be anyone, recalled Lusik's earlier comment. He said "Al.Ith and I, and I Al.Ith, and every one of us anywhere is what we think and imagine" (T.M.Z. p.244). Again we're haunted by the dazed, crazed and drunken voice of former heroines, recognising them as "part of what we are" like the "snows of a thousand years" in Al.Ith's home. In some way we're becoming conscious that what we read or understand goes to formulate our ideologies and psyches, if only on an unconscious level. What we relegate to the back corridors of our minds could well hold the key to our external behaviour. This is why it's so very important that we examine our responses to what we read, noting

what gives pleasure, and what causes fear.

We read of how Rosa "left the children's tree-house we were living in" (B.D. p.70), that is "the cottage" which will always represent to us and to Rosa, a series of events and understandings about her. This memory survives along with that of the donkey incident which told her that she didn't "know how to live in Lionel's country". All textual entries, including the film-makers, authors and students as represented by the narrator are carried along under the banner of "ordinary life: other people's suffering" (B.D. p.73). For Rosa therefore, "ordinary life" is hardly bountifully endowed with joy and pleasure and in breaking down her identity into fragmented versions of the sign Rosa, she also breaks down some unpleasant memories. She grapples with the task of taking charge of, and rearranging a past she's been planted with. Those "snows of a thousand years" recall Jung's idea of archetypes or community memories which surface occasionally, if only in dreams, to influence current events. Breaking up her memories is an act of subversion and even an indulgence in a kind of pleasurable fantasy, she acknowledges memories as events, things of substance which affect her 'real' life. Readers too are forced to acknowledge the significance of apparently fictional experiences in the creation of real-life experience. Our mock-reading strategy is our answer to Rosa's act of breaking down her past. Her reading and ours have the quality of releasing us from under the weight of an author/ity we've inherited and so must carry painfully in "ordinary life". In fact we're forever met by uncanny similarities in experiences as we are here in the return of our detecting selves

who pursue the origin of a narrator we're suspicious of. Is she/he surveillance, one of the faithful, or even another Rosa? We must assume that like the other tiresome memories with which she's been landed, that Rosa will break him/her down into shreds or traces. The proof that this is in fact what she has done is to be found in the scattered and dissected quality of his/her narrative and knowledge. That narrator knows bits and pieces as gleaned from the many different sources in the story, including us readers. He/she is a mixed bag of every event, memory, voice and interpretation of the text. In fact this is what every reader and narrator is, an intersubjectively moving element of a dynamic community of meaning.

Had I succeeded in naming the narrator I would have proceeded to round off and enclose the sign "Rosa" too, which is sandwiched between us and the narrator. But Rosa "knows that about" the reader, as she makes clear when she says "You will use my words to make your own meaning. As people pick up letters from a stack between them" (B.D. p.171). Her dealings with biographers and researchers leave her with an insight that incites her to sustain a certain undefinability which inevitably affects our reading. Like the third person narrator, our information comes from many different and scattered sources, though we bank on having a more advantaged perspective than any other textual participant. We believe that we are privileged in that only we manage to see all the other narrative entries. As the text unfurls, we become less sure of our own apparent, relative omniscience. We read on to find that Rosa does to

us what the text has done to that seemingly informed third person speaker. She smashes our illusions in a way that opens us up to newer insights into the world of interpretation.

Another event of consequence emerges in part 2, foregrounding a kind of process in Rosa's move from the doll's house cottage to the doll's room in Madame Bagnelli's house. Growth is coded in these selected places and occasions, and again memories are being broken down to release latent meaning. Katya has prepared something that must surely reflect her own impressions of what is required by a young woman. The room was arranged for "A girl, a creature whose sense of existence would be in her nose buried in flowers, peach juice running down her chin". We ask ourselves why Rosa ventured off to such a woman in search of her 'other self' (B.D. p.229). A few pages later Rosa says "Lionel Burger's first wife. You are not to be found in Madame Bagnelli, their Katya" (B.D. p.235), something Rosa must have suspected all her life. Collette defected after all from the world of her father. The 'other' Rosa then must have held some "doll's room" aspirations, however reluctant she is to admit it. She seems to think that merely commenting upon, and ridiculing that 'flowered' scene makes it politically sound for her to enter in. How often has the reader participated in an intriguing textual drama under an illusory guarded objectivity. We, by now, know that we, in a manner become "what we think and imagine", and we suspect that much of our reading defensiveness is no more than a decoy for some latent and repressed desires which promise to be satisfied by a given plot. Our reasons for entering a reading are as informative as

our readings themselves. Indeed Rosa may have been searching for this unfamiliar role, as is suggested when we're told that "Rosa Burger entered going forward into possession by that image" (B.D. p.229), the image of the pleasure-seeking "young girl". Many times in this second 'part' we are reminded of the existence of two Katyas, one person encompassing an earlier revolutionary identity and a current, contradictory version. In this sense Collette/Katya carries the weight of a contradiction which is ongoing in Rosa, as if the heroine projects that divided condition onto the "first wife", all the better to see it.

Rosa herself is sandwiched between a love for her father, with his political background, and a desire to release herself from his grip. That desire inevitably leads to an act of subversion, however unconscious on her part. Her evasion of confrontation, as suggested by her refusal to treat Lionel, herself or the reader as oppositional objects, indicates contradiction and turmoil experienced at a more fundamental level. She tells Katya that she "wanted to know how to defect from him" (B.D. p.264), and she adapts a Katya-type role in order to both indulge her desires and to side-step the law of the father. She doesn't confront his memory directly, but negotiates with it in a roundabout way. We can't but suspect the halfhearted nature of her rebellion and we study her stay in the South of France to see just how far she'll take this proposed defection. She shifts abruptly from a companionable affection for Katya to voice some harsh criticism of her, "You deceived him because you were not of his calibre; it is your revenge for being lesser poor girl" (B.D.

p.263). These harsh words ring hollow coming from someone seeking advice as to how to defect, and we're reminded that Rosa addresses two Katyas in one, when it becomes increasingly clear that Rosa is addressing herself. In 'their Katya" of the South of France, Rosa confronts the desiring 'stranger to herself", which she seems about to reabsorb into the original Rosa. The holidays are about to end, and it looks like she will take her escapade no further. It is in this harsh treatment of Katya that we first see Rosa address herself as an object of herself', and it is the nearest thing to violence we sense from her. The contradictions Rosa has had to shoulder have finally forced her back into an oppositional relationship to her world. The attempt to give play to desire has brought contradiction with it in the form of increased self disdain. Her anger towards Katya is, we feel, really directed towards herself. The 'flowered', dolled up dosage of pleasure experienced 'on holiday" conflicts with her original identity to the point where she is sickened by it. Once again, we're reminded of Jill's act of expulsion in Braided Lives when we see Rosa expell the might have been other, as Jill expelled the might have been child. We see that difficulties for women of ever materialising alternative or newly imagined worlds, a point we must analyse further.

The act of expelling the mother figure also codes a kind of birth, and we can assume that Rosa has taken a choice in relation to her identity. In part three, we see that her link to Lionel is, very appropriately, without context. She is far away from "that house", her South African home, and the sign Lionel is isolated in the

nothingness of death. The semantic connotations that home will have held in her memory are dissolved in order to unleash her other self. She says "I'm told even people who have strong religious beliefs sometimes have the experience of being strongly aware of the dead person. An absence fills again - that sums...It has never happened to me, with you; perhaps one needs to be in the close surroundings where one expects to find that person" (B.D. p.328). Rosa left home in order to create an absence from his surroundings and his memory, and she doesn't want that 'absence' filled for her. Her travels are about absence, and the space it creates allows her to exist beyond the taboos and restrictions of herself as institution. Though she doesn't carry her holiday fantasy very far, the short gap or space gained allows her a glimpse at the "stranger to herself". In that space, she sees that she can rearrange and then re-collect her memories and her history so that she does, in fact, get a glimpse which allows her to break the narrator, the reader, and her father down into manageable elements which she can recreate to her own desires. She says to Lionel that "when people are dead, one imputes omnipotence to them", as if stating the nonsense of that habit. Having stripped him of context, and scattered his memory, she shows a newly developed ability to meet him on a basis of equality, as illustrated in her direct and "open" address to him towards the end. It's as if she has enlisted him also in her rewritten version of "ordinary life". Like the "real" readers of these chapters her interpretative approach has changed, but like us also, she has not yet sprung the alternative we've all along pined for.

Her dealings with Baasie may throw some light on this dilemma, and are of particular relevance to the reader of this dissertation. She tells us that she "automatically, not thinking" (B.D. p.329), went up to Baasie, in the subjective way many readers and writers approach the object of attention. We've seen our own subjectivity often enough, but haven't some of those texts we've read, likewise, come 'up to' us "not thinking"? Forgetting that Baasie wasn't involved in the fictional phase she played out in the South of France, she expected him to take her seriously. She got so involved in the act of writing out her "stranger" side that she lost her original awareness of that mock audience we spoke of earlier. She forgot about the "reader's response" just as many traditional texts ignore readership. She's been infected with the kind of authorial introversion we readers have laboured under for chapters now. Forgetting the wider community of interpretation, she falls back into the subject/object relationship to otherness she had tried to avoid. She walked into the scenario awaiting them in the history books, Baasie angry and she guilty, mirroring women's dilemma and fate in their attempt to materialise a desired alternative. Rosa was right in her original notion that 'something connecting mind to discourse' has prevented her from knowing her 'other' self, the desiring Rosa. Current structures of meaning lock us into inevitable contradiction, because opposition or the battle for supremacy is what's foregrounded as most meaningful. To clarify, let's look at our experience in the last chapter of this dissertation. Having read of Mary's plight and end in The Grass is Singing, we found ourselves build an unconscious wall between that heroine and ourselves. In her preoccupation with illustrating effectively Mary's deranged and

deviant disposition, Lessing lost sight of how readers would respond to them. We, in fact, distanced ourselves from Mary Turner, seeing her as an exceptional, fictional character with whom we shared little. It took another reading and another Lessing text to create the necessary change in us readers so that we could see a common ground between Lessing's first heroine and ourselves. Having seen the deviant, deranged "shadow" in ourselves, we knew that "every one of us anywhere is what we think and imagine". It was only when we saw that shadow immediately located in us that our sense of the fictional became an awareness of our unconscious selves, the quiet area illustrated by Le Guin. Our changing expectations were disappointed in The Grass is Singing which failed to enrol the reader's total confidence. We sustained barriers around our unconscious selves, and used earlier texts to expell and release certain desires and curiosities. We're only recently starting to pass through some long standing barriers in our interpreting selves. Reading our responses has allowed us to open up the subject/object relationship between text and reader, thereby unleashing repressed creativity and dynamism.

Rosa's experiment with the displacement of the object in herself reflects a desire, like our own, to reach a reading alternative. We noticed the inherent contradiction between her apparent dynamic initiative and her presuppositions regarding the location of her "stranger" self. On the last page we see that Katya is unable to decipher what Rosa had said before the censor's interruption, and this perspective on a reader's difficulty throws light on our own

situation. We have ideas of our own about what Rosa tries to communicate, and we're again enticed to get in there and apply our writerly skills in the light of what seems to be every other textual participant's inferior analytical skill. The reference to the "portable desk" like Poliakoff's one, takes us back to Katya's 'performance', her famous party piece, "Need a bloody code expert to unhook his G's and E's - a wire cutter..." (B.D. p.236). We start to wonder if Rosa is telling her to "just make up a sentence...to fill it in", as she did for Poliakoff. We recognise the "reference to a water-mark of light that came into the cell at sundown...; something Lionel Burger once mentioned". Addressing Conrad, Rosa says "even in his cell, only the coloured reflection of some sunsets..." (B.D. p.64) "We wonder if the censor 'deleted' this reference that is supposed missing because it could have given the location of Rosa's cell, and the information that she would always be in it at sundown. We wonder a lot about this obvious challenge offered by the narrator who tells us that "Madame Bagnelli was never able to make it out", and we assume neither was the narrator. The suggestion is, that with the information provided us, that we should. Throughout the text we've somehow challenged this speaker in a search for intuitive authority, and we set out a possible scenario where we have Rosa request "wire-cutters" and help, in the operation of an escape. However, we know that Rosa has more sophisticated ways of transmitting information, as when she used Christmas cards to tell who her contacts were inside the jail. With her experience it's unlikely that a censor would be allowed to know or suspect her intentions. The narrator lets us know the extent of his/her

knowledge of events saying "she told no one, no one, how she occupied her time, between the meeting with old associates at the rally or party and her return" (B.D. p.356). This omniscient voice looks increasingly like that of "surveillance", and we wonder if he/she knows what Rosa is really up to. Even in her internal discourse Rosa neglects to tell that information. Traditional omniscience is replaced by current "surveillance" which seems to read "right" into the silent unconscious. The shock encounter with this new perspective on the narrator's level of involvement, displaces him/her from the simple placement we've allocated to this unknown voice.

A certain paranoia sets in here as we wonder just how much this seemingly ill-informed narrator really knows, and if he/she has been seeing all we saw, even our own responses throughout. The illogicality of it all slightly crazes us, until we recall the difference stated earlier between Rosa's talking to someone in her mind, and her knowing she does so. Tomkins tells us that David Bleach believes that "An observer is a subject", as born out in the author's and Rosa's interpretation of self as 'subject of a subject'. She tells us also that, for Pierce, the self is a sign, accessible as everything else is, via the community of signs. We read that "for Pierce the self is a sign - it is itself 'external', like all signs, and it "must address itself to some other, must determine some other, since that is the essence of the sign" (Reader Response Criticism p.194). Like Rosa, the reader's self is a text of signs, the release of which is coded in Burger's Daughter . What our question regarding the awareness of the narrator draws to our attention is a link that exists between

he/she and us. How does Rosa get her information across to us if she neither tells nor writes it down? How does the narrator come to know what Rosa doesn't tell aloud unless she/he has access either to our minds or to hers? Recalling the moment Rosa started to direct her discourse to Conrad, that other image of herself, we remember that to have been the moment when we learned that she addresses people in her mind. Becoming conscious of that process broke the gap between subject and object in herself. Likewise, our confrontation with the villain in ourselves as introduced to us by Lusik, laid a bridge between us and the preceding chapter so that we could reach over and touch a reality in those deranged heroines which we'd formerly not recognised. There was no longer any hope, however convenient, of sustaining an illusion that on one side stood an object of interpretation and on the other, the interpreting subject. So Rosa, for some time, negotiated everything of which she was conscious, as subjects, even herself which she recognised, however unconsciously, as a product of interpretation. She, somehow, sensed that her own identity and meaning was created and processed via language. Tompkins tells us that Pierce's idea was that, not only is reading constitutive but that readers "have themselves been constituted" (Reader Response Criticism p. 200).

In Villette we observed the repressing, as well as the repressed quality of the unconscious. Similarly in this novel, we see how contradiction breeds contradiction. When faced with conflict at a personal level, Rosa reverts to the subject/object pattern of interpretation. The turmoil and chaos she experienced when trying

to unleash her repressed desires caused her to hide behind an interpretative battleground where contradictory values struggled for dominance. In so doing, she forfeited an opportunity to rebel in a way that would have secured her freedom. She settles for a fleeting glimpse at and indulgence of, her desires, expelling them onto Katya when a burden of guilt and contradiction grows too strong. She doesn't reach for a freedom which would take her across the lines of transgression on a permanent basis, and rustles up an antagonistic battle with Katya until the latter, as object, carries the weight of desire and dissidence Rosa couldn't herself shoulder. Certain scenarios, societies and even just simply texts, cultivate this kind of oppositional and conflicting habit of relating, as we've observed of traditional texts which marginalise the reader in order to foreground the subject/object relationship between text and reader. We saw that the earlier of the Lessing texts cultivated the creation of distance between us and some pretty unattractive insights into ourselves. That binarily constructed method of negotiating meaning allows us to hide from the truth and even facilitates language's own potential as liar.

Finally we come to see that postcard, pamphlet, letter, news report, biographies, author, mock-author, narrators and readers are all inter-subjectively linked. They are all constituted and constituting, courtesy of an ongoing, dynamic process of meaning we understand all the more clearly when juxtaposed against an opposing, oppositional constructed version. Rosa seems to spill out of the "Black" struggle, into a wider definition of 'ordinary life' and

suffering. We've studied how she noted and tackled the problem of seeing the stranger in herself, in order to be free. It's impossible not to see the contradiction evident in her negotiation with desire and not connect it with her position as white, middle class woman who has inherited a role as would be revolutionary. Our own readings have shown us how all too easy it is to hide behind the contradictions and illusions of separateness cultivated by that middle class and conservative tradition of binary thought. Rosa addresses the reader, as she does all other elements of the community of signs, so that we too address her. She is as much the reader of the text, as we are Rosa. In fact she could stand as a symbol of myself, a reader who, throughout this dissertation, has asserted a strong idea that language had, for some time, contradicted the process of meaning making. I was able to hide behind an attitude of superiority towards the heroic objects of earlier texts in order to distance myself from the deranged and deviant features of my own life. Like Rosa, I was haunted by a sense that there is something wrong. What Rosa and I assert from a common reading perspective in Burger's Daughter , is that some of those well-wishing authors of "women's' literature" miscalculate the value of their productions. A consideration of the reception their work will get would necessarily change both the content and presentation of literature. The mere recollection of the reader's presence "in" the work would automatically subvert the subject/object structure of the reader/text relationship. The text could provide a breach in its frontier to allow for the reader's entry onto the dramatic stage/page, and in so designing space for us, the author would participate equally as reader of an

ongoing drama written jointly with us.

PASSING THROUGH BOUNDARIES : part 3

Reading out with the Woman on The Edge of Time

Marge Piercy

In this dissertation nothing is located exactly where one would expect to find it. Even my conclusions aren't housed in any predictable place like the annexe of the thesis, but have been incorporated in the ongoing reading process. As inter-textual readers, we've referred back regularly to lessons learned from previous textual observations, thereby carrying a reading history along into our ceaseless act of interpretation. My reading of reading or understanding of understanding as a dynamic and incessant process performed in all directions, inclined me towards an active inclusion of my own reader in these chapters. I've attempted to incorporate my readers in a kind of meta-textual dramatisation of a wider fictional work, that is, this dissertation. I aimed to enlist the readers of these chapters in a pretend game of our own, creating, with you, a specific text in and around other texts. I cannot write this 'meta-text' without your participation, any more than you can extend or correct it without my initial involvement. You and I read/write in the many ghosted stories and silences left within and surrounding those novels I've selected. If you reject my invitation to travel the paved fictional journey along which I've placed selected textual occurrences, then my attempt to activate or dramatise some theoretical notions will have failed. I either succeed or fail to create the textual or environmental conditions which allow you to change in the manner required for my work to secure the reading it craves.

As we noticed in The Grass is Singing the negotiation of otherness is directly relevant to the long debated issues of space and invisibility, and is again vital to the point I'm trying to make in this thesis. To more effectively express my ideas, I've incorporated my readers in a way that will, hopefully, allow you to experience the concepts first hand. To discourage you from enclosing my arguments in conclusions of a fixed and stagnant kind, however correct, I've encouraged in my readers/correctors, an alternative response to otherness. When you meet the many absences in this meta-text, I hope you don't wall them and me into a rejected oppositional bloc/k of my own, because the consequence would be that you'd impose the same detached constrictions around an image of what is 'your own'. We've learned nothing if not that interpretation is too dynamic and elusive to be anyone's property. Your corrections will, hopefully, be more in the vein of that "self rectification" with which I've grappled for thousands of words. There are many "different" words in and around all of those, if only you and I keep "an open space" for us to write them, you now, and I at another time. My words need reading, and the "window" I've opened in myself requires a similar opening in your readers. I couldn't, at one time, see Antoinette's perspective from anything but a distant and somewhat estranged objectivity, until I stumbled upon the 'other' in myself, as personified by Lusik. My writing, if anything should convince of, and assert, the presence of reader in writer, and vice-versa. You and I have equal roles to play in the dramatisation of responses to these 'heroines', however at variance our gender, response and performance might prove. While these, again displaced, 'last words' are genuinely not a plea for tolerance towards what is amateur enough 'stuff', the final reading

compels compassion, and indeed might be the story of 'you or I' and our long gestation until the final delivery from old interpretative habits to new, when our reading contractions cease, and we're 'annealed' into an alternative.

While Rosa's relatively autonomous identity was born out of her expulsion of the mother figure Katya, our birth/growth is of a different quality in this Piercy text. As we incessantly expel outdated notions about illness, intelligence, or even violence, we constantly expell something of ourselves, as if contracting ourselves into birth without dependence upon any single detached m/other. Our needs are seen here to be met by many different 'familial' ties and roles. In fact we ourselves seem to initially occupy a parental role when we intermittently believe ourselves to be superior to both the narrator and nervous Connie. We're reminded of the 'distance' we created between ourselves and 'other deranged and debilitated heroines, and we "catch" a glimpse of the very distancing quality of omniscience itself. A simple interception in our reading wavelength forms a dint through which we make contact with what we formerly held in invincible awe. We no sooner assume it's a crazy woman we're being introduced to, than Dolly crosses our current to confirm that she too heard voices, noticing that the 'seat was warm', though Connie had apparently been alone. The determination with which we pursue the omniscient file on Connie's peculiar experiences allows us to recognise, what is deludingly called 'omniscience in ourselves. Wide Sargasso Sea told us that nobody knows everything, and Burger's Daughter covertly exposed our resemblance to surveillance

or the know-all narrator. Our attempt to overlook Connie in our search for a more informed textual authority reminds us of our detachment from earlier deranged heroines, and it seems that what we sought then and in the initial pages of this novel, was a sort of all-distancing knowledge; a kind of grand parenthood. Our responses were those of the traditional reader/writer until Lusik provoked a more intense research of the reader as subject of a subject when, with Rosa, we applied ourselves to an inquiry into the source of self.

The contradictory conservatism we traced in Rosa is equally traceable in ourselves, and we left that reading with no more than an idea of what it would be to live the alternative we aspire towards. Distressingly we note a surviving traditionalism in our initial response to Connie when we overlook her in search of some invisible and absent power. The omniscience we pursue can only create yet more distance and absence, as our readings to date have shown us. Having merely concluded that we're both writer and reader hasn't delivered us into the revolutionised identity we dream of, and in fact there is something in that dual role that somewhat confuses us. How can we be both creating writers and created readers, "child", "parent" and even grandparent in a textual relationship? In her book Reading Woman Jacobus discusses on Kristeva's observations on paintings of madonnas holding children from whom they look away, as if at some unseen object. She quotes Kristeva's reference to m/otherness "that simultaneously dual and alien space" (Reading Woman p.148), reminding us of our own dual relationship to the

reading/writing act of creativity.

Kristeva's madonnas recall for us Dawn's apparent "looking away" from Connie, as if the child were the mother, and our own overlooking of the heroine, as if we too were mothers. Lessing similarly distanced herself from Mary in The Grass is Singing, implying that in order to create at all, women, readers and the oppressed must apply whatever means are at our disposal to make space for ourselves. By so doing, we sustain a competitive system which has marginalised us from the start. It costs to write or read, and as we've seen in The Grass is Singing , texts or systems which deny us space, entice us towards a ruthless quest for room. Likewise Jill overlooked her child, Rosa her potential mother, and now we overlook the lot as represented by the characters in this text, in order to become the grand old man of the novel. However there is a difference in our behaviour in Woman On The Edge of Time because this Piercy novel increases a growing awareness of what we're doing. We cannot but see ourselves distinctly because as we climb over all their heads we're simultaneously scattered and distanced from every role. We're handed the room we usually fight for when we're separated from all fictional identities sufficiently for us to at last see ourselves and our reading habits in process. As we seek to overlook otherness, we're becoming an otherness ourselves, though in a different mode than the alienated version we've played out in earlier texts. The birth we're contracting in this novel is something of a composition of autonomy; we're enrolled in a process where we're incubating our own birth as a 'different' independent

identity. The gradual indentations these readings have applied, have ultimately breached a window in ourselves which allows us a clear view of even the ongoing process by which we function. It's as if we see directly into an unconscious self, as even our infantile quest for control becomes to us, clearly just that. We even see how, in this text, that drive towards omniscience is used by a different kind of guiding council to bring us to where we are now, that is, to a position from where we can clearly see how we might be born into that once mythical 'alternative'. We'll discover that this unfamiliar kind of counsellor is the 'fairy godmother' of an alternative world who we come to energetically 'realise' in order to elude the equally present demonic ancestor of the society we've long wished to subvert. In effect, not only does Mattapoisett show us how to be born, but we gradually build or materialise what initially appeared as no more than a Utopian ideal.

A direct encounter with the experience of mothering or creativity is what finally displaces our old habits of expulsion, rejection, projection and defensiveness. We are no longer merely the potential child of the text struggling against an aborting or ejecting system. The breach occurs in us as we move forward into an external womb or growing space where our conception is visibly enacted before our eyes, in our social circumstances. We are products or creations of our surrounding worlds where a long gestation culminates in the ultimate birth of what we come to know as our psyches. What is different in our stance as produce of the particular society of Mattapoisett is that its system allows us to be 'parents' or authorities

in our self determination. The gap or breach occurs as in any occasion of birth, but is processed from a different direction. In order for us to even perceive that we create our own identities out of the fluidity, space and movement of an external or social womb, it follows that we're looking at ourselves from a very new, alternative angle. We've stumbled upon a window in ourselves, but unlike the ill-fated/used Antoinette, we look from a more open and free house. Looking from 'the edge' is to look from what was promised in 'the interruption' to be an open-doored venue and, at last, what was once no more than a dream or haunting archetype, starts to take shape.

This self 'mothering' or self creation is projected onto the text for our observation as we see how our overlooking of Connie implies our mothering relation to her. In fact Connie is sandwiched between two mothers throughout, Donna and the reader, neither of whom offer her a smooth delivery into the final birth she enacts. We presume therefore, and rightly, that she will have found an alternative mode of reaching an active identity which we share with her by the end. A kind of re-birth is involved, one which obviously occurs to us too in our gradual change throughout this meta-textual reading journey. This re-birth was the painful experience we've been resisting for many chapters now, with us becoming increasingly defensive as the window widened on our darker, 'shadow' selves. Like Connie who, looked through the 'viewing port' of a gestation 'tank', the compassionate impact of Mattapoisett finally allows us "to look at any younger...babies" (Women On The Edge of Time p.104). A room full of floating embryos causes Connie to 'lurch' at the shock of being

confronted with the long covered shadow side of herself. It's as if her womb were projected before her and her entire conception and development made transparent. Her own mother, and her own mothering powers are no longer a solid attachment to her identity and with the dissolution of that old illusion comes the deconstruction of omniscience itself. What I ironically term the "fairy" "God" "mother" transpires to be no "(m)/other" than the surrounding world, and with the forfeiture of that omniscient grand parenthood, goes the alienating distance usually involved in our acts of creation. We saw in The Grass is Singing how we can apply that same distancing as directed towards the deviant, deranged or strange heroines, to ourselves when we keep our otherness at a safe or invisible distance from us. Without her mothering or child role Connie had only her own otherness or autonomous identity to look at. Seeing the floating embryos in the tank brought home not only her difference from the mother role, but also her existence as something other than a mothered product. While Connie, like the reading/writing textual audience holds both positions, the binary, and usually opposed pairing is breached to incorporate the existence of an 'other', that is Connie's self. Not long ago in this dissertation we too reached the point when we were compelled to search for the 'subject' of ourselves. The confrontation with Lusik threw the outwards, text directed analysis inwards. Seeing such an "otherness" in ourselves, we tried to find a source for it, again the all knowing omniscient voice in us trying to talk to ourselves "in my mind" as Rosa put it. What Rosa finally did was to enclose the source of her "stranger self" in the binary relationship of mother and child. She

ejected the mother, as Jill aborted the child. Woman On The Edge of Time subverts that trend when we're stripped of mother and child, start and end, with the distancing parental omniscience involved. Looking for omniscience is no different than searching for the silence and space of pre-oedipal ignorance. Connie was faced with the prospect of not being able to mother her way to self esteem, or of hiding behind the inculpable naivety of the victim role. The distance we and those familiar heroines maintained between ourselves and our 'other' selves is dissolved for a protracted period in this novel, though we've had fleeting visions of this kind of consciousness in Wide Sargasso Sea and 'The Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five'. Rhys visioned it for us through the gap in her novel, but Lessing and Piercy seem to have undergone a re-birth, however temporary, of the kind Connie enacted.

The 'growing pains' experienced in the Al.Ith role taunt us again in this reading until increased understanding of what it is to grow relaxes tension, and makes the contractions less severe. Our changing choice of reading roles, paralleled with our recognition of the motivation behind those selections, causes us to be aware of an overlapping procreation of difference. Our responses show us to ourselves in the process of expelling old norms, while simultaneously providing the space from where we can observe that growth in an authoritative or 'motherly' way, while equally facilitating growing or creative room. Interpretation doesn't stem from any detached 'mother' or 'objective' authority. We can read this novel as if it were part of ourselves, and it allows us similar autonomy to 'do what

readers do', that is open ourselves to other experiences as if they were our own. Reading Woman On The Edge of Time involves constantly forfeiting one stance for another to such an energetic and blatant extent that an other I/eye cannot but see why. A dialectical process is visible where what was once deemed the spirit-like eye of omniscience materialises as something no more awesome than ourselves. The long honoured, all-knowing phenomenon was nothing but a product of repressed awareness. Hiding our otherness from ourselves deluded us into believing that this other presence we sensed could only be addressed by an infallible and superior 'other' knowledge. We were persuaded that self knowledge, self determination and the creation of our own lives were impossibilities. The parental voice is of major importance in this novel, if only in relation to our sense of being talked down to. I believe it is part of Piercy's intention to impose this agitating experience of being dwarfed, directly on the reader. It is not enough to expose us to a heroine's oppression, as we've learned from other readings, since we astutely distance ourselves from that kind of turmoil. Though this novel doesn't effect that kind of distance upon us, we've noted already how, like Connie, we're growing into separate or different autonomous identities. We're not Connie, and she's not any single child or parent; she is Connie. We are readers and for us too to 'lurch' at what is exposed to us in Woman On The Edge of Time., we must be dealt such confrontations directly. The guiding counsel we spoke of seems to use both child and parent in us to create and give birth to us. We acquire one skill or measure of confidence only to be humiliated like some naive child. We think we know the "myth

that a revolution was inevitable" until suddenly Connie and we are slapped back to the present by Nurse Wright and told that "It's time to get in line for your supper". Our reaction is to feel ourselves to be at the mercy of a narrator who perceives us as nothing more than pathetic ancestors who function as part of a case-history in a study of primitive humanity. The old alienation, the very one that caused us to crave space for the 'alternative reader' again appears, causing us to either suspect the narrator of treating us as objects, or to fall into our old habit of assigning omniscience. The many shifts instigated by that guiding council, or alternative 'system' are designed to make of us "alternative readers". We're moved in and out of child and parent roles until finally our entire growth and birth is performed before us in a way that makes authoritative beings of us. Our gestation period is projected before us so that we're alongside that process, looking at ourselves through the window of that "tank" society. Our world too comes to be seen as part of us.

The be'littling' feature of this text intermittently flings us back into our old position as children of high realism, reminding us of the conceived alternative reader in us, as yet unborn. We're "mothering" that reader in the social "tank", just as we're being parented by an, as yet unknown future. The window scene in Wide Sargasso Sea symbolises our position as divided subject, with something of ourselves ghosted away from us. In Woman On The Edge of Time we're offered a chance to stay with the 'otherness' momentarily encountered in The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five ,

though we're inclined to flinch at the prospect of allowing a society as unfamiliar as Mattapoisett to incubate us in its womb. Yet we guess that like Antoinette, Connie is pursued by death and yet faced with the threat of miscarriage in her impending re-birth. Antoinette's imminent choice at the end of the book would have led to her death, just as Connie's will have. This fear of re-birth causes us to focus on our delivery all the more, allowing us to share the mother or writer's obsessive concern for the growing subject, and the child's own instinct for survival. While we are both child and parent, there is this other I/eye observing it all, as if 'otherness' were an infinite thing. It seems that each observation or experience creates this otherness or difference and an ongoing re-birth is going on where, at the interpretation of each new sentence, more is born from our unconscious. The next word read marks the 'arrival' of more otherness, not merely on the syntactical level, but on the silent reading site. Words create more words, ideas more ideas, as I suggested earlier when I invited my reader to add to these chapters of "self rectification". Difference or otherness comes to be seen in this novel as birth and growth. Language is the amniotic stream in which meaning floats, contradicting regularly into other differences. 'Woman On The Edge of Time' slowly builds up those "muscles of the mind" needed in order for us breach the institutional walls of language in order to take its creative potential into our own hands.

This deconstruction of the processing of otherness and meaning is another milestone in the re-birth we enact in this text, and on page 181 we find that the habits cultivated in us by the traditional

approach to meaning let us down badly in Piercy's hypothetical future. Our tolerance for myth and formal constructs like poetry as founts of selective insight, is another utensil used by the 'guiding counsel' to carry us through to the alternative finally reached. Only a vision of a fairy Godmother society like Mattapoisett could facilitate our arrival at a new field of growth. But that very utsensil is one we soon denounce as we come to see that we've tended to vision the invisible through the eyes of omniscient aesthetic voices. In a sense, rather than sharing unfamiliar reading experiences as if they were 'really' our own, we've tended to use fiction, poetry and literature generally in order to place a distancing omniscience where the unseen of ourselves should be exposed. Response reading has helped break down that distance though we've found that texts which did not leave space for readers installed that distance despite us. The texts' structures and discourse alienated us, however unconsciously on the authors' part. Forgetting what impact our reading would have on the birth of the work, those novels like The Grass is Singing only sustained walls and invisibility. The dialectical structures of existence so ably depicted by Woman On The Edge of Time , are presented in symbolic and poetic terms when we read of "the tree became a human couple embracing. Finally they passed in and through each other" (W.O.T. p.181). We might have moved directly into the reading role these lines encourage but for our awareness of a kind of insular vanity being cultivated in us. Our response to this aura of aesthetic omniscience stems from the expectation of a more flattering role, and we see how easily tempted we are. The narrator seems to reveal our

error and flaw and we start to trust 'per' for the first time. We've been clearly confronted by the bigot in ourselves, the stuff of the oppressor in The Grass is Singing , where we saw ourselves usurp Tony's narrative space. The more we learn, the more we fear the oppressor role, and wish to scapegoat the mother or authoritative voice. Yet we crave that mother role, equating it with the source of 'the subject'. Our curiosity about the invisible, omniscient and the self is what has brought us to this stage of our reading journey, yet each of these elements take on very changed aspects as we learn more about them. By the time we reach the Piercy text the entire 'society' or system these factors make up has changed. I've used the promised notion of an "alternative" to carry my reader along, and what I'm gradually revealing to my reader is that even that concept too will have to change. We aren't looking for "alternative" selves, but simply for ourselves. Woman On The Edge of Time takes us through the birth of that autonomous self but not as an alternative to everything else, but as an inter-dependent element of our surrounding world. Connie is mother, child and her self.

As is so often the case in these novels, the dramatic content extends itself to the reading level, since text and reader work in whatever system the novel foregrounds. We're either enclosed, 'opened' or brought to reject a text. In this novel it's as if we're Connie's child which the 'demonic ancestor' society has taken away from her. As a consequence the usual explusion-rejection habit is subverted, and even reversed. To find the subject of ourselves we pursue, rather than eject the mother; and Connie, the other mother aims her

desiring glance at us her lost children. We are the unseen objects of her gaze, omniscience brought home. The space she attends to is where her creative act of giving birth has been undermined, so she is constantly pursuing us too, seeking to re-create us. Connie is an extension of what, for want of familiarity I've called the "guiding counsel" but can now simply and confidently call society. She is being born into a new society and she leads us along with her.

We've already rejected three mock reading roles, but not before experiencing the accumulated tension, scepticism and pain involved. Not only have we become conscious of ourselves as mother and child of Connie's mind at once, but we're aware also of a strong growth and maturing trend in that (m)other reader outside the text. This "outside" voice observes its own birth and delivery as if through the "tank" of the reader's unconscious which is being released into the work by our responses. The "real" reader mirrors in its progress, the development of the response reader in us, and our consciousness and unconsciousness gradually join the 'hands' still separated in the Le Guin text. That external parental voice, the real reader, is yet another subject continually emerging and giving birth to itself in the contracting process enacted by our mock readers. The mock and real readers go through a laborious struggle to grow, each being born and each 'mothering' the other. Who, we wonder, is 'the' mother of the reading subject? We recall that Connie had more than one mother in Dawn and the reader and we read that in Mattapoisett "Every child has three" (W.O.T. p.105). Since the subjective reader is one of Connie's mothers, and yet emerging "child" reader,

the real reader too is mother and child of the text. Nowhere in this interpretative family does mothering end and birth begin. There is neither start nor finish to our subjecthood. Connie is our mother, we're her mother, and growing around my growth is yet a wider, meta-meta-text holding many alternative extensions of the reading "difference" we're incubating all along. The real reader is yet another parental figure growing and creating outside the text. But each of these 'parents' are simultaneously the growing 'child' of the textual arena. Each point on the reading stream is interdependent, and the stream runs both ways. It is sourceless and endless. As we discard one reading role, it is already replaced by another. There are no gaps in our processing of meaning, any more than there are gaps between the creative elements, mothers and children of the reading, since every element is, in part, the other. When we deconstruct the binary relations of traditional meaning, mothers/children, omniscience/naivety, villain/victims, subject and object, walls collapse and the gaps are filled with the flowing process of interpretation.

Ironically the accumulated effect of all the questioning and stress involved in our constant review of and replacement of reading roles, is not subduing as was the weight of high realism, but energising. The reading acrobatics permitted by this text have an 'opening' and enlarging effect. It's as if the process of giving birth were reversed, presenting the notion of a subject conceived outside the self, entering through an opened mind. Rosa's craved-for 'freedom from the institution of self' seems to have been granted us here as

the conceived alternative or different, other subject of the self enters and enlarges into an on-going pregnant presence in the growing subject. The many shifts and jolts applied to us in order to make us 'grow up' ultimately open a window in us through which we can deliver the formerly hidden and unconscious shadow of ourselves. Birth happens both inside and outside the mother, just as the death implied in Connie's impending re-birth is free from specific location. Birth and death happen at once in this text and both are projected before the heroine and us, as if to invite us to direct and take responsibility for them. Birth and death in Woman On The Edge of Time are not acts of expulsion but the interaction and spiralling of creative forces within and outside of each subject. The novel could be the biography of "you or I"; co-authors of these chapters. There is no split, no gap and no unitary origin. Like the embryos in Mattapoisett, we're products of a moving and dynamic matrix of meaning. The basic multiplicity of which we're moulded is strangled when we try to hold ourselves in quantifiable units. Those units count us "up" or "down" into constrained and controllable constructs, and freeing ourselves from the institution of ourselves involves letting go of our attachment to those addictive, obsessively maintained monoliths.

The very dynamic quality we share in the work overall is a product of an ongoing creativity at work in Connie's mind. It's as if the womb of creativity, like the mind is made 'trans/parent', so we readers can see through the haze of cultural influences to the act of authorship itself. The authorial parent moves closer to us until we

actually become authors of our own reading experience. Just how compulsive are our old habits of placing and counting ourselves into constructed units, is clearly foregrounded by our constant slip back into anxiety about where we are, and where we've come from. So haunted are we by a past we keep repeating, that our progress is as slow as the process of growth itself. Associating our energy and dynamism, as experienced in Woman On The Edge of Time , with a narrator we once thought to have cracked some awesome system, we follow close behind presuming the ground per has gained in advance of us will be handed back in chunks of meaning. We're still caught up in the notion of parent as authoritative voice and source of understanding. In fact the inherent death enlisted in Connie's act of re-birth suggests that the forfeiture of our 'old habits' is a kind of death itself, and the painful contractions represent a very stressful struggle between new and old identities. To be born into the compassionate world of Mattapoisett seems like death to us, because the compulsive attempt to control ourselves as countable constructs was what kept us alive. We were the produce of a quantity orientated and constrained demonic ancestor . Connie is told that "part of women's long revolution" involved giving up "the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone" (W.O.T. p.105). In order to freely hold autonomy over ourselves we must give up that self control we've grasped since the 'opening' of this dissertation. From Villette until now, the most potent impact upon our reading lives has been our obsessive pursuit of control. We've read in an institution that compelled that kind of compulsion, but as we've seen in Le Guin's text, this compulsion is killing. Letting go

of those old habits is killing also, but promises the birth of difference. As Connie says at the end of the text, "For Skip, for Alice for Tina...for you who will be born from my best hopes..." (W.O.T. p.375). This text and the alternative world of Mattapoisett allows us to create difference. Difference is the basic quality of meaning and creativity. What we created in our old system was an antidote to creativity, in that repetition incited by compulsive drives for control forbade the enactment of difference.

The double quality of Connie's and our own existence is mirrored by the text which in itself is a double. We are of both worlds and if the heroine is sick, we've shown some of the symptoms too. Yet her lot is a particularly unattractive one as we see again abruptly in the hospital wing. Connie "did not return exhausted" (W.O.T. p.194) from her travels to and fro between Mattapoisett and the ward, and when we switch back to the present with her, it seems like a displacement. Mattapoisett becomes more attractive and probable. She "cast an invitation to Luciente" and consequently to that narrator who seemed to treat us like children. We're dependent upon that 'parental' voice, as upon the space existing between per and us. But this reliance becomes more of an inter-dependence as we start to trust per. If we depend upon/per, then per relies on us too, reaching us and Connie out of necessity. As if our minds too "have developed muscles", we transform into a fourth reading role, yet another point in our pre-birth development. Again we fall back into our old habits relating to what is pleasureable and flattering. Once more our infatuation with omniscience is used to bring us closer to

that alternative we pursue. Two systems work hand in hand in Woman On The Edge of Time and the counsel of the 'future' world uses our more primitive obsessions to move us into the new. Barbarossa, our child of the future, is a parent to us in his advice "the holi should have related the freed and waste to the political and economics system" (W.O.T. p.197). We hang onto this 'teacher's' every word until it strikes us that he's suspiciously like that narratee, the narrator's right hand per whose presence we sensed and pursued in our desire to know everything. Barbarossa's discourse is about scrapping all traditional panaceas like omniscience, God and original sin. He tells us that "the powerful don't make revolutions", exposing the folly of our ways. No sooner has a specific response been extracted from us, than we're shown the conservatism inherent in it. We're aggravated by this constant exposure of how controllable and predictable we are. Yet we see that we've somehow changed our family circle; we're looking back at ourselves as if from the future. We're breaking out of dependence upon unitary, countable divisions of ourselves.

To gather up all the mother-child relationships we've made between 'here' and Mattapoisett, would involve squashing them all under one label, distancing them from the there of the alternative world. They are everywhere, and we with them, moving and flowing between the every(w)here of reality. Connie's exile and deprivation of the right of motherhood is caused by that demonic ancestor society which is seen to be the repressing or stunting parent of our experiences. Instead of enlarging the womb or creative space of the subject, the

society or institutions we've read in, seems to shrink that space so that we must struggle in order to resist being aborted from the process of interpretation. Habits of ejecting and expelling have been cultivated in us from birth, with the ultimate consequence of our involuntary sustenance of an oppressive system. Our lives are lived as effects of imprisonment. As Luciente says "All are effects" (W.O.T. p.175), not just the more outstanding debilitations and ailments that dog so many 'victims' in our world. A closer encounter with the subtler of our responses to even the prison house of language, asserts the blatant fact that we're all institutionalised. Institutionalisation is about blinding the individual to the 'otherness' of their selves when we're controlled by obsessive and compulsive habits of behaviour. The rest of our selves are aborted into invisibility of one sort or another. The oppressor in all his/her omniscience is as distanced from the self as is the victim inscribed and hidden in a sub-culture of silence.

Things unnamed still exist, and can be mislabelled by reader or author in a way that convinces one of their "no-thingness". To reinforce this point, and to foregound Mattapoisett's vulnerable dependence upon us, the narrator takes us into another future of equal probability to Mattapoisett with "cost" and "richies" where "cash" replaces the familiar Geraldos of our world and Dud is another version of Dolly. The death inherent in Connie's final re-birth seems like nothing compared to the ongoing mortification involved in life as we by now know it. The last dystopia we visited with The Handmaid drew our attention also to the double experience of

invisibility and space. We saw that we could compromise ourselves and accept an equally repressive sub-culture largely because we could mould a binarily structured theory around ourselves which justified our failure to be free. By further marginalising ourselves into unreal, semi-conscious worlds, we fare no better than if we cling to the illusion of omniscience inherent in the depiction of women as madonnas or elevated Virgins.

By page 235, we like Connie, have been rocked out of our habitual assumptions, and we've "no idea of what was up and what was down". We've tossed and turned between childish acts of hero worship and patriarchal loftiness until, like most things, the family itself appears like a cultural effect. We've clung to that familial image in order to control the growing idea of multitudinous relationships. The diversity of roles we occupy at any one time in Woman On The Edge of Time subverts our best attempts at governing ourselves as single constructs. We're beyond accountability and yet very accountable by the end. It's as if all our mock-reading selves have returned to breach the barriers in that institution that is ourselves. They burst us "open", giving birth to us as much as to themselves. We are those mocking rascals teasing ourselves into a more compassionate approach to the sight of ourselves. We've delicately and nervously broached the issue of the secret self, nurturing so many embryos until the point when we're ripe for the delivery of all that otherness. By an almost osmotic process we shed the shell of our institution in order to release those long ghosted "stranger selves". These silent spirits "anneal" and harden into

reality. "Im a dead woman now too" says Connie, and it's as if that receptive ability to "catch" is forfeited as the price of her new-found ability to act autonomously. Connie doesn't live in Mattapoisett, but in the here and now of "cost" and "richies". However, her journey to that compassionate terrain allowed for the development of all that was best in her. Like the reader of any 'compassionately' open text, she found room to express her many selves formerly dissolved into silence and invisibility. She was allowed to 'do as Connie does' and we've found a way to do what readers do. We've been many selves throughout these readings, and however (science) fictional those borrowed identities, the driving force behind these thousands of words is the very reality of these heroines. Connie is everywhere, and we meet per every day. If it weren't for the Draconian reality of the prison I see her from, these chapters would never have been written. Nevertheless, I interpret from the very inside of the shrinking womb of the institution of Britain. Like all women, I am within and without, "On the Edge", from where I've been diligently scraping out a cavity, or window on freedom. From where I'm looking, you're as free as I, and you must gauge our State and correct it according to how my best attempts at self determination move you.

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Note: Abbreviations used in the text of this thesis are given in brackets after the book's title.

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