

METAMORPHOSIS AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE
FEMININE: A MOTIF OF "DIFFERENCE"
IN RECENT FEMINIST QUEST FICTION

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

First she dies. Then she loves.

I am dead. There is an abyss. The leap. That Someone takes. Then a gestation of self--in itself, atrocious. When the flesh tears, writhes, rips apart, decomposes, revives, recognizes itself as a newly born woman, there is suffering that no text is gentle or powerful enough to accompany with a song. Which is why, while she's dying--then being born--silence.

--Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing*, 36

The feminine quest has lately been identified and defined to some extent by feminist scholars who have attempted to differentiate its elements from those of the quest of the masculine hero. This differentiation suggests that there is a true archetype of the questing hero(ine) that lurks behind the mythological figures previously identified in literature by structuralist scholars. The true archetype would be one that would be equally relevant to both the male and female quest, neither a hero nor a heroine, but a figure in which the two are indistinguishable. It is true that such a figure cannot exist as long as culture so strongly identifies the nature of a human being with his sexual identification. Because roles are assigned by gender, the imagery of the male and female quests differ from one another. The part of each individual, a self, that is neither male nor female is, therefore, not acknowledged. The implication of the differentiation in roles in the images that represent archetypes is that the casting of the "type" is informed by a culture that fails to define a part of itself. The stories examined in this volume are

attempts by their authors to create an image of this part of themselves that culture has suppressed. Because language is the clay that culture uses to create its forms, these stories are invariably reflexive. These authors borrow images and patterns familiar to western culture and re-invest them with meaning pertinent to the feminine consciousness. Their stories, then, are a re-creation of the human experience. The quest heroine's return is determined by her ability to remake her world to sustain herself and those like her. It is this return that is questioned most by feminist writers and critics of this century, and that deliberation is the organizing principle of this study.

In this century, many writers have coupled the theme of female development with a quest for the discovery of the feminine "voice." This integration of quest romance and *Bildungsroman* is an effective vehicle to convey the search and discovery of the feminine self. Not only must the female writer discover her true nature, she must also create language that appropriately packages her discovery for conveyance to the rest of the world. Since the presumed associations for a feminine identity are already wrought in iron in the external world, the search for the feminine self must begin inwardly. The feminine quest narrative is self-referencing because of the necessity for self-examination, and it is reflexive because of the writer's desire to export the image she has of her own identity into the language field of her culture.

In the void of the feminine resulting from the lack of language, one hope of locating and manipulating an image of the feminine self is through archetypes. Nor Hall describes the relation of the archetypal to language: "Language evolves from the

experience of being held by our actual and archetypal mothers: myth is the original mother tongue. . . . The language we await is feminine. It is not pure logos, but mythologos, or mythological” (29). The images most commonly associated with the archetypal female in western culture reflect women’s roles inside a masculinized society. The image of Persephone is that of the forced subjugation of woman to man’s control. Zeus encouraged Hades to rape her and then enforced her marriage to Hades on the basis of a seed she ate while a prisoner in his world. Women’s compliance in such subjugation finds an image in Penelope, the patient, faithful wife to Odysseus who weaves a burial shroud. Ironically, the shroud serves as a metaphor for the quality of women’s lives under male domination, and so is just as suitable a metaphor for the quality of Penelope’s life as it is literal for her father-in-law’s death. Neither Persephone nor Penelope, however, are questing characters in the myths in which they are involved. In both the myth of Persephone and patient Penelope myth, the female is the object of masculine domination, and, as such, is not representative of the search for self that modern Feminist narratives seek to portray.

Psyche, on the other hand, is not only a female quest figure, but is transformed through her search for her soulmate. In the myth, Psyche is moved to look at her lover, Eros, whom she has only known in darkness. As she holds a lighted candle over him, he escapes her curious eyes. Nor Hall expresses Psyche’s search in the terms of woman’s intuitive sense of the existence of an “otherness,” and her desire to possess it. Hall says:

In a flash, she had seen and lost and then began her exhaustive, nearly endless search for reunion. Psyche ventured out of the unlit realm of not

knowing, an unconscious, all-embracing place, where fascination holds sway. Step by step she moved through the dark of loss. By error and by trial she came eventually face to face with her other half. She made the journey from earth to heaven, where finally welcomed by Aphrodite, she was reunited with Eros and gave birth to the child Bliss. Psyche divinized is consciousness raised. (21)

Psyche's search, as Hall points out, involves a motif that mirrors the quest of women to regain the feminine, her "self" that has been eclipsed to her awareness. The reunion with her soulmate, or *animus*, represents the completion of "herself." It is only by this fulfillment that she achieves "Bliss," the birth of the perfect creature that is the consummation of her quest. The word "psyche" means "butterfly." As her name implies, Psyche metamorphoses through a quest that takes her from being a mortal on earth to the heavens where she is reunited with Eros. Steven Shaviro describes metamorphosis as a process in which the being "is perpetually 'other than itself'" (2). In using the motif of metamorphosis as a metaphor for Psyche's search, then, the focus of the search becomes both internalized and transformational for the subject of the search. This study seeks to show that women authors of this century and in both North and South America have utilized a motif of metamorphosis expressed through images found in the natural world such as insect metamorphosis, seed plant germination, and images in nature related to the birth of a creature wholly autonomous from its immediate ancestor.

Insect metamorphosis as a motif suggesting Psyche's search has been identified by Sandra Gilbert as the organizing principle of *The Newly Born Woman*, Hélène Cixous' and Catherine Clément's monumental work on feminist theory. Gilbert says of

the work: "For an American feminist--at least for this American feminist--reading *The Newly Born Woman* is like going to sleep in one world and waking up in another . . ." (x). Gilbert's remark itself suggests metamorphosis as a metaphor for "becoming" through progressive states of awareness. The dance of the tarentella, a ritual whose description is the interpretive center of *The Newly Born Woman*, is called a "festival of metamorphosis" (20) which takes the dancer through a series of responses to the role imposed on her by society. The stages of her emancipation and her eventual return to "the men's world" (22) mimic the stages of insect metamorphosis in which the insect's productive powers are usurped for the benefit of another. For example, the reproductive and transformational functions of the silkworm are farmed by humans so that the thread it spins for its cocoon can be harvested. Like the aberration that takes place in the life cycle of the silkworm, the metamorphosis that takes place in the dance of the tarentella is contrary to Psyche's metamorphosis. The metamorphosis is curtailed before the dancer can escape from her imprisonment. Her awakening brings about the "tragic happiness" of the newly born woman, a creature who is complete in her being, but nonetheless entrapped for utilization in a man's world.

Like the dance of the tarentella in *The Newly Born Woman*, the narratives examined in this study suggest Psyche's search as an interpretive tool through a motif of metamorphosis. The motif lends meaning to the quest conventions of the narrative because of the "radical becomings" (Shaviro 2) that take place in metamorphosis. Shaviro emphasizes that through metamorphosis the body of the insect is "broken down

and completely rebuilt in the course of transmutation from the larval to the mature stage”

(2). Thus, the implication of the motif when applied to feminist quest narratives is that the questing character is totally transformed through her search, a process by which the questor undergoes a continual “becoming.” The stage in feminine awareness that corresponds to the larval stage in insect metamorphosis is prehistorical: there is no conscious imprint of the old form on the new except in the unconscious. This perpetual “becoming” places the questing character in the continuous present until prompted to search for evidence of the existence of an earlier form. This form is *ahistorical* in terms of her own memory. Therefore, the prehistorical existence of the feminine corresponds to the *larval state* in metamorphosis. The period during which change in form begins—when the questing character is unconscious that she attains her identity from her form—corresponds to the *dormant state* in metamorphosis. The questor comes to recognize such unawareness as a state of life in death, but only after she becomes aware of a change in her perception in herself. It is because the feminine has been dormant throughout the building of western culture that the questor must return to this “larval” origin to retrieve the lost consciousness of itself. The quest to discover this past requires an inner regression--the journey must take place inside the confines of her existence just as metamorphosis takes place inside the cocoon. The internal nature of the quest may explain why many women writers place the quest of Psyche within the motif of metamorphosis. By doing so, they suggest that the voice of the feminine, constituted in the story they tell, must begin with an inner quest for the feminine.

The feminine is prehistoric to memory because its existence has not been retained in language. Therefore, the language of the outer world excludes the feminine. The journey of the questor (the author and her protagonist are on a dual quest in a reflexive quest narrative) takes place within a cocoon or seedcoat of language that shuts her out of the masculine economy of the outer world. The journey is initiated by some experience that activates within the questor an instinctual call from her unconscious. The questor regresses to a time that is primal to her existence, her larval state in terms of the motif. This *regression into the unconscious* is often mirrored in the narrative by the questor's journey into a primitive setting—a “green world” environment where events cannot be explained in accordance with her previous perception of herself. The encounter between her self-concept and her primal consciousness causes her to become disoriented. The disorientation that takes place when the questor encounters her primal consciousness is *dissolution*, a final breakdown of form that must take place before the new form can be built from its remnants. This state in the questor's self concept is equivalent to the state in metamorphosis when “the butterfly is one with the caterpillar” (Shaviro 2). Through this meshing between her present and her past form, the questor, then, is able to rebuild a conceptually different self as a product of an environment unshaped by masculine-based presumptions. This reconceptualization, when complete, is equivalent to the awakening of the insect to its new form inside the cocoon-- has outgrown the cocoon that entraps her. The questor's *awakening* takes place when she comes to realize that she is no longer

compatible with the terms of her former existence--that her self-conception no longer compatible with the gender role forced upon her by society.

The metamorphosis motif defines the heroine's quest. If successful, it enables her to utilize the material of her imprisonment, language, to escape the cocoon as a mature creature able to successfully propagate her own kind. For the authors whose works are examined in this study, the narrative itself is the means of escape for the feminine from the cocoon that entraps it. Because of the reflexive nature of the narrative, the author and the questor become one. Success for the author of the feminist quest narrative entails a *Promethean theft* of images and words from the stockpile developed by the masculinized culture to propagate its own institutions. The authors of the feminist narratives under study here use words and images from the old stockpile of language generated for and by a masculinized society in a new way to re-define for the outside world their sense of the feminine. If she is successful in that re-definition, she transforms the world from a hostile environment into one that accommodates her as the complete creature--the *newly born woman*. If the author is successful in her emergence and survival in the world outside the cocoon, she attempts, through the "voice" that she has attained, to "*procreate*" others like herself. Such proliferation is through the discipleship of other writers and thinkers who promote and extend the images that she has endowed with meaning pertinent to the feminine.

An examination of the works included in this study suggests that the extent to which the metamorphosis is complete in the motif in any one narrative is a reflection of

its author's sense of empowerment. The narratives examined in this study are grouped in chapters according to the stages of metamorphosis into which the quest of the character extends. Generally, but not always, feminist writers from the early third of this century are pessimistic concerning emergence of the feminine from the cocoon of male domination. These works, under study in "Chapter II, Durable Fires," challenge the validity of the "naming" that takes place in the images of women. This challenge expresses the loss of self-conceptualization that was a product of educational opportunities for women at the end of the nineteenth century. The Gothic novel suggests that society, especially women readers and writers, was in tune to a lurking "otherness," an instinctual awareness of the presence of the feminine that contradicted the gender roles assigned to women in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century society. Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" not only attempts to define that "otherness" as repressed feminine, but suggests that patriarchal control is the basis for such repression. Stein's "Melanctha" is allegorical to her own dictum on reification, "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose." As such, "Melanctha" suggests that definition is entrapment by language. The implication of the work is that re-casting of the feminine image is dependent on an escape from the current socially constructed image. Such escape from form constitutes dissolution. It is significant that, in these narratives, the mother is present but is unavailable to the questing character. She may be hidden or dead during most of the quest, as in the Gothic novel; she may be (presumably) kept away, as in "The Yellow Wallpaper"; or she may simply be ignored, as in "Melanctha." In any case, these narratives seem to suggest that

there is no discoverable legacy through the matriarchal line that will assist the protagonist in her search. Though the questing female characters in these works awaken to a sense of "otherness" and recognize their entrapment, they fail to establish a means of permanent escape from it.

In the narratives in "Chapter III, Naming," the questors not only become aware of their entrapment, but they attempt to define their existence in it by synesthetic association. Djuna Barnes in *Nightwood* uses bird imagery to show entrapment in a role by stigmatization. She proposes escape through redefinition in the final chapter of the work. María Luisa Bombal names the feminine experience in *La última niebla* through association with the Psyche myth, but Bombal's narrator's ultimate reunion with her *animus* is foiled, leaving her aware of self but still trapped in a traditional role of womanhood. Clarice Lispector, in her collection *Family Ties*, uses animal imagery to convey the sense of primordial essence of dissolution. She then births the primordial woman in language from the associations made through the animal imagery. Helena María Viramontes in "The Moths" proposes through a combined motif of insect and seedplant metamorphosis that the feminine must be translated from ritual into words through the maternal line in order for the feminine to escape masculine appropriation of female resources. Mothers play no significant role in the questor's development in these stories. They are either absent from the story altogether, or else they align themselves with the patriarchal stance against their children. "The Moths" is the only story included in Chapter III in which there is a surrogate mother. It is significant that the matriarchal

legacy in that story is enabling to that questor, thus setting a pattern for matriarchal legacy to make a crucial difference in the story groupings in the subsequent chapters of this study. In the narratives included in this chapter, however, the author shows only a rudimentary attempt at “naming” the feminine experience. The attempt at naming in each work shows the author’s/questor’s attempt at definition—a “feeling out” of one’s form within the darkness of the cocoon—but no successful attempt at re-definition.

The three narratives grouped in “Chapter IV, The Promethean Theft/Emergence” exhibit the escape of woman as a new, aware, and resourceful adult creature from the confinement of a masculine-imposed imprisonment. In her short story “The Youngest Doll,” Rosario Ferré portrays the dormant state of the feminine as a result of marriage, an institution that maintains and promotes the interests of the patriarchy. Ferré proposes, through her story, an escape from dormancy and domination through the use of a decoy to attract the parasitical male. The Promethean theft is exacted when the male finds that it is his own treachery with which he has been repaid. Margaret Atwood, in *Surfacing*, uses the motif of insect metamorphosis to portray the narrator’s growing resistance to language as a tool for societal entrapment. The narrator is reborn as she plots to reshape the language to conform to the rudiments of meaning. Sandra Cisneros, in her short story “Never Marry a Mexican,” uses the metamorphosis motif to portray a reversal in cultural evolution that would emancipate the story’s narrator from cultural and gender-based entrapment. Using visual art as a metaphor for writing, Cisneros proposes that a re-drawing of the cultural landscape is a prerequisite for social and sexual equality. It is

significant to this chapter that each questor requires a surrogate mother as an enabler for her quest. The surrogate is the aunt in "The Youngest Doll," the father in *Surfacing* (as the moth at the window, he becomes the guiding figure for his daughter out of the conflicting roles her mother encouraged her to accept), and the questor as her own ancestor in "Never Marry a Mexican." These stories suggest that the replacement of the traditional role of motherhood is a necessary component to the successful emergence of the feminine. The three narratives in the chapter all show their questing characters using the resources of their entrapment, language, as a means for their escape.

The narratives of the final chapter, "Procreation," entail a return of the questing female to propagate her form through disciples to whom she tells her experiences. In terms of the reflexivity of these narratives, those disciples include the readers of the story. Within the motif of metamorphosis, this discipling is an act of procreation, the fulfillment of the life cycle for the female creature. Zora Neale Hurston, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, imbeds the Psyche myth, discernible through Hurston's use of the metamorphosis motif, inside the myth of Persephone. In the final chapters of her story, however, she eliminates the identity of maleness from the *animus* of her character's quest, indicating that the interference of masculine influence is a deterrent to feminine self-actualization. It is by this elimination that the questing character is able to return to the locus of her rebirth and procreate her sense of self through the "voice" she has attained in her quest. Luisa Mercedes Levinson's short story "The Cove" uses the motif of insect metamorphosis to rewrite the Biblical version of the Fall. The events that take

place in a masculinized parody of Eden follow the motif of metamorphosis depicting the failed emergence of the feminine from male domination. But these events are witnessed by a visitor, the narrator of the tale. The narrator, in carrying the story of the death of feminine back to her own time, promises to succeed in the procreation of her discovered identity. The authors included in this chapter are hopeful that a dissemination of the awareness of the feminine in the images that shape modern society's conceptions of the human will be balanced by a dignified view of the feminine. As in the narratives included in Chapter IV, there is a displacement of the direct matriarchal line in the narratives of Chapter V. Janie, in Hurston's novel, is at least set on the right path by her grandmother in the absence of her own mother. The narrator of "The Cove" skips countless generations of her own matriarchal line (the suggestion is that the feminine has lain dead during their evolution) to find the legacy of the "first mother" in the woman at the cove. Although the procreative process of the feminine has been diverted to benefit a masculine economy, the narratives of the final chapter reinvest the legacy of the feminine in the matriarchal line.

CHAPTER II

DURABLE FIRES

It is said that whatever is not being born is busy dying. Archetypally, the tomb, which then becomes a womb, is the locus of re-generation. In the plant world, this locus is found within the seed, which is a part cut off from the life of the parent plant. In the insect world, the locus between the old creature and the new is found in the chrysalis, where the creature that was the larvae loses its previous form and attains a new one that better suits it for its role in procreation. The fact that the feminine is yet undefined indicates that it is in a state of gestation--the seed or chrysalis stage. Although it has not yet been born into language, it has been conceived in thought, rippling and bumping at the surface of civilization, for many centuries. Gestation is a period of time in which the embryo defines itself apart from the form of other species and the other sex of its own species and birth takes place only when these two agendas are fulfilled. In the terms of the mechanics of gestation found in the physical world, of germination and the metamorphosis of insects, the transformation between the old creature and the new takes place between the time that the world becomes uninhabitable for the fruit or larvae and the emergence of the seedling or adult insect. The new creature emerges following a long period of seeming inactivity, usually in the Spring of the year when conditions are optimal for its self-propagation. For the feminine, the twentieth century has been spring

after a long dormancy enforced by the lack of language adequate to define the properties of the feminine.

The turn of the century should not be construed, however, as an absolute marker for the change in the production women's writing, but rather, generally speaking, in the focus of the texts as they were perceived. Nina Baym in her *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*, states concerning nineteenth century women's writing: "Women were expected to write specifically for their own sex and within the tradition of their woman's culture rather than within the Great Tradition" (178). Baym's statement explains how the basis of dormancy is based in reader consciousness. Although critics of the twentieth century identify a feminist consciousness at work in many works of the nineteenth century, the readers contemporary to those texts did not. Citing Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" as examples of texts anachronous to the nineteenth century reader's textual experience, Annette Kolodny points out that, in at least the United States, readers "'wandering around between texts' were wandering around somewhat different kinds of texts where male and female readers were concerned" (246). Thus, Chopin's novel was relegated by reviewers as "sex fiction" while Gilman's story located itself, in the minds of readers, in the genre with Poe's stories of madness and horror (Kolodny 246-247). The texts refused, however, to nestle snugly into the genres to body of texts to which they were assigned. The discomfort produced by early Feminist works such as these, together with the mere fact that women were both reading and

writing for and among themselves, generated a social consciousness that questioned the traditional views of femininity. The reawakening of the feminine began when women had the means to compare what they sensed about themselves with the historical projection of them.

The *means* of feminine self-awareness, then, comes through an access to and a manipulation of language. The feminine is *a*-historical because the use of language has been based in masculine experience. The feminine traditionally has been shut away from his world except to mirror it. The feminine exists as something missing from recorded history because language that women have is not their own, but rather a reflection of a male-dominated society. Women's widened access to education in the nineteenth century, however, allowed them both a glimpse outside their own domain and a means of expressing their feelings of alienation to it. Another Gilman story, "If I Were a Man," illustrates in narrative form the awakening that would ultimately result from women's manipulation of language. In the story, Mollie, the narrator, takes her husband, Gerald's, body and navigates in a man's world. In his body, she sees women as he and other men see them, but she still has an inkling and memory of her past self as Mollie, the wife who must "beg for, tease for, wheedle for" the money that her husband earns (304). She realizes that physical accommodations—shoes, seats, the height of train platforms, even--were made to accommodate the male physique. Women's hats become a symbol of what men perceive of as women's mindless frivolity. He is comfortable in his own "normal, dignified, becoming" male hat, this judgment emblematic of his presumption of male

superiority. At some other level of consciousness, however, Mollie retains her own memories and feelings, so that, by the end of the narrative, Gerald defends women's actions to other men as a result of masculine determinants. Women at the turn of the century entered the masculine world through an access to language. Since that time, our highly masculinized society, like Gerald, has increasingly become "vaguely conscious of new views, strange feelings" (308). Like the "submerged Mollie" of Gilman's narrative, women have "learned and learned" about themselves through the appropriation of discourse (308).

It is through this dialogue between women and western culture that a large number of women in the twentieth century have come to be aware of a "submerged" identity that has not taken form because of language infacilitative to define it. In terms of the imagery of metamorphosis that is found in women's writing, the dormant period of women's history is represented as the chrysalis. The restricted state of their existence insulates women from the knowledge of masculine "reality," which, in turn, shuts them away from cultural influence outside the home—a vicious circle which entwines them as surely as the worm that weaves a cocoon around himself. The home, individually and collectively, is tomblike, dark and locked away from the light, which is knowledge that builds on itself via the language that transmits it from one generation or culture to the other. Because it is men who traverse this world outside the home, they use the knowledge, and thus the language, to propagate their own interests--to build culture that predisposed only their own activity in it.

Because of the dormant state of women's actualization, culture developed without their influence, the roles imposed on them maintaining their encapsulation. Because confinement did not permit intellectual stimulation which would permit participation in the affairs of men, their development was truncated. This is not to say that women did not develop to some potential in the sense of who they are--rational and knowing human beings. But their knowing was restricted to themselves and their enclosed world, to bearing and rearing children, and to the responsibilities necessary to maintain the household such as cooking, spinning and weaving, These skills were not deemed important to the masculine world, although they perpetuated his own economic gain. In a measurement based on elucidation, the development that would qualify woman to participate in the daylight world was lacking, the utilization of her potential to participate in the process of civilization was stymied by her seclusion. Because of women's domestic entrapment, spinning and weaving become organic to the imagery associated with the metamorphosis motif. The creature in its infancy spins the chrysalis in which its dormancy is spent. Imagistically, as well as practically, culture has placed upon women the responsibility for maintaining their own prison, spinning around themselves a cocoon which has, in their past, been their tomb as well.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace writing which depicts feminine self-awareness and attempts to express that awareness through the appropriation of a language that was not formed to accommodate such definition. There are a handful of works which, in this writer's opinion, best represent early attempts to capture different aspects

of the feminine in prose fiction. Among these, the emergence of Gothic fiction reflects a sense of the “uncanny,” a lurking suspicion that there is more to reality than the Victorian predisposition allows to exist. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, at the turn of the century, used the conventions of Gothic tradition to define that reality in terms of an imprisoned feminine lifehood in “The Yellow Wallpaper” through the image of woman shut off and incubating in a world closed to her by a masculine economy. The protagonist’s identification of herself in the woman imprisoned behind the wallpaper results in the disorientation that is imaged in her increasingly agitated narrator, whose voice is deemed hysterical because it reveals an unaccepted reality. The critical reception of the story itself in Gilman’s time exemplified the silencing mechanisms that she exposes in the story when she was criticized for writing about unexplainable madness. Although “The Yellow Wallpaper” speaks of the repressed feminine in a voice that late twentieth-century readers generally hear very clearly, that voice was incoherent in Victorian society, which lived in denial of its own fallibility. Gilman was speaking in language foreign to her culture, but she made the uncanny of the Gothic recognizable in the female hysteria popularized by Freud and Bruner. The fact that the narrator becomes aware that the hidden woman is the imprisoned part of herself indicates her rejection of the definition imposed on her by society. Gilman’s protest through her story registers as an indication of women’s growing awareness that their social definition is not adequate to their personal needs, and awareness is the first step in any kind of change.

Gertrude Stein demonstrates in her story of "Melanctha" the dynamics of the Promethean theft of language and the mechanics of linguistic manipulation as a means of re-creation, a sort of dissolution of language so that re-imaging can take place. Like Gilman's protagonist, Stein's Melanctha seeks to escape the image that defines her as "woman" in western culture. Unlike Gilman, Stein suggests that re-definition must start at a renunciation of meaning altogether. In terms of the imagery of metamorphosis, the transition between the old creature and the new can only take place if the old surrenders its known conception of itself as it is entombed in language. It is only from this essence of unformed being that the new creature can arise. Stein's female protagonists, Melanctha among them, because they have not the means in language to reform themselves, are eternally doomed to return to the previous definition. It is for this reason that Melanctha is hopelessly trapped in the redundancy of the repeating cycle of Stein's motto: "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose."

Since the early third of this century, and perhaps without effect before that time, women have searched for the expression of the feminine, an awareness of themselves which does not exist on the conscious level simply because there is no image that aptly reflects that awareness. An image is a way to define through association, and the feminine thus far has not found definition because it is only allowed to *not be* in relation to those things that the father culture claims as part of his own definition. The implication of the works is that re-casting of the feminine image is dependent on an escape from the current socially constructed image. That escape is constituted through

the erasure of boundaries socially construed to create "meaning." The erasure of such boundaries is dissolution, a condition that brings the questor to disorientation, but serves as *prima materia* for the recasting of the feminine in a new definition. In the imagery of metamorphoses, it is the loss of form or consciousness (a reversal of "being") which follows the larval or blossom stage, but precedes awakening and rebirth of the organism in a different form.

The Gothic: A Premonition

I do not know if you remember the tale of the girl who saves the ship under mutiny by sitting on the powder barrel with her lighted torch ... and all the time knowing that it is empty? This has seemed to me a charming image of the women of my time. There they were, keeping the world in order ... by sitting on the mystery of life, and knowing themselves that there was no mystery. --Isak Dinesen

The chrysalis is protection for its sleeping inhabitant, but eventually the insect inside quickens back to life and seeks an escape from it. Just as the sunshine of spring stirs the dormant insect, so elucidation stirs the feminine spirit. The Enlightenment produced an environment conducive to emergence of new ideas, and a few women, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, championed the cause for the education and rights of women between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Elucidation, limited though it was, warmed the feminine spirit, and women, still very much in the shadows but warmed by the penetration of the external light, began to be aware of themselves. The census in 1801 recorded the number of unmarried women as outnumbering men by

400,000. This fact as well as the acquisition of education by more women, could explain the burgeoning of works by women that explore the place of women in society during the latter half of the nineteenth century (Timeline of Legislation). The awakening of increasing numbers of women to the awareness of themselves and their entombment set the chrysalis of feminine existence aquiver. As the entity that we call feminine consciousness came to life, it pushed at the rigid, confining enclosure of the tomb that had become now a womb. And the world felt the movement.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, literature reflected the dark fears that self awareness generated both within women themselves and within a world that insisted on a division between men's and women's writing. Society's sensing of this yet undefined reality prompted a cultural wariness that may be described by Freud's definition of *das unheimlich*, "the uncanny." Julia Kristeva explains Freud's and Schelling's notion of the uncanny in regard to the awareness of a repressed secret:

Such an immanence of the strange within the familiar is considered as an etymological proof of the psychoanalytic hypothesis according to which 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar,' which, as far as Freud was concerned, was confirmed by Schelling who said that 'everything is . . . *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light. Consequently therefore, that which *is* strangely uncanny would be that which *was* [Kristeva's emphasis] (the past tense is important) familiar and, under certain conditions (which ones?), emerges. (183)

Kristeva goes on to explain the uncanny in terms that can be applied to the societal phenomenon which produces the Gothic novel:

Let us say that the psychic apparatus represses representative processes and contents that are no longer necessary for pleasure, self preservation.

and the adaptive growth of the speaking subject and the living organism. Under certain conditions, however, the repressed 'that ought to have remained secret' shows up again and produces a feeling of uncanny strangeness. (184)

Such a societal fear began in the Victorian Age and continues into our own. It is the result of a loss of faith in social stability--a crack in the wall of Western culture that, during the complacency of Victorian progressivism, seemed to be solidly constructed. The social reverberations produced by these doubts are expressed literarily in the form of the Gothic novel where "uncanny" applies to an atmosphere of apprehension caused by haunting by a menacing, but hidden presence.

If the Gothic novel as a genre is a manifestation of Victorian *das unheimlich*, then the heroine of Gothic novels may be seen as representative of the response of women to the same awareness, an awareness which was personal to them. Eugenia C. Delamotte points out that in the Gothic novel the conflict that the heroine encounters is her inability to escape from a closed space where she is menaced by some danger. Delamotte attributes the appeal of the Gothic novel, the center of which is most often a house, to the female reader's subconscious identification with the heroine's plight:

For it is only half the story to say, as so many critics have said in various ways, that the maiden lost in Gothic space is the mind beset with its own internal dangers, lost to the order and reason of the outside world. The other half of the story, for women writers and readers, that in symbolic form Gothic interiors were the daylight world, apprehended as nightmare. Their disorder and illogic was the logic of the social order as women experienced it. (Delamotte 4)

Her observation is that the enclosed space has been the only space allowed to women in which they can define themselves--and they define themselves by their suffering:

Woman in these nocturnal spaces is really woman in her everyday relations, immured in her domestic prison, "surrounded by the vice and violence" of the social and political institutions that dominate her life. . . . this Gothic talk of houses was really a description of women's suffering. (Delamotte 4)

In the light that penetrated her dark world, women sensed their being but were horrified by its different form, or the lack of it. Its presence did not conform to the shape allowed the chrysalis which is the language of a masculinized culture. Its existence was alien, and yet vaguely familiar.

The development of the Gothic novel as a genre is important step toward the realization of the feminine because it marks, and makes, a point of departure from the misrepresentation of women's social predicament that had been touted by the masculine world. Within certain eras in western culture, women's confinement to the home was considered an act of love, a gesture of protection from a hostile world. That insulation, however, also guaranteed their control by making them fearful of emerging from their cocoon of existence. For this reason, the positive image of the archetype assigned to women in Western society has often been that of either the dutiful daughter, such as Electra, or of the faithful wife and good mother, imaged in such figures as Penelope or the Madonna. In those cases, the traditional quest of the heroine, who is powerless to effect any change by herself, is completed when she places herself in the care of a father, brother, or (prospective) husband who becomes her defender against the hostilities she has encountered on her own. The situation in the Gothic novel, however, shows that women's desire for discovery is frustrated by their imprisonment by social conventions.

Diana Russ provides an explanation of how that frustration is rendered in the modern Gothic novel: "The heroine's suffering is the principle action of the story *because it is the only action she can perform*. The Modern Gothic, as a genre, is a means of enabling a conventionally feminine heroine to have adventures at all" (as quoted in Delamotte 6). Russ's explanation is even more relevant to the early women's Gothic than to the modern. In Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the central figure, Emily, finds that she has no control over her space in the castle, since the door to her room bolted only from the outside. In *Jane Eyre*, Bronte makes the famous plea in Chapter 12 that women should not be confined to "to making Pudding and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags." The plea, although subtle, accentuates Bronte's realization in the novel of the constraints placed on women by society. Because it shows women's attempt to orient themselves in a world where women's space is construed apart from that of men, the creation of the Gothic heroine is a response to, albeit not an active rejection of, the traditional feminine role.

In women's fiction that utilizes the metamorphosis motif, the period during which the protagonist is unaware of her encapsulating acceptance of masculine-oriented ideals is generally presented as a time of dormancy and is imaged as a sleeping seed or a cocoon. If we apply the same imagery to the historical reawakening of the feminine, we can say that, after a long period of dormancy, the feminine Gothic novel is an indication of the reawakening of a feminine consciousness. As the creature stirs within the light that penetrates the cocoon, she seeks to gather up all that she finds within that closed space--

herself. However, what she finds there she cannot recognize as herself, since language has not yet provided a form for it, and yet it holds an uncanny resemblance to her.

Delamotte points out that in the Gothic novel the heroine discovers a "Hidden Woman." The creature she discovers may be the mad woman in the attic, such as in Jane Eyre's discovery of Bertha Mason, or a model of virtuous longsuffering. Delamotte identifies the Hidden Woman as the "Other" of the heroine, who searches for some reflection of herself. According to Delamotte, the hidden "self" may be either good or bad, depending on whether the heroine's discovery of this woman is related to women's oppression or women's suppression: "Both discoveries reveal complementary aspects of women's subordination: their immurement in domestic spaces as sisters, wives and daughters; and the immurement inside themselves, of an angry, rebellious, sexual Other Woman that conventional morality taught them to reject" (Delamotte 5). The appearance and popularity, especially among women, of the Gothic novel in the nineteenth century suggests a crack in the wall of the complacency of Victorian provincialism. That vague awareness awakened in the women who read Gothic horror a vague curiosity in themselves. The fearful search for self that ensued at the end of the Victorian era in Western society is manifested in the adventures of the Gothic heroine.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman: "The Yellow Wallpaper"

We also have built durable fires
But mine
As high as yours and as changing
Hides behind the hands upon your eyes.
Their reflection burns.
(The dark reflections
Of other, all-consuming flames . . .)
(Alejandra Pizernik)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" parodies the Gothic novel while it identifies the escape of the feminine from the dark recesses of its prisonhouse. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the young wife of a doctor is restricted by her husband to the nursery high at the top of a mansion that they have rented for a season. Her husband, a physician, has decided on these restrictions as a remedy for a "nervous condition." His prescription also involves the mandates that his wife should sleep and eat according to a routine that he has set for her, that she should not think about her condition, and that, above all, she should not write. Care for the household and for her child have been placed under the supervision of her husband's sister, and the narrator is forbidden to associate with her own friends and family because of her "condition." The plot of the story develops through the female protagonist's increasing obsession with the yellow wallpaper which she first abhors for its color and lack of consistent pattern. She eventually discovers a hidden pattern there, one of bars that locks away a woman (and later, women) hidden in the wallpaper. The narrator's personality finally merges with that of the hidden woman, effecting the escape of the latter from the wallpaper.

The outward conventions of the story are imprinted by the Gothic--the helpless female, incarcerated in a mansion, is threatened by haunting visitations from a creeping woman. Suzanne Owens elaborates on the similarities in the story to the conventions used in ghost stories that are the center of many Gothic tales. The heroine fears her own sanity as she discovers a hidden woman who is not only entrapped, but mad as well. By the end of the story, the heroine has escaped (ironically) with the involuntary help of a male benefactor, her husband. By parodying the Gothic novel, Gilman names the object of and the reasons for the feminine quest that takes place in nineteenth century women's fiction. Delamotte, however, points out some of the turns that Gilman takes from the Gothic conventions that inform her purpose in parodying those conventions. She points out that, while the protagonist is in a mansion, this mansion for the time being is "home" to herself and her family, and the menaces to her are inside the "sanctity" of that "home." The woman's sense of estrangement is not a result of some location which is distant from home, but rather a psychic location distant from the woman she has always been and is expected to be. Even as the hidden woman celebrates her escape from the wallpaper, the reader is aware that the husband, if he wakes up, will have the power to have her subdued and eradicated, for the narrator has forewarned: "John says if I don't pick up faster he will send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall. But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!" (170). Alienation itself threatens her well-being because it puts her at odds with an

environment, the patriarchal society in which she lives, that has the power to crush anything that opposes it.

Gilman's story, interpreted in terms of the Gothic novel, exposes, then, the dynamics in Western culture that have caused and maintained the "cocooning" of the feminine influence on that culture. It is implied within the story that the narrator's difficulties coincide with her recent responsibilities of marriage and motherhood. She seems to have had no conflict with the idea assuming of these roles before her marriage because she reports: "I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort . . ." (168). It is apparent, however, that she has found such a role stifling: "Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good" (165).

The narrator's "nervous weakness" is a direct result of the conflict that results when she is forbidden meaningful existence. Her difference has been diagnosed by her husband as "hysteria," a condition frequently identified among women of the comfort class during the Turn-of-the-Century era. It was a time when women's existence was totally dictated by their role. As a husband and a physician, John represents the patriarchy at several levels of control, and his diagnosis of hysteria for his wife affords him, as is modeled in Freud's *Studies in Hysteria*, the opportunity to empower himself through a transformation of her. As her doctor and husband, he defines her role, diagnoses her deviance from it, and forces her compliance by his dictates. His dictates include isolation, non-stimulation, and silence. She is threatened into compliance by the suggestion that she may have to be sent to S. Weir Mitchell, a non-fictional practitioner

of the “rest cure” and the doctor under whom Gilman herself was treated for hysteria. John’s prescription for his wife’s recovery are fashioned after those of Mitchell’s “rest cure.” This prescription reflects conditions that have ruled women’s lives for years. Since, historically, men were customarily the holder of the wealth, women have been confined to the home by the necessity of being caretakers. They have been isolated and silenced merely by the lack of opportunity to learn. Mirroring this universal circumstance, Gilman’s narrator is imprisoned in the attic room under the pretense that her husband wishes to take care of her. John’s diagnosis of her as hysterical forbids her to sanction any of thoughts of her own as legitimate, and his prescription for her not to think or write is designed, in the name of “love” and “care,” to silence her. “Love” and “care” are the conventional excuses by which women have been isolated from one another and shut out of the masculine economy

Gilman uses the wallpaper to represent the cocooning of the feminine spirit. Like a cocoon, it is, at the narrator’s first examination, “repellent, almost revolting: a smouldering, unclean yellow” (167). Because of the sunlight, however, it has changed to orange and the color of sunlight in some places. Gilman’s image of the changes that the exposure to sunlight has made in the wallpaper reflects the fact that, although the social environment had permitted women’s exposure to the daylight of masculine economics, such changes had cast a slightly different hue on her entrapment. By the Nineteenth Century, a woman’s need for physical protection and her inability to compete in the masculine economy were conditions that were no longer natural but rather imposed by

society. These very gradual changes in social atmosphere are aptly expressed in terms of the wallpaper being “strangely faded by the slow turning sunlight” (167).

Gilman describes the wallpaper as ripped off in places “as if a boy’s school had used it” (167), suggesting the Promethean theft of language. The narrator is, after all, a writer, even though she is forbidden to use this resource for her own purposes. It is very telling in the story that it is paper that she feels imprisoned by. Though women were more educated than ever before, the provincial dictates of middle and upper class societies attempted to stifle any promotion of female autonomy. The appropriation of language, the artifice which both defines and constructs the masculine economy, has been the means for the search for the feminine since women gained access to the written word as a tool. The narrator in Gilman’s story is forbidden to express herself on paper, a concrete “reality” that becomes a “record” of her existence. By her narrator’s “hysterical” insistence on writing her story, Gilman is opposing the attempt by her society to continue to trap women away from the opportunity for growth and recognition.

This truncated development is made visible in “The Yellow Wallpaper” in the fact that the wife’s unwilling imprisonment is inside the nursery of the house. She identifies her own frustration and disgust with that of the children that she supposes must have been entrapped in the room like herself: “I never saw such ravages as the children have made here. The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother--they must have had perseverance as well as hatred” (167). The fact that John not only treats her like a child, but addresses her as one as well reaffirms Gilman’s

implication that such cocooning arrests the development of women, making dependency and control a vicious cycle. The hidden woman in the wallpaper emerges from her entrapment creeping, as a baby would creep, on all fours. It is this position that the narrator herself takes as she finally identifies completely with the hidden woman at the conclusion of Gilman's story.

The narrator's final exclamation in the story, "I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" represents women's escape from the cocoon, generally through the medium of women's writing, and specifically through Gilman's story itself. Women's desire to write their own adventures is a desire that Eugenia Delamotte says causes the females' "masochistic" experiences in feminine Gothic literature. She states:

In women's Gothic, this dynamic [of masochism] operates, not at the level of the plot, in which heroines are portrayed as victims rather than masochists, but at the level of writing and reading, themselves acts of pseudo-power in which the writer or the reader, by willing the heroine's suffering as a source of a pleasureable literary experience, gains the illusion of being in control of it. (6)

What the narrator wants, and what the writer has achieved in the writing of the story, is control of her own experiences. Both are realized through the reflexivity of "The Yellow Wallpaper." Paula Treicher, in her "Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" writes:

I interpret the wallpaper to be women's writing or women's discourse, and the woman in the wallpaper to be the representation of women that becomes possible only after women obtain the right to speak. In this reading, "The Yellow Wallpaper" stands for a new vision of women--one which is constructed differently from the representation of women in

patriarchal language. . . . The story's outcome makes a statement about the relationship of a visionary feminist project to material reality. (66)

Although still in the nymph stage of development, the feminine emerges from the cocoon determined to use her newly acquired tools of discourse in the pursuit of her goal to create herself by it.

The emergence that Gilman presents in "The Yellow Wallpaper" aptly predicts that the use of language to claim autonomy is problematic in the sense that the medium has to be remade to accommodate signification of the feminine, and that the attempt to do so entails continuous battle against its keeper, a patriarchal establishment predisposed toward its own maintenance. Gilman predicts the tenacity of the challenger, undeterred while resigned to the coming struggle, when her narrator concludes: "I kept on creeping, just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder. . . . Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!" (180). John's fainting suggests at least a role reversal between the two of them. Fainting was stereotypically a female reaction, so the role reversal and the woman's dominant stance over her husband Her "creeping" indicates the yet immature status of her development and prowess, but her retrospective view on the incident ("I had to creep over him every time!") indicates a recurring escape from his domination. Through the narrator's retrospection, Gilman predicts the rebirth of the feminine through acquisition and a slow reshaping of language. Like the chrysalis which entraps and constrains the developing creature, language has formerly served to inhibit the participation of the feminine in the formation of culture. Gilman's story has the narrator

returning to the wall that was her prison, but implies many other escapes from it. Since Gilman's publication of "The Yellow Wallpaper" in 1892, women writers have returned to the wall of language over and over again to recycle the material of their former entrapment as the medium of their re-creation.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" establishes a paradigm as well as a theoretical strategy for the quest fiction of later women writers. In fact, the title of Gilbert and Gubar's *The Mad Woman in the Attic* may well allude to Gilman's cloistered hysteric. In a quest for voice, women writers have had their writing branded as inferior when it differed in style from its masculine counterpart, and as disgraceful when it imitated a masculine style. In Gilman's story, John demeans his wife's desire to record her thoughts in writing, implying that her feminine thoughts and desires are inferior to those of himself and other men (" . . . [John] scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures"). He implies that her attempt to voice her desires ("any silly fancies") shows a lack of self control, and the resulting "hysterical tendency" would result in her banishment ("John says if I don't pick up, he will send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall"). Gilman's narrator indicates that she realizes her escape may be only temporary, and may only be able to escape often rather than permanently. Such a realization (was) is real to women writers, as well. How can they speak as themselves, and yet be heard?

Gertrude Stein: "Melanctha"

A Word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanging. It is the skin of a living thought and may vary in color and content according to the circumstances and time in which it is used.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Language is the boundary between the phenomenal and the imaginary--that is, naming makes real that which does not exist before it is named. Within the imagery of metamorphosis, then, the word itself is the form in which the organism--the idea--is housed. An idea is birthed from a formless nature into an environment where its image is discerned by the word or words assigned to it. Through the negotiation that takes place in a word's association with other words (as words represent images), an idea is manifested as a distinguishable image by the word in which it is currently encapsulated. The word is the idea's form, and without that word, the idea lacks a conceivable existence. These shifts in association constitute the metamorphosis of the idea.

In Gertrude Stein's "Melanctha," the title character is eighteen-year-old Melanctha Herbert. She has become "street smart" about men and love through escapades with her friend Jane Harden. When a young physician named Jeff Campbell comes to treat her mother, Melanctha has long conversations with him. It is revealed through those conversations that their perceptions of truth differ because of their different ways of perceiving events. While Jeff decides on a logical explanation of events, Melanctha believes that the real truth is in things as they are without such interpretation as Jeff gives them. Melanctha's capacity for "forgetting" reinforces the flux that she

finds in events. Jeff is irresistably drawn to Melanctha in spite of their fierce disagreements, but Melanctha finally throws Jeff over for a gambler, Jem Richards. As might be expected, Jem rejects Melanctha at about the same time as her good friend tells her that she never wants to see her again. Melanctha finally contracts consumption and dies in a sanatorium.

Gertrude Stein was adamant in her proposal of the facility of language to create and control. Her declaration of "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" is emblematic of the duplicity that exists in "naming" in the process of symbolic association. On the one hand, a name may form an entrapment from which it may be impossible for an idea to escape because of its static associational environment. But on the other hand, ideas are at times chameleons, metamorphosing through time and escaping the word or image inadequate to accommodate the associational shifting that takes place in its social conception.

Barbara Clarke Mossberg, in her article, "A Rose In Context: The Daughter Construct," explains that Stein herself felt entrapped in her mother's image as it was defined by gender. After arguing that Stein adopted the adage "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" as her personal motto, Mossberg explains the crystallization (or chrysalisation?) that is manifest in the saying if it is understood in deterministic terms: "What is Stein saying about *herself*, then, in this dictum? If we turn to the sentence, we see that it does not set out a definition or even the impossibility of definition as much as it argues the lack of possibility for a certain being to exist in any form other than her original identity" (200). According to Mossberg, Stein's allusion to this self-defining

motto in her lectures and writing is a "living out" of the processes of definition that her motto places in language. Structurally, Stein's works often end where they begin--imitating the circular aspect of the statement.

When Stein's characters include one named "Rose," this character is one who inevitably returns to the definition of herself in a world that is, for her, round. "Rose," the word that is the character's definition in terms of Stein's motto, binds her inside a existence that carries her in a circular path. Stein's Rose in "The Autobiography of Rose," and the same character in her later work *The World Is Round*, is a child whose world is inescapably round. Preoccupied with the continuity of her world, she ventures out seeking to escape the encapsulation it poses for her. The perpetual nature of roundness as a definition for her existence is made a metaphor by her encapsulation within the roundness of her feminine body, a body which promises the capacity to engender the continuation of roundness through pregnancy. This Rose can be none other but Rose, a preoccupation which Mossberg claims is a projection of Stein's frustrations at the limitations imposed on her by her gender. She says of Stein's motto:

If we consider it in the context of Stein's life and literature, beginning with the literary and biographical context of the circular construction of the idiosyncratic axiom, we can understand more fully its significance and meaning for Stein as a self-portrait, an autobiography-at-a-glance, a parable of identity and destiny. Taken in a larger sociological and historical context of women in a patriarchal culture, we can extend Stein's own immodest claims for the historical significance of the sentence to construe it as the shortest tragedy in literature. (201)

Surely, in *The World Is Round*, Stein draws a world in which an escape from circularity is an impossibility if one is a girl. On the other hand, the lack of definite identity for her boy

character. Willie (“who are you who are you”), in itself frees him from entrapment, a condition that Rose envies.

Mossberg may be right in her proposal that Stein believed escape from definition was impossible by the time she published *The World Is Round* in 1938, but her story of “Melanctha,” as part of the trilogy *Three Lives* published in 1909, suggests the possibility of escape. Melanctha, Stein’s title character, is juxtaposed with Stein’s Rose in this work, a minor character who epitomizes the identity of female gender. Like Rose, Melanctha has a circular existence, but unlike her, Melanctha is periodically freed from the circular entrapment of definition by temporary amnesia. Her name, in fact, alludes to Melanctha, the maid servant of Penelope, and mistress of Eurymachus. Both Melanctha and her brother, Melancthus were hanged for “forgetting” their loyalty to Penelope and Odysseus respectively in siding with the suitors. Stein describes Melanctha’s “wanderings” from the circularity of “truth” (loyalty to conventional beliefs) when she says:

Some man would learn a good deal about [Melanctha] in the talk, never altogether truly, for Melanctha, all her life, did not know how to tell a story wholly. She always, and yet not with intention, managed to leave out big pieces which make a story very different, for when it came to what had happened and what she had said and what it was that she had really done, Melanctha could never remember right. (100)

Melanctha’s “forgetting” places her in Stein’s “continuous present,” a state of dissolution, an a-historic zone in which events and ideas have not been minted into the currency by which the patriarchy finances the perpetuation of its preferred illusions. Dissolution is the formless state in metamorphosis in which the larval form is completely

lost to the developing insect. In the loss of the old form, its consciousness is lost as well. The new form has not yet begun to form. In the sense that neither form has memory, the formless mass is in the continuous present, and has "forgotten" both past and future. In her "forgetfulness," Melanctha is free from conventional definition by gender, her "form." She is Rose in idea, but not Rose in name. Her essence is without association, un-imaged, as long as she remains aloof from the possibilities of re-definition.

The capacity for the re-coinage (rebirth) of an idea can exist only when some event removes it from the history of its previous associations and places it among new associations. Although any new associations are as historic as the old, the movement between definitions is timeless, free of historical definition. Stein's motto gives image to this timelessness that exists in the continuous present. In reference to the repetition in adage "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," Mossberg explains:

There is something defiant about the second rose which subverts the definition process by its echo--a case of metaphoric boomeranging. . . . Each of the four roses represents successive moments in time, perhaps, but not progress or growth in terms of identity; each linking verb constitutes a possible moment of freedom in which this rose can be or become something else, something *besides*, can be *understood* [Mossberg's emphasis] in terms other than herself. But there is a letdown as the rose reappears: rose again, always rose, rose forever. The case is hopeless if one values hope or change, consoling, if one sees what must be the rose's steadfast refusal to be anything but herself as a heroic, defiant, or stubborn stance against a constantly affecting world that threatens identity. (200)

While the statement "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" supports the deterministic control that language has over existence, it also reveals that the power of the word is threatened by the process of its own dynamism.

In terms of Mossberg's interpretation presented above, Stein's statement argues for essence over existence. Melanctha's "forgets" her gender-conditioning, forsaking the role women are supposed to play, in order to adventure in the world of men, a realm free, for her, of associations:

Melanctha liked to wander, and to stand by the railroad yard, and watch the men and the engines and the switches and everything that was busy there, working. . . . For a child watching through a hole in the fence it was a wonder world of mystery and movement . . . For Melanctha the yard was full of the excitement of many men, and perhaps a free and whirling future. (96)

Melanctha's "adventures" allow her the opportunity to explore the possibilities of definition for herself outside the historical associations made for and by her gender. And yet she is careful to escape a forced re-definition by the men she visits:

But when Melanctha was alone, and she was so, very often, she would sometimes come very near to making a long step on the road that leads to wisdom. . . . The man would sometimes come a little nearer, would detain her, would hold her arm or make his jokes a little clearer, and then Melanctha would make herself escape. (100)

"Wisdom" is a re-definition of Melanctha's feminine essence that would be offered her in the exclusively male world that she visits *if* should were willing to accept it. But to Stein, definition as a social contract, this "agreeing to agree," stifles creativity. Growth takes place only in *pursuit* of "wisdom," not in the *acquisition* of it. The trick is not to "become," but merely to "be."

All elements in the story, characters and their interactions, the definitions of feeling and suffering, and the tensions between life and death in "Melanctha" characterize

“being” as a state of dissolution. “Being” can only be found in the absence of definition. the process by which “being” *becomes*. The dynamics of the narrative are based, not on construction , but on deconstruction--meaning in “Melanctha” is derived through the cancellation of one element by another. The main characters of the story are a mixture of races, colors, social classes, and educational levels. Rose is a negress, well built but stupid, reared as a daughter in a white household. Jane Harden is a very intelligent, educated negress, but a social outcast. Jeff is high yellow, educated, and “good” according to social standards. Melanctha, high yellow, educated, and intelligent, is the product of a high yellow, passive mother and a brutally domineering, uneducated, very black father. The stereotypes that are generally assigned to Blacks and Whites are contradicted either in the characteristics assigned to individual characters, or in the juxtaposing of pairs of characters.

The characters that are good by social standards are bad in terms of their nourishing nature towards Melanctha. By the juxtaposing of Mrs. Herbert to Rose Johnson as mothers in their relation to Melanctha, it is clear that their seeming goodness does not fulfill the needs of their children. In fact, there is the suggestion through their dependence on Melanctha that they vampirishly feed on some essence of her nature, although they both think she is “bad.” Both Mrs. Herbert and Rose Johnson, who play traditionally female roles, are a drain on Melanctha’s physical resources, demanding her help to sustain their households and health. In merging of these two mother figures, it becomes apparent that Stein believes that the traditional role of motherhood is not

nourishing for the caregiver and leads to death rather than growth. Rose's baby dies from a lack of nourishing care after Melanctha leaves Rose's household. Melanctha, in turn, dies after she returns to Rose's household. In contrast, Jane Harden, whose last name characterizes her reputation, plays the part of a nourishing mother to Melanctha, wandering with her and teaching her until Melanctha outgrows her mentor in understanding. It is at that time that Melanctha begins to mentor Jeff in the art of separating "being," a state of non-definition that exists in the continuous present, from "meaning," which has a historical definition. Through the mother-child relationships in her story of Melanctha, Stein identifies definition, or the word, as the tomb of the spirit.

Stein models a method of recovering the spirit by presenting characterizations that contradict stereotypes and, therefore, defy definition. By this method, she allows the reader to "wander" like Melanctha. Melanctha's adventures show her the contradictions that exist between reality and social construction. When Jeff accuses Melanctha of not remembering events "right," she retorts:

You remember right because you don't remember nothing till you get home with your thinking things all over. . . . I certainly do call it remembering right Jeff Campbell, to remember right just when it happens to you. . . . No, Jeff Campbell, its real feeling every moment when its needed, that certainly does seem to me like real remembering. (181)

"Real" remembering is to realize the chaos of events and to appreciate them as the only reality. It is only in this "present" that one can discover truth. To place existence into words is to construct truth into a lie, an illusion. That is why Melanctha, as Jeff's mentor in "suffering," urges him not to talk, but only to feel. The distance between his timely

existence and her timeless one is revealed through their conversations. Placing their thoughts in words forces each one to form a construction that belies a dissolved reality. It is only in dissolution that the idea, or essence, is free from definition.

Dissolution is that timeless moment between the words "rose" and "is" in Stein's axiom. Rose, the character that is Melanctha's foil in the narrative, is afraid of the suffering that would come from freeing herself from social convention. Her "wanderings" contrast with those of Melanctha because she insists on being engaged to any man with whom she associates, and insists on always being associated with a man. Melanctha, on the other hand, attempts to extend her wanderings as far as possible, and "escape" from any man who attempts to curtail her freedom. Though it is in "being" that she finds nourishment, it is only in "becoming" that one can exist within the social context of language. Despite her "wanderings," however, Melanctha is never able to discover new associations for herself that would establish a new definition for her existence. She is forced, like the rose, always to remain entombed within the only word that has historically been associated with her existence--woman. Although Stein shows the word's capacity for rebirth, it remains a grave for Melanctha. In spite of her endeavors to escape the circularity wrought in her life by definition, she finds only that . . . a woman is a woman is a woman is a woman.

CHAPTER III
"OTHER THAN ITSELF"--NAMING

Within this century, women writers have coupled the theme of female development with a quest for the discovery of the feminine "voice." This integration of quest romance and *Bildungsroman* is an effective vehicle to convey the search and discovery of self. Not only must the female writer discover her true nature, she must also create language that appropriately packages her discovery for conveyance to the rest of the world which has not an inkling of her existence. Since the presumed associations for her identity are already wrought in iron in her external world, her search must begin inwardly. The writers in this section take the quest beyond dissolution (dormancy) to an awareness of self as existing apart from her role as defined by society. In terms of metamorphosis, this stage is the awakening life within the cocoon and an attempt to escape the darkness there.

The writer's narrative in each case is self-referencing because of the necessity for self examination, and it is reflexive because of her desire to export the image she has of her own identity into the language field of her culture. To do so, the feminine in each of the included narratives "names," or defines, her discovered essence through the association of its elements with images (language) already heavy with meaning. The images chosen are those of plants and animals, images that convey the idea that the

feminine is yet among the primordial, undefined elements of creation. As such, it is like the germinated plant inside its seedcoat or the awakening butterfly inside its cocoon. Within the darkness of the environment, the feminine does not yet know its own form, but it is aware of its life trapped within the dead facade of language. The new associations with known images cause reverberations that make the cocoon quiver. The life within the cocoon becomes known to the outside world through these reverberations although it is not seen.

María Luisa Bombal, in a twentieth century Latin American social ambiance that very much resembles that of anglophile Victorian provincialism, demonstrates in *La última niebla* a means to acquisition of a feminine "voice" through subversive writing techniques. Her protagonist's auto-eroticism gives image to a feminine self-consciousness that is in-*corporated* by the *body* of her text. The protagonist, as a result of her disillusionment with marriage and the female role, regresses to a state of mind as dissolute as the imagery of the story's title by questioning and disavowing the complacency of provincial assumptions. Through the use of conventions that characterized acceptable modes of "women's writing" in her culture to convey the suffocating effects of the casting of women in provincial society, Bombal is able to use the token voice allowed her as a woman writer by a masculinized society to suggest a means of the expression of the authentically feminine. In such formulation, the formless mass inside the chrysalis of feminine existence pushes at the reticulum of language that encloses it to itself in an attempt discover the possibilities of a new form for itself.

Though Bombal does not propose that new form, she reveals through her story that language is plastic, and that discovery promises the accommodation of language as a means of re-definition. The appropriation of language as a weapon against Patriarchal control is a Promethean theft.

Djuna Barnes in *Nightwood* defines the feminine as the center of existence. The overpowering darkness and chaos of her novel result from the refusal of civilization to acknowledge, i.e., "name," the "lack" around which its existence swirls. Barnes uses primordial images to "hatch" the concept of the "feminine" as a sex-less missing component of humanity. Unlike Bombal, whose narrator cannot move that which she discovers from intuition and experience into the realm of existence, Barnes predicts that the feminine will be translated into existence through the re-appropriation of language, and that it is the writer who will bring about that re-appropriation. Clarice Lispector proposes such a re-appropriation in the plant and animal images with which her characters find community in her collection, *Family Ties*. The experiences of the female protagonists of Clarice Lispector's fiction combine the sensing of the uncanny, the resulting disorientation, regression, and dissolution with the character's identification with a new, strikingly alien image. This re-imaging trumpets the emergence of a creature previously unknown to the world. Helena María Viramontes' title story in her collection *The Moths* proposes that woman may only be able to "name" her own existence through a re-claiming of the legacy of matriarchal alliances away from the interferences of Patriarchal institutions. "The Moths" re-endows the feminine to

language through the narrator, who gives voice to the ancient knowledge of her Matriarchal line. In its reflexivity, it suggests that it is the writer who will serve as the priest who translates the ritual into words.

María Luisa Bombal: *The Final Mist*

It may be that true happiness lies in the conviction that one has irremediably lost happiness. Then we can begin to move through life without hope or fear, capable of finally enjoying all the small pleasures, which are the most lasting. (María Luisa Bombal)

María Luisa Bombal's *La última niebla* is a narrative which allegorizes both the problem and the solution to the imposed cocooning of feminine expression. Its plot mirrors the author's narrative strategy to transgress societal and literary boundaries which deny women a voice. Bombal's story models the subversive tactics necessary for women writers to use to effect the permanent escape that Gilman's narrator cannot hope for and for which Melanctha searches. Under the deceiving guise of a "woman's" novel of romance, Bombal embodies in her text the vision of what Hernán Vidal has termed *la feminidad enajenada* (alienated femininity). In *La última niebla*, a woman who was previously doomed to spinsterhood has entered into a marriage of convenience with a distant relative. He is a widower who is haunted by the death of his first wife, whom he adored and who becomes the model for conventional womanhood in the novel. This second marriage to the narrator of the story is apparently one without emotional

engagement for either partner. It is an arid relationship within the world of a bored upper-class existence.

As the protagonist withdraws into herself until, in a state of hallucination or desperation (it is never clear which), she finds a lover. Their encounters are always in thick mist and darkness. She does not know his name or the location of the house where he takes her. Either her life is a dream, or this dream becomes her life, because she is obsessed with the circumstances of the brief encounter with her lover for many years. Events happen during those years to return her to reality—the death of a servant's child in the pond where she had frequently bathed in her loneliness and self possession and the death of her sister-in-law, Regina, by suicide. She finally discovers that her lover was a blind man and that he had fallen to his death in the house where he had taken her, or was the man that she was told about ever her lover at all? She is never to know. The protagonist also considers suicide after she recognizes the sinister in her husband's face. She resigns herself to an empty life, finally, living without meaning and only to avoid scandal.

The point of the ambiguity blurs the boundaries that exist between the inner and outer life of the protagonist. The ambiguity mirrors the critical reception of Bombal's narrative. In terms of an outer existence, some critics such as Marjorie Agosín argue that Bombal turns her protagonist into a romantic heroine, a woman who finds her fulfillment through a love unattainable in her own marriage (Méndez Rodenas 935). Such an explanation would surely hold true in a masculinized world in which, as is indicated by

Stein's 'Rose' characters, women are *supposed* to be content in their restricted definition of the object of a man's desires. In terms of this interpretation and of Psyche's search, Bombal's protagonist should be content to have been the object of her lover's desire, never having the need to see him outside the darkness of their misty encounters, never feeling the need to hold a candle above his sleeping form (it is suggested by the end of the narrative that the lover, like Eros, is blind). Bombal's questor should, at that point, emerge from her sterile existence with wings full-spread, and give herself over to be captured, pinned, mounted, and displayed as the perfect specimen of womanhood. But, as such, the aging narrator asks, years after the loss of her lover:

¡Qué importa que mi cuerpo se marchite, si conoció el amor! Y qué importa que los años pasen, todos iguales. Yo tuve una hermosa aventura, una vez. . . Tan sólo con un recuerdo se puede soportar una larga vida de tedio" (63)

But if one adventure was enough, what would we make of the latter two-thirds of Bombal's narrative?

Bombal herself questioned the extent of the feminine quest in her second novel, *La amortajada* (*The Shrouded Woman*, 1938). She says in that novel:

Why, why is woman's nature such that a man must always be the center of her life? Men succeed in applying their passion to other things. But women's passion is to brood over a love pain in an orderly house, surrounded by an unfinished tapestry. (250)

The unfinished tapestry is an allusion to Penelope who, to keep her house "in order" until Odysseus' return, wove the shroud of her father-in-law all day and unwove it all night. In effect, however, the shroud is her own as she is cocooned waiting for the fulfillment of

her husband's quest. The narrator of *La última niebla*, is the subject of the protagonist's outer search is the completion of the tapestry—her own quest. The encounter with her lover, however, is only the catalyst for the protagonist's awakening from the state of dormancy that has been imposed on her through her marriage. Lucía Guerra Cunningham identifies this “lover's motif” as a device employed by Bombal to map the interior search of the protagonist:

The lover motif creates a metaphor of vitality: His body radiates luminosity and warmth; his embrace evokes the vital movement of the sea. The real or imaginary fulfillment of repressed instincts is, in essence, an attempt to reaffirm life and to overcome the moral restrictions of marriage, defined in the novel as ‘life in death.’ (44)

The protagonist's drive to discover the identity of her lover represents her desire to draw for herself a boundary between her outer and her inner realities. Like Psyche, who was not allowed to look upon her lover, Bombal's narrator in *La última niebla* finds only tangled threads in the dubitable evidence of his actual existence, however. She fails, therefore, to unravel and thus escape the threads that bind her within her own cocoon. One must remember, however, that the culmination of the quest of Bombal's protagonist takes place in daylight, in the arid world outside the watery realm of the novel's title. The scene where the narrator is intimidated and shamed by Regina's lover reminds us that this is a world hostile to her adventure, a world of sight where her physical plainness cancels her worth. As is shown by Regina's death, a life based on a woman's desirability loses its sustaining power if love fails. Such a loss leaves nothing to the questor.

The real *animus* for which her searching Psyche quests is her own femininity, but Bombal sublimates that desire by disguising the quest as heterosexual. The ambiguous ending--the narrator is left unsure whether her adventure was real or a dream--precludes the censure of her story as one that promotes adultery. The death of Regina, the unfaithful wife of Daniel's brother, seems to affirm Bombal's compliance with society's standards. But those events take place in the daylight world of the protagonist. Bombal's real story is played out in the nebulous realm of water. The protagonist's real search is internal, discovering her own body as the form in which she has previously perceived to be herself dissolves into the water of the pond. There she touches and delights in the rediscovery of her own body, not in the refraction of daylight, but according to her touch. It is important to note that it is by touch, not sight, that her blind lover, her Eros, knows her. Her desire to forsake the definition of herself as mandated by outward reality is mirrored in her dream adventure. Her self-eroticism is displaced by the form of her lover. Her desire for him is her desire for the "other" of herself, the form that she has never known in daylight reality, her own feminine self.

It is necessary to the narrator's psychic survival that her inner reality intrude into her outer existence. She attempts to draw her dream life into her dreary daily existence when she rises from her bed to record her memory on paper. She finds this impossible, saying: "*Escribo y rompo*" (64). A reflexive reading of this statement reveals the reason for the subversive tactics of the novel. The associations that Bombal makes in her narrative between the narrator's auto-eroticism, her dream adventure, and outer reality

mirrors her own purposes in writing her novel. In the same way that the sexual desires of the protagonist are displaced in a dream in order to be realized, Bombal had to hide the auto-erotic quest of her protagonist inside the accepted conventions of women's writing of her time. The reality of her writing situation forced her to first write ("escribo") of the protagonist's quest for the feminine, and then displace ("rompo") it so that it would be undiscoverable to the guardians of the patriarchy. It is only through displacement that Bombal, in her time, could give us what Adriana Rodenas has termed "*un mapa psiquico de la desdichada mujer*" (935).

Bombal's narrative, then, reveals both the problem of defining the feminine and a means to resolving that problem. Because Bombal's narrator cannot find contentment in the sexual and social roles assigned her in the outer reality, she turns her energies to an inward search. In the privacy of her bath, she discovers that the most immediate, seemingly "readable" part of herself, her own body, no longer has a static form. Within a more fluid medium, she encounters a new vision of herself:

No me sabía tan blanca y tan hermosa. El agua alarga mis formas, que toman proporciones irreales. Nunca me atreví antes a mirar mis senos; ahora los miro. Pequeños and redondos, parecen diminutas corolas suspendidas sobre el agua. (48)

In the passage, the narrator can only identify herself through analogy and comparison. First, she defines past experience as "the real" by naming her present perception as "unreal," thereby redefining the environment in which she exists. By comparing her breasts to blossoms which float upon the water, she is defining herself as a natural component of her new environment. In a corresponding manner, Bombal has placed the

terrain of her protagonist's adventure within a watery realm, the "unreal" plane of a dreamscape, of which the transforming ambiance of the pond is an analogy. This analogy extends into her adventure in the mist, which is an auto-erotic. The feminine quest of her narrator allows Bombal to locate the missing feminine, but in order for Bombal to bring it into the arid world of outer reality, she must first name it. In the same manner as the narrator makes an analogy between her breasts and water lilies, Bombal uses the outer-world scheme of heterosexual romance as an analogy for her questor's discovery of the "other" of herself. Analogy is the language by which Bombal is to "write" (*escribir*) her new reality of the feminine into the old ("real") world, which previously had no accommodation for it in language. However, because the old world may refuse to make the associations necessary to recognize the analogy, and/or because such recognition may be dangerous for the survival of the work, the analogy may become a displacement that tears or obliterates (*romper*) the record that the author makes of her discovery.

Bombal's work marks the entry of the feminine into the world of language, a necessary link in emergence of the feminine into *being*. Discovery is consciousness raised only if the discovery can find enunciation. Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" was perceived in her own time as a story of hysteria and fear, the identification of the source of that fear and the origin of the voice as that of the trapped feminine generally recognized as such only in the latter half of this century. The enunciation of the feminine is garbled--mad--incoherent to a world that does not have a ready image to which it may assign a bodiless voice. Bombal's imaging of the feminine, displaced though it may be,

poses a means of permanent escape from the tomb/chrysalis of suspended animation, an emergence from the unlit realm of loss-in-language. Bombal's imagery, though borrowed and accessible only by association, is a corporeal manifestation of what was perceivable in Gilman's narrative as only a amorphous haunting.

This linguistic embodiment determines the function of the chrysalis retrospectively--has it been the womb of the new creature or the tomb of the old? The survival of the feminine, from an allegorical view of Bombal's story, depends on whether the analogies she uses result in displacement through a masculine reading (romper), or creation through a feminist reading of her of her narrative. If the narrator and Regina, her sister-in-law, are juxtaposed in their quests to fulfill their feminine desires, it happens in the story that narrator's quest in the realm of the mist, the new environment in which she searches the object of her feminine desires, has sustained her when Regina's hope in a masculinized validation of her femininity has failed her. Regina, operating in the arid world of outer reality, finds only rejection by her male lovers, and, in despair, takes her own life.

The feminine victory, however, comes only in a retrospective reading of the story. The narrator, and by analogy Bombal, could not foresee the emergence of the feminine that has been actualized since its imaging in works such as *La última niebla*. The narrator bemoans her own entombment within the masculine regime as she views Regina's corpse:

*Daniel me toma del brazo y echa a andar con la mayor naturalidad.
Parece no haber dado ninguna importancia al incidente. Recuerdo la*

noche de nuestra boda. . . A su vez, él finge, ahora, una absoluta ignorancia de mi dolor. Tal vez sea mejor, pienso, lo sigo. Lo sigo para llevar a cabo una infinidad de frivolidades amenas; para llorar por costumbre y sonreír por deber. Lo sigo para vivir correctamente, para morir correctamente. algún día. (103)

Like the butterfly awakening inside the chrysalis, the narrator remembers her past, but in the darkness of her unbroken imprisonment, her awareness is more curse than blessing. In terms of the myth of Psyche, this awakening is a transgression against established order. Psyche was held captive by Eros' insistence that she never truly see him. She remained in the dark until her curiosity, like Pandora's, caused her to seek knowledge of her lover's form. The form of the feminine is discovered when authors feel their way inward, and by lighting the path they have tread through language, show others the way. If Psyche's search is, as Nor Hall describes it in Jungian terms, "feminine journey from blind instinctual attraction to a knowing individuated love" (22), then Bombal's protagonist is left in a dark mist. But in the daylight world, a small tremor is felt as the creature, like Bombal's narrator in the pond, moves to discover anew the body of her being--that form created by the forging of old images in to the forms of the new awareness she has of herself. In a discovery of the feminine, women may complete their quest.

Djuna Barnes: *Nightwood*

The night is a skin pulled over the head of day that the day may be in torment. --Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

The title of Djuna Barne's novel *Nightwood*, published in 1936, suggests the dark stagnation of the society examined by the narrative. In the novel, Barnes presents us with individuals who are enmeshed in a tangle of conflicting societal ideals. As a result of his inability to fit himself completely into any of the forms proposed by his society, the individual cannot discover a definition for himself because each ideal cancels out another. The tragedy of *Nightwood* is that the characters are aware of the impossibility of an absolute definition, but, being human, they fear the chaos of relinquishing the forms of identification that civilization has constructed as a basis for progress. In their entrapment by the acceptance of these forms, the characters are each lost in a dark forest, knowing the space in which they are entombed, but unable to deduce a form for themselves within it. The social constructs that encase them are like an unhatched egg or cocoon, and they, like the mass of formless protoplasm found inside an unseasoned chrysalis, seek the true form of themselves, the shell binding them away from such discovery outside of the darkness it imposes.

The narrator of Barnes' erratic tale is a Dr. Matthew O'Connor. He is a mad, raving, hermaphroditic Tiresias figure who serves as a sounding board for the other characters. If he is the narrative center of the story, then the evasive Robin Vote, an American woman, is the void center of the action. Robin never appears except as others

tell of her. Her husband, Felix, a descendant of the House of Hapsburg and a Jew of Italian descent, he is a cross section of nationalities and social class. To him Robin had born a mentally defective son, Guido, who of all the characters in the novel is the only one that is invariably happy. After the birth of her son, she leaves them both for Nora Flood, another American. She then deserts Nora for Jenny Petherbridge, a widow four times over. As the story proceeds, it looks to Jenny as if Robin will leave her as well. In the final chapter of the novel, however, Robin reverts to her natural self, represented by her assuming animal characteristics.

The central character of the novel, Robin, represents the state of dissolution that these character feel in their disillusionment. Stein's Rose, as essence without definition, is recreated by Barnes in the character (or non-character) of Robin who is the absent center of the novel. Like Stein's Melanctha, Robin "wanders," drifting like a somnambulist from Europe to America and back again, being temporarily "captured" by one lover or another, but escaping each in turn. Her character and background lack any distinction pertaining to nationality and class. Instead, she possesses a "primitive innocence" that defies association with time and place. She is both young and old, in spite of her age, and her appearance and sexual preference defy definition by gender. Her definition in the novel is Protean, changing each time she touches some part of humanity, and in this sense her form is is much like that which Bombal's protagonist sees as she immerses herself in the pond, fluid and undefined. The difference between Bombal's purpose in presenting this undefined aspect of womanhood and Barnes'

purpose is that Barnes, through the image of Robin, shows the hopeful process of woman giving birth to herself by defining herself in writing. This process is one that Bombal could not have hope for as is proven by her final proposal in *La última niebla*. Bombal's character shows that she is resigned to her lost state when she says : "*Lo sigo para vivir correctamente, para morir correctamente. algún día*" (103). She will continue to be entrapped in the a chrysalis state. However, Barnes proposes, through the bird imagery found in the novel, that the undefined essence that is represented in the character of Robin will emerge from its eggshell by proposing a new definition for itself. Through its emergence, this essence, which through the homoerotic emphasis found in the novel, will reclaim territory that has been lost to view in the mounting overgrowth of Western Civilization.

The characters in the novel who are irresistibly drawn to Robin are those individuals whose identity (definition) history and heredity have "canceled out." Robin is the mirror of their dissolute state, and, in this state, they are eager to "dress" her in the identification that they most desire for themselves. The attraction of these characters of the novel to Robin is ambivalent: she is both all-encompassing of what they desire in themselves, and yet "vacuous," holding no identification, being undefined in herself. The other characters attempt to take possession of Robin as they come to sense the falsity of the historic and cultural definition of themselves. Mairéad Hanrahan writes:

The novel indeed revolves around painful involvement in the sense of an agonized participation in life (sorrow) as well as in that of a circuitous and radical impossibility to be simple (confusion). Sorrow and confusion are to be encountered at every level of this book (characters, author,

language, etc.); they are linked inevitably with being alive, with the search for a form that being alive entails. Thus the importance of the reoccurrence [sic] of the word 'predicament': being human is a predicament, a painful ('sticky') situation where no turning or particular direction is indicated, where no outlet is possible. (84)

The action of the novel, then, is a result of the conflict between the characters' desire for freedom from cultural and historic restraints (essence), and the inherent human need for stability and form (being).

The characters of the novel simultaneously fear and are drawn to this lack. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Kenneth Burke, in his 1966 examination of *Nightwood*, describes Robin as an "unmoved mover." In a stance typical of sociological leanings, Burke obviously relates the "undoing" of definition that takes place in the lives of the characters as decadence, but admits that such movement, as further defined by the Doctor's lamentations, is an unconscious attempt to throw off the suffocating weight of cultural identification. He says:

The terministic basis of the development is indicated in the titles of the first and seventh chapters: "Bow Down" and "Go Down, Matthew." The process is completed by stylistic devices and an enigmatic conclusion designed to make the plot seem absolute, and to present the lamentations much as though this were the "primal" story of all mankind. (335)

While Burke may see the movement of the entire novel as "a kind of 'transcendence downward'" (335), the words of its narrator, Dr. O'Connor, suggest that the cumulative effect of historic recollection itself obliterates any interpretation that it proposes as a definition for itself. Such is the effect of too much history. The Doctor states: "We don't rise to heights, we are eaten away to them." Modern man may envision himself as being

at the top of a mountain, the view from which defines him as modern man, but Barnes' novel illustrates the notion that the view from this precipice dispels his illusion of identity.

The bird *motif* suggests that all the characters except Robin are as grounded birds, tethered, molting, or dying because of their insistence on defining themselves through lineage, nationality, or sexuality. Robin's husband, Felix, was born on a bed under a "valance stamped with the bifurcated wings of the House of Hapsburg, the feather coverlet an envelope of satin" (1). His mother, Hedvig, is pictured as strong and aristocratic with a "goose-step" of a stride, a feather in her hat, full-bosomed, and, in her pregnancy, she "seemed to be expecting a bird" (6). His father is a commoner of Jewish and Italian descent. Felix's perception of his mixed heritage tethers his aspirations to nobility by forcing him to realize that his "title" of Baron has no real substance. Barnes points out that Hedvig appeared the Baroness only because she believed herself to be one, "as a soldier 'believes' a command. . . . Hedvig had become a Baroness without question" (5). Felix could not believe the same about himself in the face of the conflicts that culture placed upon his mixed heritage. Such representations of the artificial nature of "labels" typify the portrayal that the novel gives to people's obsession with definition.

Jenny Petherbridge (the verbal association of her name with "feather" is quite unavoidable) imitates the actions of the cowbird in her appropriation of secondhand belongings. The chapter that Barnes devotes to her is named "The Squatter." Hanrahan interprets Jenny's behavior to indicate that she is so "totally devoid of a sense of herself,

she appropriates anything of importance to someone else” (89) Unlike Felix, who claims the legacy of a titled ancestry, Jenny has no fund of her own from which to draw an identity for herself. Edward Gunn, in his article “Myth and Style in Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*,” compares Jenny’s search for identity to that of Felix:

As Felix represents man unwilling and unable to alter, accept, or forego his past and thus unable to alter his fate, Jenny represents man’s inability really to know abstractions, for they are formless and man is bound by form. (549)

Together, these two characters explain the cause and effect of culture upon the individual. Considered together, their idiosyncrasies suggest that the desire for form prompts the individual to appropriate an identity endowed with prestige by the culture. Felix appropriates his values diachronically, as determined historically and by pedigree. Jenny, on the other hand, adopts the values of her personal ambiance--a synchronic appropriation. They both seek identity for themselves in much the same way as Jeff, in Stein’s “Melantha,” derives meaning from events. Identity is self-definition. In the case of Barnes’ characters, the appropriations the characters make for their own identification are so weighty and conflicting that the character cannot extricate himself from the muddle, and, yet, each cannot find an indisputable definition of himself within it.

For the above stated reason, Felix and Jenny are grounded in their quest for personal identity (form) by entanglement in the cross of the cultural myths that inform (and confuse) their existence. Doctor O’Connor condemns their desire for definition because it is the cause for their suffering. This condemnation becomes clear when the doctor encounters an ex-priest who himself expresses his desire for a form. The ex-priest

acknowledges his confusion when he says that he wants "to know what is what." The doctor responds in an exasperated tone:

Well then, that's why you are where you are now, right down in the mud without a feather to fly with, like the Ducks in Golden Gate park --the largest park in captivity-- everybody with their damnable kindness having fed them all year round to their ruin because when it comes time for their going south they are all a bitter consternation, being too fat and heavy to rise off the water, and, my god, how they flop and struggle all over the park in autumn, crying and tearing their hair out because their nature is weighted down with bread and their migration stopped by crumbs. (160-161)

The image of the grounded birds in the Doctor's tirade is central to all the bird imagery in the novel. The life of birds is dependent on their ability to move themselves, to change their environment according to their needs, to migrate.

The character of Nora Flood is emblematic of the other side of the tension Barnes presents between definition (existence) and freedom (essence). Edward Gunn points out that Nora's existence is outside of the "durational" or linear time that is comprised within the space of the novel, because her perception of events is dependent upon sensation tied to associations she makes to her personal past. Like the other characters, Nora "creates" Robin for the Doctor from her memory. Memory is limiting because it defines. This creation of Robin by Nora suggests that Robin is limited by the perceptions of those who "remember" her through their account to the doctor. In fact, she never appears in the novel except as someone else's perception of her. Robin is examined only in the continuous present of the different characters who think of her. Taken separately, their accounts define her, but define her differently according to their

own desires. Their opposing impressions, however, serve to cancel her out with one another so that within the durational time of the novel, she, in fact, does not exist at all. During the time of the characters' recollections, then, she exists (*is* as opposed to *becomes*) only as the absence of definition. The dynamics involved in the definition of Robin (or lack of it) in the novel mirrors the dynamics involved in cultural or *mythic* identification.

Robin's importance to the novel is that her presence (or absence) brings for the reader a sense of dissolution (as it does for Doctor O'Connor, the only dynamic character of the novel). According to Jungian psychology, this state of dissolution constitutes a mythic chaos. Edward Gunn explains the rendering of chaos in the novel as follows:

The novel draws the structure of its conflict from a conception of the mind in tension; historically and individually created in unknown, unknowable circumstances akin to concepts of Dionysan darkness, chaos, and formlessness, yet shaped unconsciously by a fusion of actual memory and given religious-cultural myth. (547)

It is from this chaos, Gunn points out, that rebirth takes place. In order to assume a new form, or definition, all previous form must be lost. As the absent center of all the other characters' concerns, Robin constitutes the essence from which each attempts to give birth to herself. Her name itself suggests her power of freedom from the forms that have weighted down their existence. As Gunn points out, in regard to Jungian theory, Robin is a "premythic" mother figure, a monolith for existence, and free of archetypal association. The robin is a migrating bird, and Robin is in constant migration from the

Old World to the New and back again. Her last name is Vote, a word that denotes the power to decide, the power (freedom) to effect a new form. Gunn observes:

Robin represents the power of unified existence, undifferentiated consciousness that man became separated from when he ceased being totally a beast, and individually when he was separated psychologically from his mother. If Felix and Robin are saddled with a myth they cannot achieve, [sic] Robin embodies that achievement but without a myth, a way of expressing and assuming that power. Hence she takes on a cosmic role: the animal-divine, the child-saviour, but also man's inability to achieve union with these. (550)

Thus, as Gunn also discerns, the characters' wish to possess Robin represents their (man's) desire to reach into this premythic time in order to recreate themselves.

Dr. O'Connor is the character who, in observance of the gravitational pull that Robin has on the other characters, realizes that their unwillingness to relinquish cultural and personal preoccupations causes their suffering. Immediately preceding his symbolic crucifixion, the Doctor declares:

. . . what I've done and what I've not done all goes back to that--to be recognized a gem should lie in a wide open field; but I'm all aglitter in the underbrush! If you don't want to suffer you should tear yourself apart. Were not the several parts of Caroline of Hapsburg put in three utterly obvious piles? . . . Saved by separation. But I'm all in one piece! Oh, the new moon! . . . When will she come riding? (164)

His imagistic crucifixion is his abdication of the roles that western culture has prescribed for him and the other characters in the novel. After this crucifixion, both the dynamics of cultural definition as well as the possibility for rebirth in a new form are imaged in the concluding chapter of the novel. In the chapel, Robin assumes the role played by Nora's

dog as Nora is cast in the role of the Virgin Mary, the suffering creator of a divine consciousness (Gunn 554).

The possibility for recreation for the characters, then, is made possible by disassociation that is effected in the novel by their conflicting definitions. Other techniques of the novel reduce the conventions of narrative writing to a degree of chaos as well: its non-linear movement within a greater linearity, the use of an unreliable narrator who confounds the present with references to both the fictive and “real” past, and the juxtaposing of the colloquial with the eloquent and the mundane with the cosmic. Such dissolution of narrative form suggests that Barnes is attempting to recreate writing by freeing it from the conventions that have thus far kept other possible forms unknown and unknowable. If Robin represents the “unmoved mover” of the outer events of the novel, she would be likewise representative as the absent center in a metafictional interpretation as well, and her absence from the events of the novel suggests that she would represent the source of the “unknowable” as it concerns narrative representation.

Though Robin is designated as female in the work, her physical description blurs the boundaries between genders. The same is true of all the characters of the novel, either in their person, their sexual practices, or their heritage. Frann Michel, in her article, “Displacing Castration: *Nightwood*, *Ladies Almanac*, and Feminine Writing,” suggests that these blurred boundaries are present in the character of the narrative as well, noting that the outermost style and structure of the work is true to convention while renegade narrative practices, such as those described in the previous paragraph, are

rampant within those frameworks. In paralleling the metafictional significance of the novel with the mythic interpretation already examined, we may conclude that the novel suggests that unaffected writing is a-sexual. It is important to note, however, that the narrator of the work, Dr. O'Connor, in spite of his asexual or third-sex nature, is designated as male. It is HE who speaks in the novel. It is Robin who is silent until the final chapter, at which time she speaks only in a voice that *seems* to be that of a dog, and yet frightens the dog. Michel insists that certain forms of writing, which may be designated as "feminine" only because of their difference from accepted modes of discourse, are unassimilated to the masculine order of discourse. By labeling "difference" as "feminine," such alternate forms are denied entrance into that order. Michel points out that while Robin is preoedipal in her disposition, she is "castrated" (gendered) by the context of her existence in Western culture. Barnes reverses this castration in the novel by the "re-creation" of forms previously lost to culture. That Robin's ("Woman's") absence is acknowledged in language constitutes the creation of her. It is in this manner that Barnes inserted the feminine into discourse, and, yet, because Barnes operates within the framework of masculine discourse, the transgression passed unnoticed.

Mairéad Hanrahan acknowledges the metafictional implications in the novel, identifying Frau Mann as a symbol of the writer, and her trapeze as symbolic of the type of writing that has been outside the realm of culturally determined conventionality. Like Robin, Frau Mann's body is as sexless as that of a doll, her attributes defined only by

her costume. Frau Mann, at her work, creates the illusion that her body and her art are the same. Her identity appears to be enmeshed in the performance of her art, that art indeterminate of affectation. By creating such an illusion, her expression is timeless, ageless, and genderless. Hanrahan explains:

The trapeze can be read as a metaphor for writing and, as Frau Mann becomes "herself" through the abdication of her body to her art, so Djuna Barnes hopes to gain some "property," some identity, even if it must be that of no sexual identity. For the only property possible is the "property of no man. . . ." (85)

Like Frau Mann, Robin is also described as timeless ageless and genderless, and her migrations from Europe to the states and back again imitates Frau Mann's backward and forward movement on the trapeze. In terms of writing, both women's qualities represent an escape from stigmatization. This stigmatization forces a re-definition of the form which includes the previously unclaimed property as part of itself.

Thus, *Nightwood* demonstrates a means of transcendence from one image to another. Djuna Barnes claims the middle ground between definition and the return to definition, the place where Stein's Rose no longer "becomes," but simply "is." That middle ground must then be an added consideration to the redefinition of the image. Hanrahan writes: "Writing, the creation of images, can 'fix,' can create something definite from the 'space between,' where being human is itself in question, where being human is a question of holes" (94). By inserting the "feminine" into the cultural definition of "writing," Djuna Barnes began an emergence of the feminine from the murky recesses of its cocoon. This small break would allow just a beam of light, but

enough to guide later writers in their attempt to enlarge the aperture. The beam became the ray of hope that Bombal's protagonist, some thirty years before, had not been able to predict for herself.

Clarice Lispector: *Family Ties*

Humanity is male and men define woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . . . She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with her; she is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the absolute--she is the other. (de Beauvoir xviii-xix)

The fiction of Clarice Lispector emphasizes regression and dissolution as necessary to the transformation that takes place in metamorphosis. Through her work, Lispector suggests that, like the constant return of Gertrude Stein's rose to its definition, a definition may be escapable, but escape is seldom accomplished. Each of Lispector's protagonists intuit or momentarily realize the limitations that her social definition imposes on her existence. As a result of this realization, he or she fears the loss of sensibility inherent within the extrication of essence from form. The triumph of Lispector's characters is not in escape from definition, but merely in their courage to "become," to continue on, in face of the realization. Lispector's *The Passion According to G. H.* may serve as an anchor to Lispector's sanctification of such acceptance. In *Passion*, Lispector's protagonist takes communion from the body of a squashed cockroach in a tribute to her oneness with it. Just as the larvae within a cocoon must

dissolve into an unformed mass before her former components can be reconcocted into the creature that will eventually emerge, the individual must admit her ultimate “nothingness” in existentialist reality in order to conceive of the real nature of her own existence. This existential reality is the limbo from which meaningful life is resurrected. By accepting oneness with it, the individual acts in her awareness by making a return to her “definition.” The choice she makes her autonomous, a creature changed through her construction of herself.

Lispector suggests through her narratives that such autonomy is denied to both genders by the patriarchal system because the roles assigned differentiate each gender from the single essence from which they originate. Clarice Lispector’s *Family Ties* (1961) is collection of stories which have the common theme of the discovery of essence, and each exposes the anguish that the discoverer undergoes as she or he realizes the loss he suffers in definition. Though each story proves to the reader that change is not a viable option for the individual, *Family Ties*, as a collection, exposes the social dynamics involved in the individual’s social stasis and thus suggests that it is only through a dissolution of societal construction that reclamation and redefinition can take place.

Each narrative in *Family Ties*, then, represents an individual’s quest for autonomy. The first step in the quest is a sojourn into the territory of the unknown. Such freedom may be perceived as a Sartre-like “nothingness” which invokes “la Nausée”--- illness or vertigo resulting from loss of orientation (18). In the stories in this collection, such disorientation results from some occurrence or condition which enhances the

subject's sensitivity to his surroundings to the extent that category boundaries are blurred. The subject's perceptions are recorded in terms of a gradual regression from a perceived ordered "reality" to a state of dissolution where he cannot separate his own identity from those of his surroundings. In a state of oneness with all creation, he senses the potential for himself that unformed existence holds, a realization that evokes both apathy and fear in the individual. Those emotions become his incentive to react to his newly perceived environment.

The regression from present reality into a state of dissolution that prevails in the plot of many of Lispector's stories is central to "The Daydreams of a Drunk Woman." Appropriate to the study of the process of the emergence of the feminine, which considers regression and dissolution as primary steps in the scheme of new birth, "The Daydreams of a Drunk Woman" is situated as the first story in Lispector's collection, *Family Ties*. Like the protagonists of many of Lispector's fictions, the main character of "Daydreams," Maria Quiteria, is a housewife of the privileged class. On a day that she is to be alone, her personhood first fragments as the commuter train shakes her apartment. Afterward, that fragmentation is reflected in the "sometimes dark, sometimes luminous" trifold mirrors in which the original Maria Quiteria carries on a conversation with her other three interconnected selves. Her "conversation" reveals the desire to gain a new identity:

"Hey, there, guess who came to see me today?" she mused as a feasible and interesting topic of conversation. "No idea, tell me," those eyes asked her with a gallant smile, those sad eyes set in one of those pale faces, that

make one feel so uncomfortable. "Maria Quiteria, My dear!. . .You!". . . .
How boring! (28)

Maria Quiteria's wishful vision is of herself as young and sensuous. She sees her potential in her fragmented selves as a background to the "boring" life that she lives. She surrenders to apathy in the face of that awareness and, thus, sinks into the "succulence" of her room, choosing sleep over household responsibilities.

Lispector inserts a detail at this point in her story that is important to the idea of redefinition that she proposes through the collection. When Maria is not compliant with her role of wife and mother, her surprised husband refuses to accept her contentiousness as a sign of unhappiness. Like the husband of the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper," he is convinced, that her behavior is an aberration in her existence--an "illness": "What the devil's the matter with you? . . . You're ill, my girl" (29). Such deference typifies the response of society to any individual who seeks to reject her assigned role: the change is ignored on the basis of its anomaly. Maria Quiteria herself accepts her husband's assessment of the situation as flattery, as if, perhaps, he excuses her from condemnation because of her previously impeccable record for self-containment. The hardship that the individual who is called to change suffers is a societal ostracism. Mental or physical illness becomes, for society, the motivation for the anomaly rather than a change in the individual's definition. For this reason, any anomaly can be conveniently ignored, with the individual that exhibits the change being deemed out of touch with reality. With "reality" being only what society chooses it to be, the status quo remains firm. Excused

from her responsibility for rectitude, Maria drifts at her leisure away from her assigned port, an indulgence that promotes her growing disorientation.

Time becomes blurred for the reader as temporal indicators surge and wane throughout the story. For the reader, this loss of a sense of time mimics Maria's disorientation. Having regressed in her lethargy to a state outside "normalcy," Maria feels herself growing to encompass everything around her. Her disappearing hearing indicates that she is becoming de-sensitized. Her state of dissolution is defined as a quest when she thinks: "Whosoever found, searched" (29). In this preliminary stage of her search, her desire for fulfillment is tokenized as a desire for a temporary fulfillment through an extramarital affair. As she awakes to reality in the evening, she is immediately gripped with guilt for her lapse, projecting such feelings on failing to define herself as wife and mother. She chastises herself: "God, I've lost my self-respect, I have! My day for washing and darning socks. . . . What a lazy bitch you've turned out to be!" (30) Her condemnation, however, introduces the episode which embodies her actual search--an odyssey into an adventure that reveals the sensuality that has been stifled in her marriage. Through a drunken state, she travels through a lapse in time and sensibility to a dinner with her husband and a rich businessman at a fancy restaurant. In her memory of the occasion, all her sensibilities are increased until she experiences a nausea at the convergence of all the sights and scents that assail her. A fusion takes place among all the elements of her existence until she even associates her own flesh with the "sweetness" of the lobster on her plate. That image then metamorphoses to a more

reprehensible association of herself with that of her birth sign, the scorpion. The switch in identification provides an image for the discrepancy she perceives between the sensuous creature she desires to be and the life that she has accepted as the mundane wife of a "ridiculous" businessman.

It is at the point of this "stinging" revelation that Maria refuses to move further into her quest. It is not guilt that stops her, but the fear of losing her self-respect. She assumes the critical voice of her own society as she projects her own forbidden desires onto a woman at another table. In truth, she envies the woman for her chic dress, high-class aura, and for the lover at her side. Lispector says:

[Maria's] eyes once more settled on that female whom she had instantly detested the moment she had entered the room. Upon arriving, she had spotted her seated at a table accompanied by a man and all dolled up in a hat and jewelry, glittering like a false coin, all coy and refined. What a fine hat she was wearing! . . . Bet you anything she isn't even married for all that pious look on her face . . . and that fine hat stuck on her head. A fat lot of good her hypocrisy would do her, and she had better watch out in case her airs and graces proved her undoing! . . . And no doubt, for all her fine hats, she was nothing more than a fishwife trying to pass herself off as a duchess. (33)

The projection marks the point in Maria's quest where fear of social ostracism outweighs the attraction for change that compels her. Maria's refusal to sink further into her inner sensibilities truncates her self-examination. Instead of searching further for the reason for her unhappiness, she makes herself believe that her misery results from discontent itself, and faults herself for not being happy. She thwarts this discontentment through the scorn she projects on the other woman in her contentious, yet self-referencing thoughts: "I know what you need , my beauty, you and your sallow boyfriend. . . . Shameless sluts

like you are only asking for a good, hard slap on the face” (34). These words signal her return to patriarchal complicity with its misogynist view of woman as the sole sinner in licentiousness. Her words show that, though she longs to escape her role, she finds herself fixed in her role by the patriarchal socialization with which she has been inculcated. Because no change is made in her outer life, she has not completed the “return” phase of the conventional quest pattern.

But, what is Lispector’s point in presenting the quest if nothing is accomplished? In Lispector’s stories, the insight that her characters acquire in their quest allows them to readjust the view that they have of themselves and the precarious equilibrium they maintain between order and chaos. At the moment when they are whisked away from reality into dissolution, they are on the brink of complete apathy. It is as if they, like Ophelia in *Hamlet*, would be pulled down by the weight of living, drowned without deliberation. The awareness they experience helps them to alter the views they have of themselves and spurs them on to an active perseverance of life, even if they may not have the option to prevail. Maria Quiteria remembers during her hangover that her husband's protector flirted with her, and she had surrendered to some amount of coquetry. Though her pleasure in the remembrance is based on an image than is only a token of her actual desires, it still satisfies Maria’s need to modify the image she has of herself to the extent that she resolves to exert herself in the performance of her role as wife and mother. This resolve to act comes because sweetness of the adventure makes her more intensely aware of her unhappiness. She thinks:

Certain things were good because they were almost nauseating . . . the noise like that of an elevator in her blood, while her husband lay snoring at her side . . . her chubby little children sleeping in the other room, the little villains. Ah, what's wrong with me! she wondered desperately. . . . (36)

Maria's first fragmentation is a result of boredom, an apathy which loosens the ties of family life by which she is anchored to an ordered existence. Such freedom induces a quest, the result of which is an awareness of the discrepancy between the questor's potential and her definition. Lispector's characters never achieve a re-definition because of society's restrictions on the terms of their existence, and, as a result, they turn and turn again in a pre-defined existence rather than making a return from their quest. While their stasis is assured in their outer lives, however, the tension their quest causes them, at least, to awaken to their life predicaments. Though change is not outwardly apparent in her characters (indeed, it would not be recognized even if it were made as will be seen), their awareness demands a response, a choice not apparent before the quest. Their resolve adds dignity to their existence since they willfully persevere in life in spite of the knowledge of their limitations.

Action, then, is the result of the human need to read meaning into nothingness. It is because humans insist on this reading that they suffer. Lispector's collection seems to suggest that human suffering is a result of wrenching order out of chaos, a Sartrean message that Djuna Barnes had previously promoted in her *Nightwood*. Lispector's story, "Preciousness" seeks to exemplify how such "wrenching" destroys individual autonomy. In that narrative, a fifteen year-old girl knows she is not attractive and so attempts to remain invisible on her way to school, protecting a "preciousness" that

remains hidden inside her. She is, nonetheless, on this occasion, "manhandled" by two young men. She is convinced that it is because her shoes make so much noise that they call attention to her. Lispector thus shows us that her character is aware of the influence of social perception on her own self concept. Her initiation is the visibility of her womanhood (i.e., her social role as a female), the announcement of which left her "preciousness" exposed and vulnerable to alienation. Her defiance to "growing up" is her refusal to give up her sense of autonomy to gender classification. Because of the lack of language to "name" her sense of autonomy, she can only convey its existence through the description of her emotional response to it--"preciousness." The loss of that "preciousness" is the initiation --the definition--she suffers in a world which is hostile and deprecatory to that autonomy that only innocence can retain. Her autonomy exists only in the lack of the assignment of a stereotyped, gender-based role through which obligatory ties are established. She ceases to be precious when she can no longer deny the sense of "difference" that is thrust upon her. In that reification of difference, which is an act of violence upon the psyche, she discovers her isolation and mourns the loss of self.

Giovanni Pontiero, in the introduction to his translation of *Family Ties*, states that Clarice Lispector "subscribes to the idea that acts alone are important --and isolation and violence become the two salient features of human experience"(19). Ironically, our actions bind us to communal obligation, and, yet, they simultaneously bind us away from a sense of communal experience. Pontiero points out that the title, *Family Ties*,

calls attention to the presentation of these ambiguities within Clarice Lispector's fiction. He says: "*Ties* refers both to the constraints and ties of human relations as well as ties that enmesh one in nets of isolation" (19). In the case of women, this net is the expectation of society that they become the absent center of its culture, the self-denying, self-denigrating engine of the Patriarchal economy. The net of maternal responsibility becomes a web with the increase of family responsibilities. It encrusts her sense of self, her "preciousness," inside an ever-thickening tangle which draws itself tighter around her psyche, and finally extinguishes any spark of autonomy found there. Defined by "love"--love of home, children, husband --she is disseminated as she is claimed as dutiful wife, selfless mother, careful homemaker, and community servant. She becomes the weft and warp of society, but her own desires are buried deep inside the cocoon she weaves out of the fabric of herself.

Lispector portrays the entombment, or cocooning, of a woman's spirit inside her societal role in the story "Love." In it, a woman who has fulfilled her "destiny" with husband and children has rechanneled her artistic aspirations into housekeeping and the increasing responsibilities of motherhood. A motif of soft-dark roots represent her nurturing others in that role:

Deep down, Anna had always found it necessary to feel the firm roots of things. And this was what a home had surprisingly provided. Through tortuous paths, she had achieved a woman's destiny, with the surprise of conforming to it almost as if she had invented that destiny herself. (38)

In compliance with a cocoon motif, the "roots" that Anna appreciates also bind her to the responsibilities that they embrace. The roots make her static, and envelop her in the

cocoon-like enclosure of her home. As her feelings and her living situation is described, the reader senses the tightening and thickening of the web which diminishes the personal space referred to as her “artistic aspirations”:

Anna had three nice children. . . . they were demanding more and more of her time. The kitchen after all was spacious with its old stove that made explosive noises. The heat was oppressive in the apartment, which they were paying off in installments. . . . She had planted the seeds she held in her hand, no others, but only those. They were growing into trees. Her brisk conversations with the electricity man were growing, her children were growing, the table was growing with food, her husband arriving with the newspapers and smiling with hunger. . . . Meanwhile she felt herself more solid than ever, her body become a little thicker (38)

The spacious kitchen with the exploding stove images Anna’s spirit and potentiality. The anxiety comes to her when she momentarily ceases to feverishly expend the “life current” that sustains the “growing trees” of the domestic web that entwines her--when she ceases to play host to the parasitic demands made on her by her family and her culture. The explosions in her stove are the heat of her own desires enclosed within the ever-tightening cocoon of the kitchen, her small space within the home. It is at quiet, unhurried moments that she feels the suffocation that is taking place:

Anna tranquilly put her small, strong hand, her life current, into everything. Certain times of the afternoon struck her as being critical. At a certain hour of the afternoon the trees she had planted laughed at her. And when nothing more required her strength, she became anxious. (38)

The heat generated by repression threatens to explode at these times when her daily obligations lull, leaving her time to “feel.” It is at one such time that her identification with a blind man chewing gum brings her to a recognition of the mechanical life that she lives. That awareness, born of her compassion for the blind man, shakes her from her

complacency and disrupts her world. She glimpses the fragility of existence behind her own seeming security. As in the case of Maria Quiteria, Anna's reaction to such awareness is pleasure, but mixed with "suffering and alarm." In this acute sensitivity, she regresses to a state of dissolution as her being is absorbed by nature, the *prima materia* of creation, the essence of which she perceives as equivalent to decay because its nature opposes the rigid forms wrought by "civilization." Like Maria Quiteria, as well, Anna reacts with disgust and fascination to such identification by "resistance that precedes surrender" (43). Such richness in nature contrasts with the sterility of her own life. She comes to understand that it is the rigidity of her own ordered world that has taken away the sight of the blind man, and she feels that she is both perpetrator and victim:

She no longer knew if she was on the side of the blind man or of the thick plants. The man little by little had moved away, and in her torment she appeared to have passed over to the side of those who had injured his eyes. The botanical garden, tranquil and high, had been a revelation. . . . It was easier to be a saint than a person!

In spite of the intensity of life that she finds in the natural world and that that appeals to her inner spirit, Anna runs back to the "normalcy" that she has carved for herself in the civilized world. She cannot face the fatalism she finds in nature, and so she returns to her former world of pretended order. The security of her husband and household make her feel removed from "the danger of living."

Taken individually, each of the stories in *Family Ties* tells of a failed quest such as Anna's because, as A. M. Wheeler points out, none of Lispector's characters makes a "return" from the quest each one endeavors to make:

Indeed, the stories in Lispector's *Family Ties* primarily relate the struggle of women to realize themselves as subjects and to escape their roles as objects. Few of them successfully make this break, but, because their failure usually involves a return to the traditional roles of wife and mother, their defeat has more often been interpreted as victory. (125)

From these words, it is obvious that Wheeler does not consider the return to social "normalcy" as a victory, but rather as a defeat. These characters' return to their previous societal expectations, or definition, precludes the possibility for change for not only the individual, but for the whole of society as well, since change must be perceived socially to be real. Though Wheeler's interpretation in the given remark is specific to the women characters that Lispector portrays in her fiction, the same may also be said of the men in her stories. They too are doomed to the role cast upon them by society. As individuals, these characters fail to effect autonomy for themselves. The message is that reification, a re-defining of self, is impossible because humans have not developed terms outside their accepted domains to express that which the patriarchy forbids.

As a collection, however, *Family Ties* can be seen as Lispector's proposal of a means for claiming autonomy through the embodiment of her characters' discoveries in non-human imagery. It is only through the plant and animal imagery plotted in the collection of *Family Ties* that the successful quest can be discovered. Lispector's attempt to provide an image to human predicaments that are not otherwise admissible in human

terms has already been seen in Maria Quiteria's identification with a stinging scorpion and Anna's identification with the blind man, whom she sees as fruit of the botanical garden. It is only in the manufacture of natural images in which they identify themselves that the characters can distinguish between essence and existence. And it is only in this awareness that individuals are able to find meaning in life. Wheeler's observations concerning subjects and objects imply that a choice can be made, but the stories in *Family Ties* suggest that, while the choice may be made by the individual, the realization of that change in a social context is next to inaccessible.

The choice between essence and existence that Lispector exemplifies in her stories is represented in a single image in "The Imitation of the Rose." The rose in this story is a symbol of the main character's divided self. The character, Laura, must choose between two opposing ideals of existence --that which society and religion impose upon her, and one which allows her personal, albeit not social, autonomy. Laura is a wife with a convent background. She has just returned to her home from a sanitarium where she has been in recovery from a nervous breakdown. She becomes obsessed with first a bouquet of roses and then with a single rose as she is caught between one desire to send all the roses to her sister-in-law and another desire to keep at least one of them herself. Throughout the story, her thoughts waver constantly between what others will think of her gesture of giving the roses away and what she herself truly desires.

The title of the story alludes to *The Imitation of Christ*, which presents an ideal of Christianity based on a generous spirit. The allusion may be broadened to include the

image of the beatific rose in Dante's *Paradiso*, where the icons of ideal womanhood are seated according to their faithfulness to the Christian cause. It is toward this ideal that Laura alternately aspires and recoils. These two sides to her nature, the one that dictates that she please society, and the other that prompts her to please herself, are represented by Lispector in her account of Laura's childhood response to a convent experience:

When they had given her *The Imitation of Christ* to read, with the zeal of a donkey she had read the book without understanding it, but may God forgive her, she had felt that anyone who imitated Christ would be lost--lost in the light, but dangerously lost. Christ was the worst temptation.
(55)

Like Anna in the story "Love," Laura also fears giving herself over to her inclination toward personal indulgence. She has resisted that temptation through obsessive regimentation to the demands of society and the church. In her adult life, she is constantly batted between desire and guilt. This pendulum-like movement between two extremes is like the movement of the trapeze in *Nightwood*. The swing of pendulum shows her desire to escape from convention, and yet she is anchored firmly by the dictates of her social role. Because of her compliance with her expected social role, she has lived for the perfectly construed marriage --an effort that, because it clashed so completely with her personal desires, had previously brought her to a mental collapse.

The roses become a symbol for both Laura's inner and outer life. Laura adores the roses for their seeming perfection, comparing them in that aspect to artificial roses, and yet, she senses the presence of genuine life just under the surface of their delicate blush:

They were a bouquet of perfect roses, several on the same stem. At some moment they had climbed with quick eagerness over each other but then,

their game over, they had become tranquilly immobilized. They were quite perfect roses in their minuteness, not quite open, and their pink hue was almost white. "They seem almost artificial," she uttered in surprise. They might give the impression of being white if they were completely open, but with the center petals curled in a bud, their color was concentrated and, as the lobe of an ear, one could sense the redness circulate inside them. (62)

Laura's observation of both the natural and the artificial beauty found in the roses is the event that begins her quest, the roses being the focal point of her ambiguous desires:

"How lovely they are," thought Laura, surprised. But without knowing why, she felt somewhat restrained and a little perplexed. Oh, nothing serious, it was only that such extreme beauty disturbed her. (62)

The roses simultaneously represent the genuine life of the psyche that Laura has denied herself in pursuit of the life defined by society's expectations of her as a woman. Laura's response to the roses, like the response of most of Lispector's protagonists to the event that ruptures outer reality and leads them to an inner quest, is one of both attraction and fear. She intuits that, because of her obsessive nature, giving in to her attraction to the roses would cause a total loss of control for her. She sees her attraction to the roses as a "risk" and a "warning." The attraction incites fear in her, tempting her into a state of self-indulgence that she forbids herself because society denies it to her as a woman.

The juxtaposing of Laura with her sister-in-law, Carlota, to whom Laura desires to send the flowers, constitutes Lispector's proposition for survival in a world which denies autonomy to its inhabitants. While Laura, as a child, obediently read the text for living (i.e., *The Imitation of Christ*) that the Sisters gave her, Carlota did not read it. Instead, she lied to the Sister, *saying* she had read it. In doing so, she "talks the talk" of social

compliance, while maintaining her own autonomy. Laura, who compares herself to a donkey, allows herself to be entrapped by social expectations. The plant-like description of the two women contrasts the nurture of their differing lifestyles. Laura repeatedly remembers that Carlota has green eyes, a physical trait that Laura associates with her character. Laura thinks of Carlota as “authoritarian and [having] practical goodness,” and is a bit scandalized that Carlota and her husband “treated each other as equals” (61). Carlota’s association with the color green in relation to the image of the rose indicates that she is thriving.

In contrast to the suggestion that Carlota has a more striking hair color, Laura is proud that she is “Chestnut-haired, as she obscurely felt a wife ought to be” (60). Laura seeks her husband’s approval in her own stunted stature, which she seems to feel is “right” in comparison to her husband’s taller, thinner form. Laura leads a life of deference, satisfied with, and even seeking, a place in the shadow in her relationship with society and her husband. The chestnut-haired Laura, with brown eyes, “large pale ears,” and “soft dark skin,” plans to wear a brown dress with a cream lace collar, the brown matching her eyes, to Carlota’s dinner party. The description of Laura’s attire finishes out the description of her as a withered, dying plant beside the robustness of the green-eyed Carlota, a survivor, “ambitious, and laughing heartily” (55). It is appropriate to the sterility of the life that she has chosen that Laura has been unable to bear children.

The life that Laura has striven to live is that of the artificial rose, an icon of perfection. Attaining it is an impossible quest--as impossible as the imitation of Christ--

and a lost cause that Laura pursues at the expense of her natural self. Carlota, on the other hand, models the compromise that Laura has been unable to make. Such a compromise would have allowed her to survive in a world hostile to the propagation of a feminine spirit. Ellen Douglass, in defining "The Imitation of the Rose" as a feminine quest, states: "Before female quest is regarded to be feminist, then, we must ask whether it speaks on behalf of women in patriarchy, or on behalf of patriarchy itself" (17). "The Imitation of the Rose" fulfills Douglass' requirement for definition as a feminist quest because of the joint characterization of Laura and Carlota imaged in the single rose. Laura is the inevitable martyr to the cause that Lispector pursues through her narrative. Laura makes a selfless sacrifice for/to Carlota by sending her the roses. Carlota is the survivor and the propagator for the future of the feminine. Laura's devastation in the loss of the roses, represents the loss that womanhood suffers in its deference to a submissive state in society. Laura is lost to oblivion, as all submissive women have been and must be, under patriarchy. Without the corresponding character of Carlota, Laura's lost state at the end of the story would support the patriarchy because it would mark the quest as hopeless. But Lispector's story of Laura's devastation at the realization of her lost state speaks to the cause of feminism. Laura's triumphant return is in the person of her alter ego, Carlota, to whom Laura wills the red life-force that she finds within tight buds of the roses. Laura's story, as the text of a female life wrongly lived, will become the "circulating blood in the lobe of the ear" of women who, like Carlota, insist on survival.

If essence is a source for redefinition, the reader of "The Imitation of Rose" images the false definition of woman in the artificiality of the "ideal" woman that Laura strives to be as opposed to the "budding" representative of autonomously defined womanhood of which Carlota is a promise. In this promise is the metamorphosis of the feminine psyche. The perceptions of the rose, that of past definition and future definition, meet in the single image of the rose. The rosebud, itself, then, represents essence, a fluid source that takes the shape of the container in which it is poured. It is lifeblood discoverable only through the emotion generated by looking into the abyss. In *Family Ties*, Lispector's protagonists, in an anguished response to the fear they suffer in dissolution, seek an image, a container, appropriate to their experience that will make their predicament understandable to them. Maria José Barbosa contends that language is at the heart of Lispector's characters' conflicts: "The characters investigate the feasibility of transgressing their own limitations. . . . Having to choose between language or remaining silent is the ultimate dilemma that Lispector's characters have to face" (327). It is only through the appropriation of a revealing image, then, that the characters in Lispector's stories move from the background of their existence, to the foreground of their own concerns so that they, and we, can examine their predicaments outside the context of a societal myth.

In order to place her characters into the foreground, to make each a subject rather than an object, Lispector uses animal imagery to represent a raw, emotional response that is not a pre-imaged part of civilized humanity. Laura, Anna, and Maria Quiteria cannot,

as humans, extract themselves from the myth that defines their humanness. Therefore, each cannot be a subject isolated from the background of social construct. Instead, Laura examines the possibilities of womanhood in the construct of the rose, Anna examines the fragile construction of her chosen world as she compares her life with the tragedy of the blind man whom she sees as the fruit of an unconfined garden, and Maria Quiteria's sees her self-scorn in the form of a stinging scorpion. As seen in these narratives, Lispector's non-human images represent unrationalized experience, emotion without the judgment that may qualify it. The result of this technique of subjectification can be seen in "The Chicken," which is prototypical in the collection for its representation of reification through animal imagery. In the narrative, a chicken intended for Sunday's lunch escapes and leads the father over field and rooftop. Finally, laying an egg saves her from the ax and gives her free run of the household. A. M. Wheeler explains how reification of the chicken takes place in the story:

In the opening of the story, the chicken is perceived by the family solely as an object. . . . This chicken's value is based solely on her physical character. . . . They see her as an individual entity only when she begins to behave in an unaccustomed manner, fleeing from slaughter to freedom on the roofs. Throughout the flight, she asserts her own being apart from the role the family has defined for her. . . . Just as Lispector's female characters are often condemned for their attempts to escape their conventional roles, the chicken in her flight for freedom seems not heroic but ridiculous. In spite of her absurdity, though, in flight the chicken is a Subject. In freeing herself from the family, she saves herself from being literally devoured to serve their needs. (126)

As Wheeler points out, though the chicken ultimately assumes its previous role in the household (as most of Lispector's characters reassume their normal role in society, as

well), the flight remains the high point of its life. Like women in society, the chicken, obviously female, is valued only for its reproductive role. Wheeler says: "Although her role in the house may have seemed more appropriate to her role as a chicken, her only real salvation lay on the roofs" (126). Perhaps the real value of "The Chicken" as a story is to the reader. The chicken, by reassuming its role in the household, is not guaranteed safety. For the same reason, the only real value of the experiences that Lispector's characters have is to the reader since her characters are unable to escape their social roles. But by taking these characters out of the human element, Lispector reifies their experience so that, though they return to their normal roles, they may have at least a memory of the day they, like the chicken, "had stood out against the sky on the roof edge, ready to cry out" (126). Though just a temporary reprieve for the character, the experience for the reader has the capacity for enabling a better understanding of the human condition, and, therefore, a metamorphosis in his understanding.

A pair of companion stories exemplify the understanding that the characters, and therefore the readers, achieve through reification. Both deal with the negative results of love, but one from a man's point of view, and the other from a woman's. In "The Buffalo," a woman tries to discover the nature of the hatred she bears after a disappointing love affair. After searching the entire zoo for an animal that would embody that hatred in its nature, and finding only gentler kinder forms (Wheeler says "feminine"), she finally finds it in the buffalo. Wheeler points out that the woman's search is her attempt to recreate (redefine) herself as an existence "based not on feminine love but on

sustaining hatred" 128). In finding the buffalo, Wheeler explains, she finds an entity that is "self-possessed" (128). In him, she sees the emotion she feels, the emotion that she wants to become, not as part of herself, but as a subject for her study. As she discovers the depths of hatred, and perhaps, therefore, the depths of any and all emotions, in the eyes of the buffalo, the magnitude of the power of the emotion overcomes her, and she swoons and faints. Wheeler explains that her final vision, "the entire sky and buffalo," represents the freedom she seeks from the imprisonment of being a woman and "the demanding masculinity that bars her from it" (129). Her ability to focus on her emotion in the image of the buffalo has enabled her to look into the abyss and to realize the impossibility of attempting to construct herself apart from the masculine conception of her.

The masculine side of the same imprisonment is seen through animal imaging in "The Crime of the Mathematics Professor." The mathematics professor is burying a dog which he has killed. The burial takes place at a spot overlooking the city in which he has previously dumped his own faithful dog. His crime would not be condemnable in the eyes of men, but he finds himself inconsolable at the guilt he feels for the desertion. He is the one responsible for the dependency of the dog, and, therefore, the dog's welfare. He hopes to terminate the guilt he feels in the burial of the second dog. After he buries the substitute dog, however, he is forced to see it apart from himself, which intensifies his feelings of guilt. He then digs it up, and must desert it, taking his guilt with him as he goes. In this case, the dog represents his crime to him. His capacity as a mathematician is

a key to his rationalization in the act of burying the second dog. Instead of subtracting his guilt by the elimination of one dog to replace the other, he instead adds to his guilt. He is forced to realize that guilt is not quantitative, so the act forces him to view his crime in isolation from the other events in which the desertion was grounded. His crime becomes the subject of his examination, and he is then unable to rationalize it, losing it within the landscape of peripheral circumstances. In its faithfulness to him, his pet was equal to his *anima*, his "other." In deserting it, he has denied a part of himself. In killing the second dog, he attempts to make it a scapegoat for his sins against the first, but, in the end, it is a mirror in which he must see his full responsibility. Just as the woman in "The Buffalo" sees her own dependence on the masculine to define herself, the professor of this story perceives his inescapable entrapment in the role of provider and sustainer in relation to the entity whom he has made dependent on him. The last view of the dog in which the professor has epitomized his own guilt shows its eyes "open and crystallized" (146), a suggestion that only he, the living perpetrator, can bear his guilt. It suggests, as well, that the professor realizes that he cannot, inside his own understanding, perceive of a way to rectify the self-perpetuating wrong that patriarchy has begun. As in Lispector's other stories where the questing character does not make a successful return from the quest, this character finds that he, as a solitary being, cannot right the wrong he has done. He cannot be reunited with his *anima* because that entity no longer exists for him. The "other dog" can neither serve to replace his *anima*, nor can it be done away with. It

remains the specter of an unredeemable betrayal. The professor, realizing his impotence, thus returns to his home and resumes the same life as before.

Just as these two stories counterpose one another in the presentation of the complexities of existence, Lispector presents in her collection other stories which seem to call to one another in their situations. Their similarities seem to suggest that Lispector may attempt, in this collection, to show situations through which, by their counterbalance with one another, the reader may come to an understanding of the terms of his own existence. For example, in "Mystery in São Cristóvão," a young woman comes to understand that both men and women are forced by society into the gender roles that each sex assumes. She is watching as four masked young men break into her family's private grounds and break a hyacinth in the family garden. The imaging of the "crime" is in terms that suggest a symbolic rape. In some sense, the actions of this later story in the collection resemble the loss of innocence experienced by the young girl in "Preciousness." Through the juxtaposing of the two stories, Lispector urges the reader to understand that both genders are forced into roles that are destructive, pleading a case for understanding that might eventually, and collectively, blur the division between the sexes through an understanding of the reasons for such division. This same counterpositioning can be seen in "The Beginnings of a Fortune." This story examines the opportunism that the social system propagates in women and may be seen to "answer" the stories in that they propose the oppression of women through marriage. The title story, "Family Ties," examines the interlocking, binding roots of family relationships. It represents the

underside of the situation that Laura believes fulfills her needs in the story "Love." In contrast to the security that Laura seeks in family life, *Family Ties* examines the intricacies involved in the interdependencies and reveals the resulting agonies of all family members. The juxtaposing of the matriarchal, controlling figure in "Happy Birthday" with the alternating savagery and decrepitude of the patriarch of "The Dinner" suggests an existing counterbalance between the powers behind the social systems at work in all the stories and the overwhelming and stifling control that such systems have over individuals within them. The image of the protagonist figures in each remind the reader of the monolithic source, and therefore the indestructibility, of those powers. Through these images, the reader may come to understand the reason that Lispector's characters do not return from their quests. Peering into the abyss that they encounter as they sink into dissolution, they understand the small figure they cut inside the overwhelming morass of social ties that entomb them.

It is only on return to the place of origin that the questing hero(ine)s effect a re-definition because their concepts of themselves depend on social construction. They either return to reality without a perceived change in their circumstances, or they do not return at all (as in the case of Laura in "The Imitation of the Rose"). Upon the discovery of their essence, they may choose to return to the definition (role) that the community has assigned to them, thereby acknowledging their existence in a social context. However, they may choose instead to embrace and exist in the essence that they discover themselves to be a part of. If this is the choice, however, they erase the lines that define

them in society, and thereby dissipate into the oblivion that is essence. In doing so, they disappear from the "reality" of the social construct.

The mechanics of social definition is elaborated by Lispector in the sixth story of the collection, found at the very center of the collection. Within "The Smallest Woman in the World," the civilized world receives the report of a pregnant pygmy woman found by a male explorer. The report incites different reactions from those who read of her. These readers become a microcosm of the many characters in Lispector's fiction, who, in turn, represent the society that Lispector writes both to and of. The response of the greater part of humanity is represented by the readers who desire to possess or control the tiny woman. Their desires represent the primal desire that humans have to control their environment, to define it as an extension of themselves. This desire to possess is the drive behind the social system that insists on naming divisions and arranging them in a hierarchy in order to imagine his own control over the creation. Otherwise, one would have to concede to a universe in which s/he is only an insignificant part. In the manner of Lispector's characters who, in their quest, resolve to persevere in life, one reader comes to the realization that she must control her fear of the modern world, that she can't allow herself to regress to Little Flower's state. This woman represents the characters in Lispector's stories who catch a view of their precarious state within the whole of creation, and then choose to return to their compartmentalized world in order to escape the anxiety that change entails. The system as it stands makes victims of us all--we all support the system for fear of our own loss of "being."

Little Flower is from a tribe that knows no socialization, however. The children are on their own almost from the minute they are born and subject to being netted and eaten by members of a neighboring tribe --the image of the net and tomb that Lispector uses to show entrapment in her other stories of the collection. Within the context of this simpler world, Little Flower does not suffer the anxiety of her counterparts, those of Lispector's other stories who become aware of their own fragility and impermanence in the face of raw nature. Like the chicken that returns to the household, what makes Little Flower happy in her primitive state is not having been devoured yet. This condition does not inhibit her motivation to act, and in fact must compel it, but it is significantly apart from language:

Not to have been devoured was something which at other times gave her the sudden impulse to leap from branch to branch. But at this tranquil moment, among the dense undergrowth of the Central Congo, she was not applying that impulse to an action --and the impulse concentrated itself completely in the very smallness of the unique thing itself. And suddenly she was smiling. It was a smile that only someone who does not speak can smile. A smile that the uncomfortable explorer did not succeed in classifying. (94)

Lispector specifies through this passage that language constitutes the building blocks of civilization. If that is so, it is the definition wrought through language that gives us a false sense of security. Upon leaving that ordered world, modern man becomes anxious, but it is this anxiety that impels us to act. In Lispector's story, the pygmy woman smiled "A smile that the uncomfortable explorer did not succeed in classifying. . . . The explorer felt disconcerted," not understanding that "Not to be devoured is the secret objective of a whole existence" (94). It is to discover this objective that Lispector has her reader to

regress into a more primitive state with her protagonists. She wants for her reader to identify with the natural components of nature --plants and animals-- so that he can identify himself outside the definition of "human."

This designation of "human" depends on the "ties" that language defines as "love." In civilization, it is "love" that obligates one human to another, thereby establishing the rei(g)ns of control. "Love" is the name of the strands by which we establish order within the family, the community, the network of civilization --the establishment of our "normalcy." But "love" is also the cause of our immobility. We are suffocated by the "soft-dark" roots of love, and cannibalized by one another. For Little Flower, however, love does not bind because it is simply a desire which demands nothing in return from its object:

But in the humidity of the jungle, there do not exist these cruel refinements; love is not to be devoured, love is to find boots pretty, love is to like the strange color of a man who is not black, love is to smile out of love at a ring that shines. Little Flower blinked with love and smiled, warm, small, pregnant, and warm. (95)

In respect to Little Flower's love for the explorer, Lispector makes a rare didactic intrusion:

There is an old misunderstanding about the word "love," and if many children are born on account of that mistake, many others have lost the unique instant of birth simply on account of a susceptibility which exacts that it should be me, me that should be loved and not my money. (94)

Without language to bind her, Little Flower does not even perceive her pregnancy. She is bound by nothing. Lispector brings her readers to Little Flower's jungle in order to extract them from the world of the social organism, and bring them to a world in which

they are individuals. It is only by such regression to the essence of living that we, like Lispector's protagonists, can perceive the predatory nature of the world we have construed through language. Like the readers who view the newspaper account of Little Flower, and like the majority of Lispector's protagonists, many of us have only the capacity to take note of the situation and turn from it. But the explorer "was kept occupied in taking notes. Anyone not taking notes had to get along as best he could" (95). Like the explorer, writers like Lispector may not understand the phenomena that they discover and record, but they keep taking notes. They continue to act so that the awareness that they bring to others might elicit action as well. Theirs, too, is an incomplete quest, but, like the explorer, it keeps them, and us, striving to assess the world in which we live and the quality of life that we have within it.

Helena María Viramontes: "The Moths"

silencio silencio silencio
--*Eugen Gomringer*

Helena María Viramontes uses the metamorphosis motif in her short story "The Moths" to show a both the maturation of a young Chicana and the evolution of generations of her matriarchal line. The personal initiation of the child is embedded in a

motif that uses hands as a symbol of nurturing as the child's maternal grandmother teaches her to adapt to genuine function as a woman. The social metamorphosis of the Chicana is shown in a matriarchal evolution from the traditional role of the Latin American woman to a more autonomous role apart from the tyrannous control of the Patriarchy. This "maturation" of the feminine spirit is embodied in the story within a motif where the moths are a central image. Moths are symbolic in Viramontes' story, then, of the natural death-rebirth imagery which marks a generational evolution.

In "The Moths" a young girl finds sanctuary in the home of *Abuelita*, her maternal grandmother, when she finds it impossible to conform to the dictates of "womanhood" issued in her own home by her father. This patriarchal standard of womanhood is exemplified by the girl's mother and sisters. The ideal function of womanhood in the father's house is symbolized in sewing, an occupation for which the protagonist of Viramontes' story is ill-suited. She says:

I wasn't even pretty or nice like my older sisters and I just couldn't do the girl things they could do. My hands were too big to handle the fineries of crocheting or embroidery and I always pricked my fingers or knotted my colored threads time and time again while my sisters laughed and called me bull hands. (23)

Sewing and weaving are traditionally women's work, and the home is considered their sanctuary within the patriarchal system of socialization. It is also, however, isolating and confining. Women shut away from the social and economic exchange of the world outside the home are never able to mature to their full potential for survival and autonomy. Viramonte's reference to sewing suggests that, at the end of their early

development, patriarchal expectations force women to weave a cocoon around themselves that restrict them to the home by roles that preclude their adventuring from it. The title of the story suggests, however, that a full metamorphosis is possible--that, like the moth, a woman may be able to reach her full development under conditions that are different than those imposed by the patriarchy. Optimally, the tomb will become a womb for the rebirth of the creature, woman, in a new form

It is advantageous for the maintenance of the patriarchy for a woman remain immature and under the control of the father, her overseer, for much the same reason that it is advantageous to keep the silk worm captured and spinning --so that those who profit from its productivity can control its output. Viramontes' narrator, however, refuses to be controlled. She expresses her incapacity to conform to the patriarchally imposed ideal by saying that her hands are too big for such work as her given gender role dictates. Her father tries to force her to conform to the submissive ("pretty" and "nice") behavior assigned to her gender by giving her whippings when her actions are as aggressive and domineering as his own. She relates one such incident as emblematic of many others:

So I began keeping a piece of jagged brick in my sock to bash my sisters or anyone who called me bull hands. Once, while we all sat in the bedroom, I hit Teresa on the forehead, right above her eyebrow and she ran to Amá with her mouth open, her hand over her eye while blood seeped between her fingers. I was used to the whippings by then. (23)

The child is incorrigible in resisting the role that her father seeks to impose upon her.

Robbed of the opportunity to express her resistance verbally, and taunted by words that ridicule her divergence from the traditional role for females, she responds with physical

violence, in a manner typical for males but disallowed for females, to a situation that seems irremediable.

The conflict between the father and the daughter in this story may be explained through the concept of the “daughter’s seduction,” a feministic view of feminine self-conceptualization based on the Oedipal model. Luce Irigaray explains that the dynamics behind feminine self-conceptualization in patriarchy is based on physical difference:

Participation in society requires that [a woman’s] body submit itself to a secularization, a speculation, that transforms it into a value bearing object, a standardized sign, an exchangeable signifier, a ‘likeness’ with reference to an authoritative model. A commodity--a woman--is divided into two reconcilable ‘bodies’: her natural body and her socially valued, exchangeable body, which is a particular mimetic expression of masculine values. (180)

In accordance with Irigaray’s explanation, a female attains market value upon puberty, when the difference in her body from the masculine form becomes visible. Such mirroring is a manifestation of the masculine desire to dominate through differentiation. In essence, she is cocooned in “threads” not of her own making. This entrapment in a masculine by the masculine economy is suggested in “The Moths” by the narrator’s natural unsuitability to work with thread, a function dictated for women through their patriarchally imposed gender role. In “Growing,” another of Viramontes stories of initiation in the same collection, Viramontes portrays what the “split” from the natural body presents for the maturing Chicana female. In that story, the word “mujer” itself, when it is used against Naomi, the maturing female, encloses her in an inescapable prison. Norma Alarcón, in her “Making Familia from Scratch,” explains:

Naomi feels increasingly imprisoned by the concept “mujer,” which her father wields as a weapon against her. Yet she is hard put to fight him because his evidence for her meaning as ‘woman’ is her own changing body, that is, menarche and breasts . . . All manner of things that she is obliged and expected to do are derived from the ‘fact’ that she is a woman. (149)

It is then that the woman is defined by her “market’ value as a commodity of exchange. The threads that imprison her are not those of the cocoon, which would be natural to her and which she would be able to escape in order to express her adulthood. The threads of the patriarchy are more like the web that spiders weave around a helpless creature to ensure its availability to them at a later time. It is within these threads that sustain the economy of the patriarchy that the narrator’s mother and sisters are entrapped. In terms of her market value, however, the young narrator in “The Moths” is a flawed product, a fact that is symbolized by her “bull” hands which will not conform to “women’s” work. They will not cooperate in weaving a patriarchal shroud around her developing form. This flaw makes her “seduction” impossible because her natural body is not compatible with the socially valued definition of femininity, what Irigaray characterizes as “a particular mimetic expression of masculine values” (180). A girl has no value for her father, and neither for her father culture, if she cannot conform to, or submit to, patriarchally defined gender definitions.

The rebirth within the matriarchal line is made possible through skipping a generation, from the “natural body” of the grandmother, reclaimed from patriarchal control by her widowhood, to the yet unclaimed “natural body” of the granddaughter. The child is removed from the father’s home, in which her mother and sisters seek to force her

compliance with her gender role, when she volunteers to care for her maternal grandmother. The grandmother is widowed, and is, therefore, the matriarch of the natural lineage of the women in the story. The removal of the girl to the grandmother's home, then, is the means for her escape from an environment that is hostile to the girl's maturation, and is, therefore, conducive to her natural development. Viamontes provides an identification within this natural line through the motif of hands that she has introduced. The grandmother uses her hands for healing and nurturing, and she has, in the past of the narrative, used her hands to restore and nurture the young narrator:

Abuelita had pulled me through the rages of scarlet fever by placing, removing and replacing potatoes on the temple of my forehead; she had seen me through several whippings, an arm broken by a dare jump off Tío Enrique's toolshed, puberty, and my first lie. (23)

In her nurturing capacity, Abuelita cures the narrator of her "bull" hands, which symbolize girl's feeling of alienation: "My hands began to fan out, grow like a liar's nose until they hung by my side like low weights. Abuelita made a balm out of dried moth wings and Vicks and rubbed my hands, shaped them back to size . . ." (23). It is this nurturing capacity of womanhood that the narrator is able to accept, and she basks in the satisfaction that "belonging" gives her. She says of Abuelita's treatment to her hands: ". . . it was the strangest feeling. Like bones melting. Like sun shining through the darkness of your eyelids" (24). In acceptance of the new purpose and the new lineage that Abuelita gives her, the narrator uses her own hands not only to carry on her grandmother's gardening, but to care for her dying grandmother as well.

Sharon Stockman explains the necessity of a multi-generational alliance in the rebirth of a Chicana who can speak for herself in place of repeating the litany of the patriarchal creation of “woman.” She speaks of all Chicanas when she says of Viramontes’ protagonist in “The Moths”:

Her own sense of being “half-born” registers birth not only in the face of, but from the presence of death; the young Chicana forms an identity out of the death and life of her Chicana heritage. This identity negotiates the symbolic power of fertility and the material and symbolic defeat of that fertility. (215)

Viramontes uses this matriarchal-based alliance, then, to depict an evolutionary metamorphosis that delivers her narrator from the oppression of patriarchal dominance on both a personal and a cultural level. The dynamics of that evolution require that gestation be removed from patriarchal interference which truncates the process of the metamorphosis by stifling the capacity of the feminine. The imagery of Viramontes’ story contrasts the artificiality of the mimetic role of womanhood and its stagnating and stifling effects with the natural role of femininity, which allows for growth and procreation. From the title of the story forward, the motif of insect metamorphosis informs interpretation of the story as a restoration, or rebirth, of the natural woman.

The narrator is routinely sent by Amá (her mother) to Mama Luna “to avoid another fight and another whipping.” The reciprocal violence in this passage, that the girl fights the role that is imposed on her by her father and responds with a violence disallowed to her, is an indication of the incompatibility between her yet unaltered natural femininity and that role of masculinized femininity that she will be forced to

assume in her mimetic body. Because she fails to be intimidated, her father sends her off to church. The means by which the development of her "natural body" is curtailed is symbolized by the accouterments appropriate to the religious female supplicant. The constraints of her father and the father culture, symbolized in the institution of the church in this story, is symbolized by the girl's "stuffing" her feet into her Easter shoes. Just as her hands are not suited to embroidery and crocheting, so her feet are not suited for the shoes intended for the masculine ideal for feminine feet, an ideal that emphasizes difference. The fact that the shoes "shone with Vaseline" accentuates that difference, and that they were "Easter shoes" extends the complaint to the restraints of orthodox religion. The girl also carries a veil. In terms of the curtailed metamorphosis that accommodation threatens, the veil symbolizes the patriarchal web that entraps woman. It is not only a symbol of seclusion, but also one of the limitation of vision that the church, as a institution formed by and for the purposes of the patriarchy, forces on women in its demand for her submission. The missal that she carries demands that her voice be used only in the litany of patriarchal ideals. These symbols represent the tools by which the patriarchy contains and stifle the growth of the "natural" body, which is the true feminine, through pressure to conform to a preconceived notion of femininity.

Such conformity as the narrator's father demands is contrary to autonomy, and autonomy is a quality of what Irigaray calls the "natural body" of a woman. Under patriarchy, a woman can claim her natural body only at those times that she is not marketable--that is, at a time when she is unmarried or independent of the need to

marry. In this sense, patriarchy usurps the autonomy of womanhood and uses her authority for its own profit. Autonomy is only restored when no more profit can be made from the exploitation of her body. This usurpation establishes an artificial patriarchal lineage maintained through restrictive paradigms that parallel the genuine matriarchal lineage inherent in procreation. In other words, when a woman marries, she abdicates the ownership of herself and *her* progeny to surrender herself to the agency of her husband. The usurpation, i.e. “seduction,” by the father is one facet of the network of institutions, such as orthodox religion, that maintain a culture built on masculine power. Viramontes illustrates this usurpation by the patriarch and the patriarchy when she has her narrator in “The Moths” describe how her aberrance interferes with the “father’s seduction” and alienates her from the patriarchal lineage. When she senses her alienation from the church, her father attempts to force her back to its teachings, which enforce his usurpation:

That was one of Apá’s biggest complaints. He would pound his hands on the table, rocking the sugar dish or spilling a cup of coffee and scream if I didn’t go to mass every Sunday to save my goddamn sinning soul, then I had no reason to go out of the house period. Punto final. He would grab my arm and dig his nails into me to make sure I understood the importance of catechism. Did he make himself clear? Then he strategically directed his anger at Amá for her lousy ways of bringing up daughters, being disrespectful and unbelieving, and my older sisters would pull me aside and tell me that if I didn’t get to mass right this minute, they were all going to kick the holy shit out of me. Why am I so selfish? Can’t you see what it’s doing to Amá, you idiot? So I would wash my feet and stuff them in my black Easter shoes that shone with Vaseline, grab a missal and veil, and wave good-bye to Amá. (25)

The girl does not, however, go to mass. Instead, she goes to the house of her abuelita, Mama Luna. The name "Mama Luna" (mother moon) links the grandmother with the mythical association of womanhood with the moon, and the masculine with the sun. This detour that the girl makes from patriarchal control is the means by which Viramontes retrieves her main character from entrapment in the patriarchal self-conceptualization, and restores the girl's natural body to her through her re-integration into a matriarchal lineage.

The action of this story, the title story of Viramontes' collection, is interpretable through motif of insect metamorphosis suggested by its title. The name "Mama Luna" in connection with the title of the story "The Moths" suggests a relationship between the girl's *abuelita* and the Luna moth. This large North American has a "moon-like" spot on each pastel-green wing. Mama Luna is described as having eyelids "never quite closed all the way" over her eyes even when she was sleeping. The fact that she had one blue eye and one gray eye not only suggests that she is a visionary in accordance with Mexican superstition, but is imagistically compatible with the "moon" spots found on the Luna moth, which are encircled by rings of light yellow, blue, and black. Mama Luna's hair is described as gray, wiry braids. As they hung over the side of the mattress on the woman's deathbed, the image is that of the moth's antennae. As the child lifted her grandmother's body from the bed, "it fell into a V" and as the body is placed in the water, her hair, now loose, "fell back and spread like eagle's wings." Her affinity with the experiences of the girl under the violent oppression of patriarchy is expressed in the

“scars on her back which were as thin as the life lines on the palms of her hands.” The older woman’s role as matriarch is established in the image of her sexuality combined with her descriptions of her maternity and age. The girl relates: “I returned to towel the creases of her stretch-marked stomach, her sporadic vaginal hairs, and her sagging thighs.” The reference to “her sagging thighs” foreshadows the “life out of death” imagery that concludes the metamorphosis motif, the sagging skin that of death from which life emerges, leaving it behind as the moth does its cocoon.

Mama Luna’s house is the cocoon in which this generational metamorphosis takes place. In the use of the term “house” as denoting lineage, the young narrator leaves the “house” of her father, the patriarch, and finds refuge in the “house” of her maternal grandmother, the matriarch. The narrator moves from a linear order, that order often associated with a male-dominated culture, to the natural en route to her grandmother’s house. She relates: “I would walk slowly down Lorena to First to Evergreen, counting the cracks on the cement. On Evergreen I would turn left and walk to Abuelita’s” (25). The street on which she begins her escape from her father’s house and church is a street named with a woman’s name, Lorena. The name’s proximity to the Spanish words for “crying” (*llorar*), for suffering (*dolor*) and for “*la Llorona*,” the archetypal sorrowing woman of Mexican myth, may not be a coincidence. It is on Lorena (the way of the crying woman?) that she passes by First Street, refusing the linear way of the patriarchy, and enters Evergreen. It is this street, named for nature, that leads her to the matriarchal line. There the narrator will find clemency for her unwillingness to conform to the

masculine paradigm for her and she will be reborn in an appreciation for her natural body.

The narrator describes this house in the image of a cocoon. She says: "I liked [Abuelita's] porch because it was shielded by the vines of chayotes and I could get a good look at the people and the car traffic on Evergreen without them knowing" (25). It is a protected, hollow area, and isolated. Like the cocoon, it is a place of withdrawal and sanctuary that allows her to be transformed without interference from the outside world.

Metamorphosis involves the loss of the old form, the dissolution of the form formerly perceived in the old creature. This step in metamorphosis is represented as both an emotional and physical purge in "The Moths." The narrator recounts that, as she would arrive at her grandmother's house:

As I opened the door and stuck my head in, I would catch the gagging scent of toasted chile on the placa. . . . The chiles made my eyes water. Am I crying? No, Mama Luna, I'm sure not crying. I don't like going to mass, but my eyes watered anyway, the tears dropping on the tablecloth like candle wax. Abuelita lifted the burnt chiles from the fire and sprinkled water on them until the skins began to separate. Placing them in front of me, she turned to check the menudo. (26)

The grandmother conducts a ritual in which the narrator participates in a symbolic purging of her former self concept: "I peeled the skins off and put the flimsy, limp looking green and yellow chiles in the molcajete and began to crush and crush and twist and crush the heart out of the tomato, the clove of garlic, the stupid chiles that made me cry, crushed them until they turned to liquid under my bull hand" (26). Her emotional purge is apparent when she says of her task: "With a wooden spoon, I scraped hard to destroy the guilt and my tears were gone" (26). In dissolution, her "bull hands" vindicate

their existence in the symbolic destruction of the form that condemned them. The child's acceptance of herself after the purge of her guilt is shown when, at the grandmother's prompting, she spoons the chile onto a tortilla and eats it: "As I ate, a fine Sunday breeze entered the kitchen and a rose petal calmly feathered down to the table" (26). The purge has enabled her to use the bitter root of her past experiences as edification for her growth in a new form. In the terms of metamorphosis, the purge represents the dissolution of the old form into the formless substance from which the new creature is formed.

It is the new creature that the grandmother forms in her granddaughter. Gestation and growth are represented in the narrative in terms of planting. This "planting" is represented as taking place within the "cocoon" of the grandmother's porch. The narrator remembers:

On Abuelita's porch, I would puncture holes in the bottom of the coffee cans with a nail and a precise hit of a hammer. This completed, my job was to fill them with red clay mud from beneath her rose bushes, packing it softly, then making a perfect hole, four fingers round, to nest a sprouting avocado pit, or the spidery sweet potatoes that Abuelita rooted in mayonnaise jars with toothpicks and daily water, or prickly chayotes that produced vines that twisted and wound all over her porch pillars, crawling to the roof, up and over the roof, and down the other side, making her small brick house look like it was cradled within the vines that grew pear-shaped squashes ready for the pick, ready to be steamed with onions and cheese and butter. (24)

It is significant that the child's own hands are put to use in her transformation. The grandmother nurtures her protégé in natural industries that promote self-sufficiency and continuity. The bearing plants that cover her porch and bear fruit insure her well-being.

In the same manner, the way of life that she teaches her granddaughter will assure the continuation of the matriarchal line after her own passing. This continuance is expressed in the child's final line of the passage: "The roots would burst out of the rusted coffee cans and search for a place to connect. I would then feed the seedlings with water" (24). As she helps her grandmother in her planting, she is like the seedling that sends out roots at its germination. Her grandmother feeds and nurtures her, and in doing so, teaches the child the art of nurturing. Through such self-perpetuating nurturing, the grandmother is implanting the maternal, making her granddaughter an heir in the procreation of the feminine. This the legacy usurped by patriarchal domination. By passing it on to her granddaughter, Mama Luna ensures the continuance of the matriarchy. This implanting is achieved imagistically when Mama Luna rubs the concoction made of moth wings and Vicks into the narrator's hands to shape and resize them to their purpose. The balm is a mixture of the nature of herself, as represented in the Luna moth, and the brand name of a penetrating agent. Together, they serve to replant the maternal, the essential element of the matriarchal, in the child.

The child's gestation and growth within the maternal is dependent upon the detour that she makes down Evergreen Street. But "divorcing" her father's line means renouncing her mother as a tie to that line. As the child moves down Lorena Street, she counts the cracks in the sidewalk. The reader may be reminded of the childhood game of "step on a crack and you break your mother's back." The child has left her father's house, pretending to go to church, because her mother is made to suffer because of the

conflict the child has with her father. The welfare of a woman and her children under patriarchy depends on her compliance with the demands of the patriarch, and the narrator's defiance jeopardizes the maintenance of his control. The father's indictment of his wife's parenting skills when "he strategically directed his anger at Amá for her lousy ways of bringing up daughters, being disrespectful and unbelieving," is a poorly veiled threat to the welfare of the mother. The child defers to his will only for the sake of her mother. It is only when the narrator can disavow her allegiance to her mother that she can claim her matriarchal legacy. In her independent decision to care for her grandmother in her final days, the narrator separates herself from her mother's care and embraces her responsibility to Abuelita. The decision allows the narrator to effect her autonomy, extricating herself from her father's house by severing emotional ties with her mother. The narrator relates:

When I returned from the market, I heard Amá crying in Abuelita's kitchen. She looked at me with puffy eyes . . . Abuelita fell off the bed twice yesterday, I said, knowing that I shouldn't have said it and wondering why I wanted to say it because it only made Amá cry harder. I guess I became angry and just so tired of the quarrels and beatings and unanswered prayers and my hands just there hanging helplessly at my side. Amá looked at me again, confused, angry, and her eyes were filled with sorrow. (26)

The injury that the narrator causes her mother through her words show that she has estranged herself from her mother's concerns. After the comment, she separates herself from her mother's grief, staying on the porch until her mother has left. She uses her mother's sense of guilt at the loss of Abuelita as a buffer between them. The dynamics of the encounter show an ousting of the mother from the matriarchal ties formed between

the narrator and Abuelita. The child's anger is a response to her mother's agency to her father, which, in her new role in her grandmother's house, she perceives as betrayal to the matriarchal. Like a bud on a plant, the tie to the parent must be cut off if the new plant is to mature.

The narrator's reference to her hands reminds the reader that the girl had felt her hands to be useless in the house of her father, and her mother's presence reminds her of that alienation. This time, in a show of strength and independence, she recovers her hands without help from her grandmother:

I went outside and sat on the porch swing and watched the people pass. I sat there until [my mother] left. I dozed off repeating the words to myself like rosary prayers: when do you stop giving when do you start giving when do you . . . and when my hands fell from my lap, I awoke to catch them. (26 - 27)

The narrator senses a bewildering freedom from an obligation to give, and prays for guidance and wisdom to know when to give. In her independence, the prayer is to herself and she answers it herself when she "catches" her hands and knows in herself to what use they are to be put: ". . . and I knew Abuelita was hungry." The narrator's hands, as the means by which her grandmother had taught her, silently, to know herself and her capabilities outside the stifling dictates of her father's house, become language by their agency. She is no longer "spoken" as a woman, defined by words that define a role for her. She defines herself by her action, and her hands are her voice. She speaks throughout the rest of the story of herself and of the nature of the matriarchal through the

language of the body-- expression through mime, but not through mimesis. Sharon

Stockton explains:

Meaning is established and destabilized throughout the text in continuous cycles that resist closure and/or stability through the action of women reading their own and other female bodies. . . . The female characters of *The Moths* thus participate in the reading of an old "text" in a new way, in a manner of speaking, because the "reading" both builds from and sets itself up against male or paternal uses of the woman's body. (215)

It is thus through this language by and of the natural body that she not only re-integrates herself into the matriarchal lineage, but also initiates the re-establishment of the matriarchy as an order whose "scripture" is read through the ritualized action of the narrator, who assumes the position of priesthood from this forgotten order from its matriarch, her grandmother.

The imagery of metamorphosis that defines the narrator's dissolution (a disowning of her patriarchally defined body) and transformation (the assumption of her natural body) under Mama Luna's "eye" is extended into her successful emergence as an adult, the form of the creature that, through its ability to procreate, completes the cycle of life within the matriarchal order. This fulfillment is dependent upon the previous generation's demise in an order which insures the well-being and capacity for adaptation of the new generation. It is thus that the "death-out-of-life" imagery is significant to "The Moths." Just as the new creature is derived from the body of the old, the narrator recounts that, after her grandmother's death, "when I carried her in my arms, her body fell into a 'V', and yet my legs were tired, shaky. . ." (27). The imagery is that of the new creature still attached to the dead body of the old, though emergent from it. The "V"

of Mama Luna's body is the shape of the adult moth whose wings are folded in death. The narrator is like the newly emerging creature, still carrying its chrysalis upon its back. The creature's wet wings are still plastered to its body. It is not yet able to fly, and the weight of the legacy of generations that it was born to carry into the future make its legs "tired and shaky." The imagery of birth and death is continued as the separation of the generations is made complete. The narrator, who has previously filled the bathtub with water, recounts:

I stepped into the bathtub one leg first, then the other. I bent my knees slowly to descend into the water slowly so I wouldn't scald her skin. There, there, Abuelita, I said, cradling her, smoothing her as we descended, I heard you. Her hair fell back and spread across the water like eagle's wings. The water in the tub overflowed and poured into the tile of the floor. Then the moths came. Small gray ones that came from her soul and out from her mouth fluttering to light The bathroom was filled with moths, and for the first time in a long time I cried, rocking us, crying for her, for me, for Amá, the sobs emerging from the depths of anguish, the misery of feeling half-born, sobbing until finally the sobs rippled into circles and circles of sadness and relief. (28)

In the image, the delicate neophyte embraces the seed of her existence--a picture of germination and rebirth. The absence of Amá reinforces the narrator's desire to return to the womb. It is a strange, new world that she enters, and certainly not the world of her father's house, where her mother and sisters are entrapped. But is a world that can finally hold the promise of completion, as is symbolized by the moths that emerge from Mama Luna's mouth. Her life spirit is depleted according to her own explanation that the moths "lay within the soul and slowly eat the spirit up" (28). The reader remembers, however,

that *abuelita* has implanted that same life in her granddaughter when she rubbed her hands with an aromatic balm of moth wings and Vicks.

The narrator becomes the sole progeny of the matriarchal line in the sense that the procreative capacity of her mother and sisters has been relegated to propagate the patriarchal line. As sole progeny of the matriarchal line, the narrator not only has the responsibility to procreate, but to be a conduit of the life that is the maternal to future generations lest it be lost altogether. In this capacity, the ritual of bathing her grandmother's body with her own represents her ascension to the priesthood, to the position of matriarch. The absence of her mother from the scene signifies the loss that she senses in her legacy of the maternal. Sharon Stockton maintains that this loss is in the "speech" that the maternal has relegated to the paternal line. She states:

For the young narrator, the body of the dead grandmother, even in a state of complete denial--dead and speechless, wasted, having 'defecated the remains of her cancerous stomach'--is yet the source of the white moths and of the narrator's 'rebirth.' Her dead body is a cipher, an unknown language, or a veiled sacrament that is replete with meaning and requires only a "priest," which role the girl claims to have filled, to complete the translation . . . As 'priest,' the narrator clearly usurps the male prerogative of interpretation and of redemption, and by so doing she replaces the role of her father and of the Catholic Church to 'save [her] goddamn sinning soul.' (215)

The voice of the matriarchy was silenced when the voice of women was usurped by their integration into and submission to the paternal line. The grandmother's silence represents this loss. The communication between the maternal embodied in the Matriarchal figure of the grandmother and that of future generations is, however, restored through the ritual enacted by the narrator. The narrator, then, as a translator between symbols and speech,

restores the voice to use by women, just as, reflexively, Viramontes uses the imagery of metamorphosis as a means of translating this ritual from actions to understanding through her story of "The Moths."

CHAPTER IV
THE PROMETHEAN THEFT /EMERGENCE

The narratives examined in this section provide images of metamorphosis for the impending escape of the feminine through the break that the author makes in language, the material that has formerly composed the prison of the feminine. The escape is made possible, in each case, through the (mis-)use of language, which, before this point in the development of the feminine, has only been used to entrap the creature. In the case of each of the narratives included in this group, Rosario Ferré's "The Youngest Doll," Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, and Sandra Cisneros' "Never Marry a Mexican," the author affords an escape for the questing character by an undermining of patriarchal power through the misuse of its own power dynamics. In each case, the questing character regresses either physically or symbolically to a location outside patriarchal control. It is at this point of dissolution (a point where masculine-imposed form is negligible) that the questor finds a means to re-make the terms of her existence. Like the developing creature inside the cocoon, the questor must lose her previous form before she can build a new one in her life. It is when this regression from the power structure is made that the questor is empowered to make changes in her situation. In "The Youngest Doll," Ferré's questor, the maiden aunt (her unmarried status places her outside the realm of masculine control), substitutes an infested doll for her niece, thereby allowing her

niece to escape the parasite infestation that is the motif associated with masculine domination in the narrative. Atwood's *Surfacing* shows the questor "diving deep" into the roots of language with an intention of remaking it to eradicate the deception in it wrought through patriarchal manipulation. Cisneros uses as a questor an artist who is a sometimes-translator, sometimes-substitute teacher to translate the terms of culture by substituting herself as the dominate gender and race. In each case the author's story is reflexive, and its text mirrors the subversion in power dynamics that takes place in the plot. The story, then, is the means by which the feminine escapes masculine control through language just as the questor undermines the domination of the patriarchy. The authors, through the use of "the word," effect a Promethean theft of language.

Necessary to these stories is a full understanding of the dynamics by which the masculine achieves and maintains power. The regression in the stories establishes contact between mother figures and their female heirs. It is significant, however, that there is an alienation between the biological mother and the subject of the metamorphosis. It is essential to each story, however, that a maternal link is made between the heir and the mother figure. It is implied in these narratives that some knowledge of the feminine and the secret for its emergence from dormancy within the culture is to be found through the re-establishment of a matriarchal line. Ferré's aunt, a surrogate mother to her niece, transplants that part of herself on which the parasite feeds into the decoy, thus allowing her niece a means of escape from domination. Atwood's narrator understands the extent of her own entrapment only after viewing her mother's

scrapbooks and remembering her mother's catatonic seizures, a mirror of her and other women's existence in a dormant state. Cisneros' narrator, Clemencia, recognizes La Malinche, the archetype for the traditional Mexican woman, as the betrayed rather than the betrayer. Claiming La Malinche as a symbolic ancestor, Clemencia uses matrilineage to turn the tables on European domination in the New World. In all three cases, essential knowledge for the development and propagation of the new form is derived through the matriarch.

Matrilineage is associated with both the cyclical aspect of metamorphosis as well as the regressive journey involved in the quest. In each case, however, the future is still unsure for the new creature on her emergence into the outer world. The narratives in this grouping emphasize the metamorphosis of the feminine from the point of awakening to the emergence of the new creature as a fledgling. It is only at this point in the development of the feminine quest that the motif of metamorphosis has enough stages to be apparent as a motif that gives an image to feminine development. It is also significant that the stories represented in this grouping are relatively recent having been written since 1972. It has only been since mid-century that feminist theory has widely shaped women's writing. The narratives in this chapter show the feminine writer functioning as the new creature, exploring/affecting/recreating the outside world in its flight. The aunt in Ferré's narrative has been victimized by through a type of treachery by her doctor that is mirrored in her niece's marriage to the doctor's son. The aunt is able through her unique situation to afford an escape for her niece from victimization in the masculine

culture. In each narrative, then, the questor makes an emergence from the cocoon with the faculty for survival in the outer world. The allegorical nature of the story (its early imagery that relates to the aunt's affliction is very archetypal) suggests that the niece's escape from her imprisoned state represents the possibility for escape for all women. Atwood's questor, at the end of her narrative, has a plan for a new world order that begins with her return to urban society and the birth of her child. Cisneros's Clemencia gives birth to herself as "the new Chicana" in a cultural field where all Chicanas enjoy superior social and gender status. In each narrative, the metamorphosis of the subject presents a possibility for procreation. It is the reflexive nature of the quest in the narrative that gives the artist wings. It is the artist's flight that remakes the world in the perception of the reader.

Rosario Ferré: "The Youngest Doll"

For there is always this to be said for the literary profession--like life itself, it provides its own revenges and antidotes.

—Elizabeth Janeway, *The Writer's Book*

Ferré's stories represent the manifestation in language of the violence that results out of oppression. The title story of Rosario Ferré's collection *The Youngest Doll* is perhaps richest of the collection in its symbolism that embodies that truth. Ferré herself has said that the irony found in her stories represent "the art of dissembling anger, of refining the foil of the tongue to the point that it can more accurately pierce the reader's

heart” (as quoted by Jean Franco in the Introduction to *The Youngest Doll*). In the story, Ferré utilizes dolls as doubles for the women in the story who first endure exploitation and then seek an escape from it. Interpreted as an allegory that parallels the colonization of women with the colonization of Puerto Rico, the story represents the repression, agitation, and revolution of the oppressed in imagery associated, through the dolls, with insect metamorphosis. The motif of metamorphosis that Ferré uses in the story suggests a social transformation inherent in a capitalistic system that, in its final phase, is destroyed by the same forces that it has created.

In the story, a young, unmarried woman is afflicted with a parasite, purportedly a river prawn, which resides in an oozing womb in her leg. Her physician seems not to be able to cure her of the infestation which robs her of the resources of her health and mobility, and, thus, the promise of a profitable marriage. As a result of her disability and disfigurement, she assumes the role of doting maiden aunt to her nieces. She uses the little time and energy not claimed by her illness to create dolls for her nieces which are the exact replicas of them at different times in their lives. She presents a final doll to each niece upon the occasion of the niece’s marriage, telling them, “This is your Easter Sunday” (4). Before the marriage of the youngest niece, however, she discovers that her condition could have been easily cured at its onset, except that the family doctor had chosen to exploit the illness for the regular income its treatment brought him.

One must assume that the aunt’s discovery moves her to action when she presents a specially made doll to her youngest niece. This niece is marrying the son of the family

doctor. He is a doctor as well. His education was, in fact, paid for through his father's propagation of the maiden aunt's affliction. The aunt places her own diamond earring in the center of the doll's eyes and fills its body cavity with honey rather than the usual cotton-like stuffing. It soon becomes apparent that the son is as much an opportunist as his father. He regards his wife only as a means of raising his social status and, thus, his wealth. He keeps her imprisoned in the house he has purchased in the elite area of town and insists that she sit on the balcony as an ornament of his prestige. His domination of her and her resources is symbolized in his robbing the wedding doll of the diamond earring that the aunt had placed in its eyes. After he neglects his wife for many years, he one day finds the doll in her place, with the prawns bulging and writhing out of her eyes. The reader must associate this shocking displacement with the aunt's delayed vengeance on her doctor and his type for their exploitation of her, her wealth, and her class.

Ferré's heroines are defined where the crossroads of determinism--cultural, economic and gender--intersect. Jean Franco, in her introduction to *The Youngest Doll*, says of Ferré's stories:

The personal and political are inseparable in these stories for the fate of the women is intimately tied to that of Puerto Rico, to the failure of the old landed aristocracy whose wealth was built on slavery and sugar cane and even more perhaps to those of a generation of industrialists whose projects had ruined the land without bringing prosperity. (iv)

In Puerto Rico, the U.S. invasion marks a very fine line between Old World exuberance and New World progressivism. The invasion is represented in Ferré's story in the aunt's infestation by the parasite. The woman in her maidenhood, like the paradise of Puerto

Rico, swam leisurely in a current of water. She is then bitten by a river prawn, an act in the story that represents the U. S. invasion of Puerto Rico. The infestation renders the woman unfit to marry, just as colonization unseats the landed gentry from their places of unquestioned power in the social caste system of the island paradise. The story serves as an allegory in the socio-political arena on the three levels mentioned above: cultural, economic, and gender. The old doctor appropriated the wealth of maiden aunt, a member of the leisure class, through trickery since he propagated the infection in spite of his ability to heal her. The situation mirrors the usurpation of Puerto Rico's economic resources by the rise of a capitalistic system of enterprise brought about by the American invasion. The appropriation of the diamond eyes of the doll reinforces the image of such usurpation as theft. The young doctor's appropriation of upper class status through his marriage to the niece signifies the transference of power that comes with the acquisition of wealth. In the story, the stolen wealth buys access to the political power previously held by the Old Families of the island. Central to these two acquisitions, however, is the individual, the basis of production, who becomes the medium of this exchange of power and wealth. In this Marxist view, the colonization of women within a patriarchal system is compared to the colonization of Puerto Rico by the United States.

Ferré illustrates female colonization through the device of the dolls, which serve as doubles for herself and her nieces. The nieces, daughters of the elite class, participate through their marriage in the exchange of women, a component of the capitalistic system spawned by patriarchy. Women, under patriarchy, usually only have access to resources

(even their own bodies and minds) through the men to whom they are forced by social dictates to yield their autonomy. The young doctor in this story marries the niece to “purchase” the prestige that her family holds. His marriage to her will allow him access to the community of the leisure class in his profession, bringing him even more wealth and power. He is a parasite on the history and prestige of her aristocracy. Ironically, even the education that brought him wealth was paid for with money his father stole from his wife’s family through his father’s malpractice.

The parallels between the lives of the maiden aunt and her nieces are made apparent in the story through the medium of the dolls. The aunt makes dolls for each niece at different stages of their lives, and each doll is a replica of the child who receives it at the occasion on which it is given. In this way, the dolls represent the growth of each niece until a final doll is given to each niece on the occasion of her marriage. Like a larvae, whose growth is truncated when it spins its cocoon, the final doll each niece receives represents the dormant state into which the woman is forced by the subjugation that marriage brings.

It is significant to the story that the aunt is of marriageable age when she is first stung by the river prawn. The water imagery presented in association with her inoculation connotes the rage of life within her: “With her head nestled among the black rock’s reverberations she could hear the slamming of salty foam on the beach, and she suddenly thought that her hair had poured out to sea at last” (1). The image of “the slamming of the salty foam” joins the movement of copulation with the imagery of the

birth of Artemis, the goddess of marriage. It is this goddess who bore Hymen, the male deity who presides over marriage. It is as if young woman herself is about to be born just before she is bitten. As a result of the bite, an imagistic marriage, her prospects for fulfillment and procreation are curtailed. Like the dolls, and her married nieces, she is imprisoned in a dormant state, made so by the bite of the prawn. Her resources, and those of her aristocratic family, are forfeited to the doctor, who uses those resources to recreate himself in his son. The aunt comes to live only through her nieces, whose marriages curtail their usefulness and autonomy as well. In her helpless state, she is colonized by becoming enslaved to the service of the family doctor, who may be seen as representative of the capitalistic system that controls her. Her only offspring are the cocoon-like dolls who can grow no older than the niece who owns them--only to the age of marriagibility. Like the dolls who represent them, the nieces are doomed to the same arrested development as the aunt and the same exploitation by the male economy represented in their husbands. Like silkworms, these women are kept in an immature state to ensure their continued production that advances the cause of those who enslave them. As a commodity of exchange, they are forced to trade in their personal growth potential for participation in the patriarchal-based economy. As the aunt is parasitized and reduced by the infestation of the prawn, so her nieces and their female progeny promise to be perpetually colonized by the masculinized culture. Although each niece seems to be given the opportunity for rebirth through the final doll ("Here is your Easter Sunday."), none of the nieces takes the opportunity except the last.

A difference that is essential to the story between the plight of the aunt and that of her nieces is that the initial cause of enslavement of the aunt is internal, a parasite, rather than external, marriage. The bite of the prawn may be seen as the limitations that patriarchy places on women. The aunt's infestation restricts her from fulfilling her natural role as a mother, but it does save her from being colonized through marriage. The aunt is not dependent on marriage for her financial and social well-being, and, so, from a vantage point outside the patriarchal economy, she learns the truth of male opportunism. As she learns of her doctor's malpractice, she is able to see his perpetration as theft only because she is not "owned" by him as her nieces are "owned" by the husbands who trade on their resources and production. Her awareness of male opportunism, however, comes too late for any recovery of her personal losses. Her own victimization is irreversible, but the awareness of it ends her dormancy.

The changes made in the final doll represent the metamorphosis of the feminine from colonization to revolution. The dolls serve as decoys whose silence allows the colonized to not only escape oppression, but to also use the means of that oppression against their perpetrators. The doll that the aunt creates after she becomes aware, the youngest doll, differs greatly from those she bore previously because it is the first of a joint union. She gives it her material belongings, the earrings, but likewise infects it with the evil that had gestated inside her with the sustenance of the old doctor's care. In a gesture of reciprocity for the oppression she has suffered at the hands of the old doctor, she fills the doll's body cavity with honey to nurture the evil which had resided in the

sweetsop of her wound for those many years. It is an apt replacement for the young doctor's wife because it fulfills the young husband's greed when he steals and sells the diamonds from its eyes. It likewise fulfills his desire for prestige as it takes the place of the niece who is condemned to sit daily on the balcony as an ornament of his social standing. But most importantly, the doll becomes a decoy for the niece that it resembles. It allows her time to escape from colonization by husband because its dormancy appeals to his complacency. The dormancy in this doll, however, is deceiving. The sweetness that the aunt sewed into the doll has nurtured, in the reciprocity that it contains, the instrument of oppression. This doll is the first that she has birthed that is viable, the first that can offer real resurrection for the woman whom it represents. When the young doctor looks into the eyes from which he had stolen diamonds, his gaze is returned by the ". . . frenzied antennae of all those prawns" (6).

The question remains at the end of the story, "what happens to the niece?" In such provincial society, how would a woman of the upper class manage to support herself without a husband? Ferré leaves the actual fate of the niece after the doll's eruption a mystery. Many critics suggest that it is the niece that is infested by her aunt's ruination--that the niece becomes the doll and then inherits the infection through the transfiguration. Such a transference would make Ferré's story pessimistic and her main character, the aunt, a villain. A more positive interpretation is that the aunt provides an escape route for her niece from the traditional domination by the patriarchy to which the aunt herself has fallen victim. This interpretation would hold true to Ferré's stated reason for her own

writing: "en mi caso, escribir es una voluntad a la vez constructiva y destructiva" (González and Ortega 13). Construction and destruction, it is implied, are at opposing ends of the act of writing, and yet are joined by it. The old form must surrender itself to the nothing from which the new form arises. Metamorphosis is no more than old matter presenting itself in a new form. The writer's purpose is to re-orient us so that we might recognize alternative forms. The final scene certainly suggests that such re-orientation is being forced upon the husband. Ferré's comment as it applies to "The Youngest Doll" suggests that the niece has escaped into a new form that her husband, oriented to recognize womanhood in only a masculinized representation, cannot recognize it in an alternative form. By looking backward, he sees the change in his wife only as destruction, and the impetus of that destruction, as it bulges from the eyes of the shell that he believes was his wife, threatens his world of wealth and power.

Language has been a controlling factor in all aspects of the "male authority" predetermined by such power through wealth. Women writers, for many generations, have had their voices silenced through subjugation by masculine literary conventions. Their influence has lain dormant in a civilization shaped by male authority because if women seek to speak in their own voice, the difference is perceived as monstrous. Seen as an allegory of women's writing, "The Youngest Doll" may predict what happens when women's literature separates itself from its masculine roots. If the river prawn represents the influence of language that men have traditionally controlled in the suppression of the voices of women, then women's acquisition and use of language to reclaim power will

seem to be a threat to the patriarchy. There is certainly much support to be lost, but independence is to be gained. Rosario Ferré's work gained recognition at a juncture that took place when the "boom" of Hispanic literature, mostly masculine and mostly poetry, gave rise to a second mushrooming of writing that was much more given to prose. Women writers such as Ferré, Magali García Ramis, Olga Nolla, Ana Lydia Vega, Carmen Lugo Filippi, and Delilah Jimenez, to name a few, were counted in this second boom (Fernández Olmos 79). This was the right time for women writing prose in Spanish to declare their independence--to break through the litany of voices of the boom generation with a voice that was clearly their own.

González and Ortega explain Ferré's statement as it pertains to her own writing: "In its constructive sense, [Ferré's] will to write reinvents and defines her sense of self and her world; the accompanying *destructive* will, Ferré continues, is directly related to her desire for *vengeance*" (105). Through such rebellion, Ferré and her sister "narradoras" would leave behind the security of old forms and messages, burning the road behind them as they progressed toward autonomy. If one interprets the story reflexively, the aunt and her repeated "birthings" may represent such a history of women's writing. Each piece of literature provides a possibility of rebirth, but just like the reproductive potential of the aunt, the birth is aborted because the time and circumstance is not right. In the case of the aunt, many of the possibilities that she birthed were aborted, but when she invested herself and her resources in the right

combination and at the right time, an escape from the long sleep of repression (an “Easter Sunday”) was made possible for her niece.

Creation necessitates the destruction of the old to make possible the creation of the new. Thus, in “The Youngest Doll,” the niece is not missing. The husband looks for her only in the form of the sleeping doll. The prawn that infests the doll’s empty shell is a monstrous reflection of his own parasitic nature. He mistakes the doll for his wife because it takes the form in which he had first imprisoned her, just as a cocoon continues to take the original shape of the larvae that sleeps within it, but not of the butterfly that emerges from it. If, following metamorphosis, we look around for a creature that imitates the form of the shell, it will not be found. But if we look ahead of us instead of behind us, we will see the new form, drying its wings in the sunshine of the world that it will henceforth claim as its own--and that is where we will find the youngest niece in Ferré’s story.

Margaret Atwood: *Surfacing*

Phallogentrism is the enemy. . . . And it is time to change. To invent the other history. --Helene Cixous, “Sorties”

In one of her earlier novels, *Surfacing* (1972), Margaret Atwood uses the motif of metamorphosis to illustrate the link between language and culture.¹ In the novel, a young woman regresses from an urbanized, commercialized environment to a primitive setting and discovers deception in the masculine use of language. She uses the discovery as a

basis for re-defining herself, her metamorphosis taking place as she “unlearns” the language by which her self concept has been shaped. Atwood’s tale of her feminine protagonist is intertwined with and imbedded in her surface resentment toward the encroachment of “Americans” and the dominating, domineering, capitalistic social economy that they represent. The “us” and “them” perspective is identified in the narrator as she renounces the rape of the Canadian backwoods by industry and tourism. She is eventually forced to realize, however, that these “Americanistic” tendencies are actually universal and are a manifestation of Western Culture. She also comes to realize that the power dynamics prevalent in the colonizing tactics of capitalism parallels the masculine domination of women inside gender relationships. Her increasing identification with animals and primitive nature supports the use of metamorphosis as a motif.

In *Surfacing*, the unnamed narrator returns to a backwoods cabin that had been her childhood home during long periods when her father’s occupation allowed him to bring his family there. At other times during the narrator’s childhood, the family had lived in the city. The narrator’s parents had retired to the cabin, and the mother had fallen ill and died some years before the opening of the narrative. The narrator’s reason for returning to the cabin was word from an old family friend that her father had disappeared. The narrator comes back to the cabin, bringing her live-in lover and a married couple, who are their friends, back with her. The friends consider the trip a vacation, but the narrator’s purpose is to search backwoods and the cabin for some indication of her father’s

whereabouts. As she searches the cabin, she finds what she believes are primitive cave drawings by ancient tribes of indigenous people that had lived in the vicinity. She then cross-references the names and numbers that her father had written on the drawings to locate their probable whereabouts and then proceeds to search one location in a nearby lake. There, she finds no indication of the drawing on the surface level of the rocks, so she decides that the drawing may be submerged. After several dives with no success, she dives as deeply into the water as she can and there encounters, presumably, the body of her father.

This image that this encounter brings her of the “creature” (she can never admit in the story that it is the body of her father and later, when a body is fished out of the water at a location nearby, that it is her father’s body) connects with many other images that haunt her since her return to the cabin—the drawings that she had discovered in the cabin, the small animals that her brother had preserved in jars in their childhood and which she had reverently buried every chance she got, and the image of the child she had aborted whose father, married to somebody else, had considered an inconvenience. When she surfaces after her encounter with the creature, she is inspired to sacrifice some of her clothing to the gods of the ancient people of the region, with whom she feels that she and her parents have a spiritual bond.

Throughout the rest of the novel, she follows the directions that she intuits from these spirits through a ceremonial purging and return to nature. First she mates with Joe, her lover, in a remote, wilderness area for the distinct purpose of becoming pregnant.

She then hides until the others, including Joe, are forced to leave the backwoods without her. She progressively strips herself of all civilized ways of living, the cabin, and the garden. She retains only a blanket to protect her from the nighttime cold “until the fur grows.” After she has completely accepted all the mandates that the gods place upon her, her initiation is over, and in her purity she is allowed to view her parents as they were before their deaths. She realizes that it was their unconventionality that allowed her the ability to experience the reawakening to her new humanity. As she re-enters the cabin and starts to dress, Joe returns to find her. In her resolve to create a new beginning for humanity through her understanding and the child she believes that she is carrying, she considers making Joe an ally in that cause.

Regression is the first step in metamorphosis. In preparation for a change, the insect in its form as a larvae must withdraw into a place that is likely to sustain and protect it while it undergoes a radical, and therefore lengthy transformation. Part I of surfacing is composed of seven chapters that map the regression of the narrator to her parents’ backwoods cabin. The narrator, a commercial artist who is working on illustrations for a children’s book, is returning to the cabin because her father has been reported missing. Her live-in lover, Joe, and their married friends, David and Anna, are accompanying her, David driving them as far as possible in his car. Although the setting is primitive, the threat of encroachment of industry and urban life on the environment of the Canadian backwoods is evident from the first sentence of the novel. She says: “I can’t believe I’m on this road again, twisting along the lake where the white birches are

dying, the disease spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have seaplanes for hire” (3). The reference to the disease “spreading up from the south” parallels the spread of industrial and commercial interests that are pockmarking the natural landscape of the backwoods. As one discovers through Part I, it is this same kind of commercial “disease” that has infected the narrator’s self-concept.

The regression is not only spatial, but temporal as well. They leave the car at a predominantly French-speaking village that the narrator had known as a child. As the narrator encounters the villagers, she realizes that she is no longer part of their world when she realizes that the villagers see her as one of the other tourists rather than a native of that area. Her familiarity with the customs, language, and attitudes of the villagers, however, sets her apart from the members of her group as well. The return to the village, then, causes a loss of identity as she finds herself between her chosen urban lifestyle and the more unassuming, rustic lifestyle of her parents and her childhood. The split that the narrator feels in her identification is intensified when she reaches her parents’ cabin, which was her childhood home. It is here that she had learned the ways of nature and survival during her father’s vacation time in her childhood. Simultaneously, however, she had experienced a “normal” social development when the family returned to the city. There exists within her dual identifications of herself—one part of herself is the eager-to-please, submissive woman who, at one time, had desired the love and support of her consort above all else. This desire was confounded by betrayal and abortion, experiences that forced her to deaden her emotional sensibilities. Thus, Atwood allows her narrator a

sort of out-of-body experience through which she is able to view her present life in perspective with her past. In that perspective, she sees human beings as knobheads whose heads and bodies are not aware of one another. As a knobhead herself, she realizes her habit of refusing to let her head acknowledge the pain of love and loss. She finds many parallels with her married friend Anna as they both allow the men in their lives to dominate their actions and wills. As she reflects on the events in her life that have caused her to prostitute her artistic talent to commercialism and sacrifices her own will to “love,” she realizes that her memories have been warped to support those two lies. She remembered her father saying: “. . . you die when your brain dies” (72). Because of that perspective, she is able to evaluate what she is, and how she became one of them—a functional part of urban humanity—and how she became what she refers to as “dead.” The narrator’s regression gives her the opportunity to revitalize her brain and, thus, live again.

The regressive journey into her past, however, awakens those sensibilities when it brings her into the “cocooned” protection of her parents’ fenced-in cabin. The cabin, then, is a sanctuary that protects her while she awakens from her “dead” state. Although the narrator cannot find any physical trace of her father, she senses his presence there. The feeling that they are intruders in the cabin, her father’s sanctuary, makes her afraid that he might return to drive them out. She hesitates to leave Anna alone in the cabin: “I don’t want to leave her alone. What I’m afraid of is my father, hidden on the island somewhere and attracted by the light, perhaps, looming up at the window like a huge

moth; or, if he's still at all lucid, asking her who she is and ordering her out of his house" (59). The comparison of her father to a moth suggests that the cabin is like a cocoon or an egg that he is protecting. It is as if the father hovers over it like a moth to make it a safe, though temporary, haven for the fulfillment of his daughter's metamorphosis. The cabin in the woodland, in fact, has the attributes of a cocoon that passes the seasons within some bushy sanctuary:

The house is smaller, because (I realize) the trees around it have grown. It's turned grayer in nine years too, like hair. The cedar logs are upright rather than horizontal, upright logs are shorter and easier for one man to handle. Cedar isn't the best wood, it decays quickly. Once my father said 'I didn't build it to last forever' and I thought then, Why not? Why didn't you? (30)

The image the reader has of the cabin is of a diminutive, gray, fuzzy or hairy structure, different from the typical log cabin because the logs are upright. The upright position of the logs mirrors the pattern of the trees that camouflage it, much like the cocoons of many insects have evolved to imitate their habitat for incubation. As the boat approaches the cabin for the first time the narrator says: "The peninsula is where I left it, pushing out from the island shore with the house not even showing through the trees, though I know where it is; camouflage was one of my father's policies." (27-28). Since the cabin is a cocoon, then it must be strong enough to protect the changing environment within it, but ultimately destructible in order to allow the new form of the creature to escape. Camouflage protects it in its weakness from destruction from without. It is clear that the cabin and its fenced enclosure were built to preserve life when the narrator describes her

brother's escape from its chicken-wire enclosure, an escapade that resulted in his drowning.

Death in this novel, however, is a temporary state. Like a cocoon, the cabin facilitates resurrection. The brother is known to have been resuscitated by the mother. Their mother, also, had a history of death and resuscitation in the form of the catatonic states to which she was predisposed. The cabin is the site of the narrator's memories of her mother's cyclic symbolic death and resurrection.²

I open the wooden door and the screen door inside it and scan the room cautiously, then step inside. Table covered with blue oilcloth, bench, another bench which is a wooden bench against the wall, sofa with metal frame and thin mattress, it folds out into a bed. That was where our mother used to be: all day she would lie unmoving, covered with a brown plaid blanket, her face bloodless and shrunken. We would talk in whispers, she looked so different and she didn't hear if we spoke to her; but the next day she would be the same as she had always been. We came to have faith in her ability to recover, from anything; we ceased to take her illness seriously, they were only natural phases like cocoons. (11)

As opposed to the urban, commercialized, "killing" society from which the narrator has regressed, the cabin is life-sustaining. Her mother's bier ("wooden bench against the wall") also "folds out into a bed," which is a place for only the temporary death of sleep. The mother is delivered from her dormant, or catatonic, state into vibrancy. But the narrator's sense of her father hovering over the cabin is threatening at this point in her metamorphosis because she does not understand its sanctuary. It is from her parents' records, memories, and codes, found within the cabin, that she is able to discern the direction for a spiritual search that will result in her transformation and rebirth as a creature full in the knowledge of the true nature of the animal that "calls" itself human.

In the case of the narrator, she must return to the place of her “uncivilized” development as only a beginning place for the introspective odyssey through which she discovers wells of intuitive knowledge and personal fortitude within herself. It is through this discovery that she is able to crawl back into the shape of her “human skin” in a hope that she will be able to begin, in a small way, a transformation of mankind. Like a moth propagating its kind, the father hid his family away from the intrusion of civilization in a place that would allow them a retreat in which to preserve their life in the hostile environment of modern civilization.

The narrator’s metamorphosis begins in Part I when she comes to understand that her present perceptions about herself and her life are not reality: “I have to be more careful about my memories. I have to be sure they’re my own and not the memories of other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said” (70). This realization constitutes dissolution, the state of life in metamorphosis when the developing creature no longer has the old form but has not attained the new. At the end of Part I, the narrator finds that she can remember her childhood at the cabin, but she has lost all memory of who she has been since that time. She says: “I run quickly over my version of it, my life, checking it like an alibi; it fits, its all there till the time I left. Then static, like a jumped track, for a moment I’ve lost it, wiped clean, my exact age even, I shut my eyes, what is it? To have the past but not the present, that means you’re going senile” (70). Senility is a forgetfulness that causes a loss of orientation. Orientation in events give us our identity, and the loss of this orientation results in loss of identity. The loss of orientation,

or identity, constitutes a dissolution of the form that such events have shaped for us. This sensation of being unformed is reflected in the narrator's childhood memories of swimming in the lake: "At that time, I would dive and coast along the lake floor with my eyes open, distance and my own body blurred and eroding" (72). As a child such formlessness had been an adventure. On her return to her past, she yearns for this dissolute state once more because she has become uncomfortable with her life since that time. In her desire to return to the freedom of her childhood, she goes to the end of the dock to dive in. She remembers, however, that this is where her brother had drowned as a child, and where her mother had saved him. She covets his resurrection, but fears death: "If it had happened to me I would have felt there was something special about me, to be raised from the dead like that. I would have returned with secrets, and I would have known things most people didn't" (71). At the end of Part I, she desires to "take the dive," but is not ready for resurrection in an unknown form. She succumbs to a state of dissolution, because it causes her less pain than the life she has recently led: "I stand there shivering, seeing my reflection and my feet down through [the water], white as fish flesh on the sand, till finally being in the air is more painful than being in the water and I bend and push myself reluctantly into the lake" (72). In her state of uncertainty, the narrator is like the formless creature inside the cocoon as the shape of its earthbound form, the larvae, dissolves. Its exposure to the air at that state would be detrimental to its development—one may, in human terms, equate it to the pain of an exposed burn--and so it remains enveloped within the cocoon. The narrator has realized that, like the larva

of an insect, her old identity has served to sustain her, but keeps her grounded and unfulfilled. The narrator's decision to submerge herself in the lake is symbolic of her relinquishment of her "urbanized" form, a surrender that clears the way for transformation.

When the narrator loses her memory of the present time in Part I, she calls her own name repeatedly, trying to orient herself to her past. This occurrence, in conjunction with her realization that one's reality is linked to what one is told by others ("other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said"), suggests that language is the shaping dynamic for identity. The cause for the narrator's dissolution is the fact that, when she returns to the cabin, she realizes that the reality represented by her memories in that place have been warped. Her experiences with other children and the "rules" forced on her during her urbanized existence came about through the use of language. In her dissolution, she is sure that the language she has learned to accept and use during that time is untrue to the reality that she learned at the cabin. The beginning of the transformation, or metamorphosis, of the narrator begins with her acknowledgment that language creates the illusion for human beings that they have control over their bodies, and by extension, their world. It is language that brings to each of us, as Foucault puts it, "things known." However, the language crystallizes the knowledge by affirming it, making it recognizable. One can only gain unspoken knowledge, as Foucault explains, by "the going astray of the one who knows." The narrator experiences dissolution as she goes "astray," and, as a result, implicates language as the reason for human delusions:

The narrator begins Part II by saying: “The trouble is all in the knob at the top of our bodies. I’m not against the body or the head either: only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate. The language is wrong, it shouldn’t have different words for them” (75). Her observation is that instinct and reason are as integrated in human beings as in other animal life, but language has developed as an attempt to deny that integration. It is through this mistrust of language that the narrator is to discover her father’s guidance in her transformation and reawakening in Part II of *Surfacing*.

Part II of *Surfacing* establishes her father’s guiding spirit in the dissolution, transformation, and reawakening phases of the narrator’s metamorphosis. In accordance with her mistrust of language, her father’s guidance comes, not through language but through pictographs that mentor his daughter in a spiritual, rather than an intellectual, reawakening. Her transformation is marked by her ability to read and interpret these pictographs. As she first encounters the pictographs, she interprets them as tracings and drawings, possibly reproductions of primitive art found in the area by her father. In the first drawing, she eventually identifies a boat containing knob-headed figures. This recognition acknowledges that her metamorphosis has progressed to the stage of dissolution, where “knobhead” is a form that she recognizes in others, but she no longer identifies with her former “urbanized” knobhead form. She cannot, however, make sense of the second drawing, a composite of human and animal forms. When a letter from an anthropologist points her toward a “logical” explanation, she intuitively balks at the misdirection: “I began to notice them again. There was a gap, something not accounted

for, something left over” (104). The reasoned conclusions are apparently knobhead. She says: “I spread the first six pages out on the table and studied them, using what they called my intelligence, it short circuits those other things” (104). She mistrusts the “logic” of the letter because the language of it does not account for all that she was seeing in her father’s drawings. Her capitulation to instinct as a discerning mechanism signal her awakening to a new form—one that has her head connected to her body.

The narrator’s new form does not allow the use of language in the way it was used to sustain her in her “knobhead” form. In the incident with the drawings, she finds direction first in the void that language leaves, and then by using language as only signposts as she translates circumstances into new constructions. As she searches her father’s drawings, she finds an English place name that she recognizes. She translates that name to a place on the map that is marked with a French name. Both names are mere translations of the original Indian name of the lake two which they refer. Such cross-referencing in language suggests that truth is a matter of back-formation, a linguistic regression to the rudimentary purposes of “naming.” The narrator’s cross-referencing demonstrates a means for re-orientation—to go back to the rudiments of language, where meaning is clear. In order to do so, she has to question whether a given term holds the same translation for both the speaker and the listener. After the narrator discovers the message of the drawings, she demonstrates her mistrust of language. When Joe demands that she declare that she “loves” him, she thinks: “It was the language again, I couldn’t use it because it wasn’t mine. He must have known what it meant but it was an imprecise

word; the Eskimos had fifty-two names for snow because it was important to them, there ought to be many for love” (107). The imprecision of the use of the word “love” is that the word has many translations, and so its use is deceptive. At the point where she mistrusts language, her search for truth becomes spatial rather than contextual. She no longer searches for the truth through her father’s papers, but she searches by going to the actual place indicated by the nonverbal codes that he left.

Like the hidden message in his papers, however, the narrator senses a missing part of herself. As she examines the family pictures, she knows that there is a truth about all of her family members that the pictures do not reveal. The pictures, like her father’s drawings, seem to have something missing. Viewing the pictures, she says: “Around [the pictures] there were borders of blank paper, at each corner a hinge: they were like small gray-and-white windows opening into a place I could no longer reach. I was in most of the pictures, shut behind the paper; or not me but the missing part of me” (108). The mention of windows and hinges in this passage returns the reader to the image of the cabin. The objective for the narrator switches from the search for her father in the woods surrounding the cabin to a frantic search for herself behind the image represented in the pictures. It is only her “other self” who could pass through the “gray-and-white windows” of the cabin. The emergence from the recesses of the cabin requires her completed metamorphosis: “The other half, the one locked away; was the only part that could live; I was the wrong half, detached, terminal. I was nothing but a head, or, no, something minor like a severed thumb; numb” (109). With the realization that “You

draw on the wall what's important to you, what you're hunting," she senses the importance of the pictographs to her quest, and follows her father's cryptic directions to the source of the drawings. When she finds no such drawings on the rocks above White Birches Lake, she believes that the drawings must be submerged in the lake. Her subsequent dive into the lake contrasts with her wading into the lake from the shore at the end of Part I. The dive signals, not simple relinquishment of will, but her active and determined quest for change. Her diving symbolizes the deep inner search she makes for the discovery of herself, made according to her father's directions. It is there that she comes face to face, not with a facsimile of human transformation, but the transmuted figure itself: "It was there but it wasn't a painting, it wasn't on the rock. It was below me from the furthest level where there was no life, a dark oval trailing limbs. It was blurred but it had eyes, they were open, it was something I knew about, a dead thing, it was dead" (143). In the incident, one supposes that the narrator is confronting the figure of her drowned father. Following the dive, however, she associates it with the dead, trapped creatures in her memory—her drowned brother, his bottled and preserved animal specimen, her aborted child.³ All these merge in the figure at the depths of her dive. She says:

It formed again in my head: at first I thought it was my drowned brother, hair floating around the face, image I had kept from before I was born; but it couldn't be him, he had not drowned after all, he was elsewhere. Then I recognized it: it wasn't ever my brother I'd been remembering, that had been a disguise. I knew when it was, it was in a bottle curled up, staring out at me like a cat pickled; it had huge jelly eyes and fins instead of hands, fish gills, I couldn't let it out it was dead already, it had drowned in air. It was there when I woke up, suspended in the air above me like a

chalice, an evil grail and I thought, Whatever it is, part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it. (144)

After the experience, she concludes: 'The map crosses and the drawings made sense now . . . He had discovered new places, they were things he was seeing the way I had seen, true vision; at the end, after the failure of logic' (146). In accord with her transformation at the end of Part II, this form represents to her the death of her former self, and she surfaces from the depths exhausted but renewed. She makes an appropriate sacrifice of clothing to the gods that the drawings represent to mark the death of her previous, dead "urbanized" form. She then begins to awaken to her new self, saying: "Feeling was beginning to seep back into me, I tingled like a foot that's been asleep. (147) Her baptism into new life is confirmed when she hopes for Joe's transformation as her own: "Perhaps for him I am the entrance, as the lake was the entrance for me" (147).

It is thus, as a new creature, that the narrator begins to fulfill her life cycle in Part III of *Surfacing*. The first few lines of Part III signal the anticipation of the narrator's emergence from the cocoon that the cabin represents. It reads: "The sunset was red, a clear tulip color paling to flesh webs, membrane. Now there are only streaks of it, mauve and purple, sky visible through the window squares and then by interlacing branches, leaves overlapping leaves" (163). The membranes that she must penetrate to escape to a full life are visible through the window— first a web, then a membrane, then the harder crust of the shell in the lattice of the window and the interlacing branches. Like an insect cozy in the cocoon but restlessly awaiting freedom, the narrator is nestled, looking out at the world that will be new to her, anxiously awaiting a chance at life. She says: "I'm in

the bed, covered up, clothes in a pile on the floor, he will be here soon . . . ' The "clothes . . . on the floor" indicate that she has shed her "human" disguise, and in the frenzied mood of an animal in mating season, she awaits Joe's arrival to their bed. Upon his arrival, she indicates her desire to mate. They escape the cabin and, in a chase that resembles a frenzied mating ritual, she leads him to a place in the wild. As she moves toward the destination, her complete transformation into the type of creature indicated in her father's drawings is evident in her description of herself: "My tentacled feet and free hand scent out the way, shoes are a barrier between touch and the earth" (164). As she takes Joe, she is has only the urge for reproduction, disdaining the "human" desire for pleasure in sex: "Teeth grinding, he's holding back, he wants it to be like the city, baroque scrollwork, intricate as a computer, but I'm impatient, pleasure is redundant, the animals don't have pleasure. I guide him into me, it's the right season, I hurry" (165). The flurry of events from the narrator's eruption from the cabin to the consummation of the mating ritual are a product of the narrator's drive to fulfill the natural life cycle from her own birth as a natural creature to reproduction of her kind.

The narrator's choice of Joe as an appropriate mate for creating a new generation is based on his implied bend toward primitivity. He is described like an animal, independent and surly at his displacement by civilization: "From the side he's like the buffalo on the U.S. nickel, shaggy and blunt-snouted, with small clenched eyes and the defiant but insane look of a species once dominant, now threatened with distinction" (4). In this narrative where the narrator prizes the animal disguised by human clothing, Joe's

animalistic nature is difficult to disguise. His primitive nature is evident in his actions as well. He, like the narrator, is an artist, but he has a much harder time succumbing to the demands society makes on his art than she does. His natural clay figures are non-utilitarian and amorphous. His resistance to conforming to capitalistic demand is shown when he creates one of his clay monstrosities every time the narrator sells an illustration. David Ward states of art as a reflection of the transformational capacity in *Surfacing*: [The narrator's] own failures as an illustrator echo Joe's as a potter; its a treasured evidence of failure to speak the language, to belong to the territory which must be left: 'Perhaps it's not only his body I like, perhaps it's his failure; that also has a kind of purity.' . . . And her affection for his body seems to be that, under the surfaces, its vulnerability to the distortive machine is as great as any woman's" (101). The trait that most makes him an appropriate choice for the narrator's mate is that he has only rudimentary skills with words. As she observes him playing cards, she thinks: "For him truth might still be possible, what will preserve him is the absence of words . . ." (160). As the narrator plans for the child that she hopes to have conceived by him, she says: "I will never teach it any words" (165) Those are the stipulations for a new beginning of her species, "true humanity," that will begin with her offspring. She says:

But I bring with me from the distant past five nights ago the time traveler, the primeval one who will have to learn, shape of a goldfish now in my belly, undergoing its watery changes. Word furrow potential already in its protobrain, untraveled paths. No god and perhaps not real, even that is uncertain. . . . It might be the first one, the first true human; it must be born, allowed. (198)

The narrator considers both the necessity of communication with Joe as well as his capacity to “unlearn” the language in anticipation for the creation of a new language which is appropriate to her new world. It is he that she finally considers as a permanent mate and father for the new generation.

Following the mating, the narrator hides when it is time to leave the peninsula. Her friends and Joe are forced to leave without her. It is at this time that the narrator undergoes a ceremonial purge that removes from her anything that is civilized. It is only by her reduction to the most primitive, animalistic state that she can finally know the self that she searched for “behind small gray-and-white windows opening into a place I could no longer reach” (108). At first the gods allow her a gradual withdrawal. She is allowed to spend the first night in the cabin and eat from the pantry. Then, however, she is directed to shed her clothing and slash them with a knife, rip pages from the books, and smash the contents of the cabin. She burns her mother’s “confining photographs” (182). Upon leaving the wrecked cabin, she is allowed to take only a blanket with her that she will need for warmth “until the fur grows” (182). The second and succeeding night she sleeps in the woods because she is forbidden to return to the cabin. By the third day she is forbidden to eat from the garden and to go inside the gate of the enclosure. She makes a lair and sleeps under a blanket of twigs and leaves, until, those clinging to her as she hides in the woods, she becomes camouflaged as part of the forest. This destruction of her former habitat signals the irreversibility of the form she has attained through her

metamorphosis and her estrangement from the cabin until the purge is complete is an indication of her return to a primal state.

The narrator's breaking back into the cabin after her friends leave completes the image of "looking behind the windows" of the pictures in her mother's album. She must climb in and out of the window to enter and leave the cabin. In the blanket that she wears to keep herself warm "until the fur grows" she looks like a moth with its wings folded—the adult form newly emerged from the cocoon and waiting until her wings dry before she tries them out. Although she prefers to sleep in the cabin and eat from the pantry and the garden, it is only outside the cabin that she feels freedom. She crawls in and out of the cabin as if she is the moth who attempts to return to the cocoon for sanctuary, but finds it no longer adequate to sustain its new form. Her comings and goings are also reminiscent of her mother's cycles of life and death inside the cabin. The difference is that, unlike the narrator, her mother's cycles represent a failed metamorphosis because she could never emerge from the cabin-cocoon before her death. The narrator, on the other hand, is able to fulfill her life cycle because of the spiritual quest she completes in the ceremony. Upon that completion, she has peeled back "the borders of blank paper" behind the picture that she had of them and herself, as surely as she had removed the window glass from the cabin to escape it. Her reward is to be assured that she has found the way when they come to her in their metamorphosed form. She realizes that it was they who had afforded her the opportunity for metamorphosis. In her fulfillment, she realizes that they taught her "to prefer life." She says, "I owe them that" (194).

After the ceremony is complete, she returns to the cabin, and dons her clothing, her "human skin." She realizes that, like any questor, the value of her experience can only be assessed by a return to her former life. To have stayed behind in the woods, to have succumbed to the spiritual and never to return to the physical realities of human civilization, would be a waste of the life she had discovered. When she dons her slashed clothing, she pronounces: "I reenter my own time" (197). But she re-enters with a difference. The child that she believes that she carries with her into this time represents the sacred knowledge she has acquired through her quest. The knowledge is the hope of a future generation. She expresses this hope as a motto: "This above all, to refuse to be a victim." Before her spiritual quest, she had hesitated, with wings folded, afraid to venture out among civilized men in her new form. She said:

They can't be trusted. They'll mistake me for a human being, a naked woman wrapped in a blanket: possibly that's what they've come here for, if its running around loose, why not take it. They won't be able to tell what I really am. But if they guess my true form, identity, they will shoot me or bludgeon in my skull and hang me up by the feet from a tree. (189-190).

She expresses the Master-of-All-He-Surveys dominating spirit of Western man, an attitude that she, at first, recognizes only in the Americans who she thinks has slaughtered a heron and hanged it up by the feet as a trophy. Through her transformation in the cabin, she comes to universalize the traits of "the Americans" to include her own countrymen as well, and, more specifically, her own companions. She comes to understand that the domination extends beyond natural resources to anything or anybody that those in control can believe is "different," and, therefore, inferior to themselves. She finds that, in a

masculinized culture, "different" includes the designation "feminine," and she perceives "love" as a word that, to the masculine, expresses a feminine submission to his control. In this perspective, she sees women as subject to legal rape as much as any other resource under man's domination.

It is to this dominating spirit in Western culture that, in her flight in the adult form she has attained through her metamorphosis, she refuses to be a victim. She says:

I have to recant, to give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone. A lie which was always more disastrous than the truth would have been. The word games, the winning and losing games are finished; at the moment there are no others but they will have to be invented, withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death. (197)

This, the narrator's declaration of, not only her autonomy but of revolution, marks her return to civilization as a "true human." Although Joe is as flawed as the clay pieces he molds, she sees potential in him as a comrade in her mission. When she sees that he has returned to find her, she says of him: "What's important is that he's here, a mediator, an ambassador, offering me something: captivity in any of its forms; a new freedom?" (198).

This slight hesitation, born of her learned mistrust of Western man, is tempered by the hope that there are others in the world who may be salvageable:

I don't know whether it's worth it or even if I can depend on him, he may have been sent as a trick. But he isn't an American, I can see that now; he isn't anything, he is only half-formed, and for that reason I can trust him. (198)

Joe is a calculated risk, but his possibilities for reshaping are at least as good as hers had been before her metamorphosis.⁴ Through his adaptability, she sees in Joe a possibility for a partner in the perpetuation of the “true” human species.

Beyond Joe’s potential as a mate and a possible ambassador to the outside world, however, the narrator has much less interest in a lasting association with him. She says: “For us it’s necessary, the intercession of words; and we will probably fail, sooner or later, more or less painfully. That’s normal . . .” (198). One should note that in the scheme of insect reproduction, the role of the male is short-lived. Once fertilization complete, the function of procreation remains solely with the female. The male is dispensable. Thus, the narrator sees her relationship with Joe to be temporary in her future of her “adult” phase.

Sandra Cisneros: “Never Marry a Mexican”

Long after, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, I want to ask one question. Why didn’t I recognize my mother?” “You gave the wrong answer,” said the Sphinx. “But that is what made everything possible,” said Oedipus. “No,” she said. “When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn’t say anything about woman.” “When you say Man,” said Oedipus, “you include women, too. Everyone knows that.” She said, “That’s what you think.” (“Myth” –Muriel Rukeyser)

The story “Never Marry a Mexican” is at the center of Sandra Cisneros’ volume of short stories, *Woman Hollering Creek*, both in order of its appearance and in the

degree of social awareness of its main character, Clemencia.⁵ The volume, published in 1992, develops the interconnecting themes of community and emancipation as it explores different facets of the Chicana experience. The awareness of the women in the stories of this collection varies from a simple epiphany concerning sexual oppression to resignation and foiled escape. In every case, however, the character attains some understanding of her own position in a world which denies her the opportunity to be central to her own existence. Cisneros suggests through the experience of the Clemencia that the attempt by the Chicana to extricate her identity from the fabric of her society results in the loss of identity altogether.⁶ To restore wholeness to the identity of Clemencia, Cisneros uses a motif of metamorphosis that proposes a modification of the image of the Chicana on three levels: the historical, the personal, and the symbolic. The result of such modification is the creation of a social landscape in which the Chicana is the center and subject of the portraiture. The metamorphosis motif used by Cisneros suggests a social evolution through which the individual is not merely reborn but is recreated. By suggesting a different social landscape for her character, Cisneros proposes that the Chicana must look at herself from a perspective not made available to her in Western culture in order to discover the creature that she is. By adjusting to that perspective, she is reborn in her view of herself.

In "Never Marry a Mexican," the narrator is Mexican American, the product of a Mexican father and a first generation Mexican American mother. The story is told in retrospect in using the stream-of-consciousness. Because her mother looks at her father

with contempt, she advises the narrator, Clemencia, "Never marry a Mexican."

Proposedly in response to this admonition, Clemencia takes her art teacher, Drew, as a lover. He is upper middle class and married. When she confronts him concerning marriage, he refuses on the basis of his family responsibilities. Clemencia finally gives him up, but not before she persuades him to have a child by his wife. During their last fling together, which is at his house while his wife is away, she sabotages his "secret" of their affair by placing Gummy Bears inside his wife's private belongings. After many years, she becomes Drew's son's art teacher, re-establishing the relationship she had with his father in reverse. The boy becomes her lover.

The surface action is the conscious level account of the narrator and explains her operative as disappointment and revenge. However, her statement of epiphany at the end of the narrative, "I've gone and done it" at the end of the story informs the reader that Clemencia's subversive acts have accomplished more than revenge. In "Never Marry a Mexican," Clemencia, the narrator, attempts to "draw" herself to discover her identity through the examination of her past. Her experiences, revealed in retrospect, initially expose the narrator's sense of dissolution, a state from which she unconsciously begins to recreate herself. The title of the story, "Never Marry a Mexican," immediately establishes the conflict of race/culture that is central to the Clemencia's loss of identity. The first of the narrator's account further identifies her situation, that of a third-generation Mexican American who is striving to assimilate into the majority culture. The spousal choices of both the narrator and her mother indicate that such assimilation is

possible for a woman through marriage into the majority class and culture. Clemencia's mother had been born of immigrant Mexican parents who had crossed the United States border looking for work. She goes back to her "roots" in choosing a husband from an upper-class Mexican heritage, a choice that would have been socially advantageous in Mexico. As a Mexican American, however, she comes to feel that she has married "down" because her husband is not an American and knows practically no English.

As a young man, Clemencia's father had run away from the university because he had disgraced his family. He is a good deal older than Clemencia's mother. Because she comes from a family of a lower social class than his own, he feels that he has married "down" as well: "But what could be more ridiculous than a Mexican girl who couldn't even speak Spanish, who didn't know enough to set a separate plate for each course at dinner, nor how to fold cloth napkins, nor how to set the silverware" (69). In her desire for social identity, Clemencia adores her father for his elegant, genteel manner. His wife, however, despises these same traits, accusing him of putting on airs. Clemencia says: ". . . a *fanfarrón*. That's what my mother thought. . . . A big show-off, she'd say years later" (70). Although Clemencia sees her father's style as "*Calidad*," she likewise admires the generosity and dignity of her maternal grandfather, whose simple, peasant ways embarrassed his daughter and were scorned by her husband.

Clemencia understands that her father or her mother would have married "up," however, if either had married a EuroAmerican, no matter how poor. Late in their marriage, the narrator's mother begins an affair with a white man, whom she later

marries. In recognition of her own social failure, she tells her daughter, "Never marry a Mexican." In terms of social assimilation, the admonition to "never marry a Mexican" is advice that promotes social mobility. The movement of both the narrator and her mother through a choice of mate represents attempts at power brokering. The narrator's mother had married out of the peasant class into the elite class of Mexican society. However, the social advantages of that marriage were lost to the mother when her husband immigrated to the United States, where his social class/connections without money meant nothing. Clemencia is born of a mother who believes that she is socially superior to her husband because she is "American" and a father who feels he is superior to her mother socially because of his elitist, old-world upbringing. The cancellation of the standards of these two social systems by one another obliterates the narrator's sense of inherited class identification.

The next step in the mother's attempt at social assimilation is the rejection of her Mexican husband and the acquisition of an EuroAmerican lover/husband from the blue collar class. The narrator extends her mother's attempt at social assimilation with her choice of a lover who, by the description of his home and family life, is presumed to be a member of the U. S. upper middle class. This movement from the ranks of the working class minority to the middle class majority is equivalent to her mother's move in her marriages from peasant class Mexican to lower class white. In this attempt to move up the social ladder, the narrator finds a glass ceiling in her mobility because of her race. Her lover remains married to his EuroAmerican wife, and keeps his lover, Clemencia, in

the shadows of his social existence. Clemencia finds, then, that she has neither a historical heritage nor an acquired one. She is denied social acceptance above that of the working class on the basis of her (assumed) immigrant status, while she is in exile from the culture which would otherwise recognize her elite heritage.

Within the ambiance of the cultural conflict at work in the story, "Never Marry a Mexican" is an admonition to the narrator against an attempt to retain her heritage. Following her mother's example, she takes an EuroAmerican lover, and following her admiration for her father, he is from the upper middle class. Her attempt to live according to the conflicting values of her parents' class and culture, each one of which cancel the other out, leaves her with no means for identification of class or culture for herself. She has rejected her identification as Hispanic through taking her mother's advice to "never to marry a Mexican," but the EuroAmerican she takes as a lover does not claim her over his EuroAmerican wife. She neither claims herself as Mexican by these associations, nor is she "claimed" as EuroAmerican. Her unfruitful attempt at assimilation has precluded any cultural identifications (definitions) at all. A sign of resignation to her "nothingness" comes when she accepts her secondary status by encouraging her lover to father a child by his wife.

Clemencia not only lacks identification by culture, she likewise can find no identification through class. An indication of her inability to form an identification for herself in her social surroundings is her wandering between her old neighborhood and her work environment. She has endeavored to attain a high status of education in spite of her

working class roots, but continues to live in the *barrio*. In spite of her education and her achievement as an artist, she earns a meager living as a sometimes translator/ sometimes substitute teacher. Although the cultured class include her in their gatherings as accomplished artist, they do not support her art. That she cannot fully identify with either group is obvious from her statement:

I'm amphibious. I'm a person who doesn't belong to any class. The rich like to have me around because they envy my creativity; they know they can't buy *that*. The poor don't mind if I live in their neighborhood because they know I'm poor like they are, even if my education and the way I dress keeps us worlds apart. I don't belong to any class. Not to the poor, whose neighborhood I share. Not to the rich who come to my exhibitions. Not to the middle class from which my sister Ximena and I fled. (71-72)

As in her recalcitrant attitude toward marriage ("I'll *never* marry" is her response to her mother's advice), Clemencia's response to this exclusion shows a bravado that hides her feelings of alienation. Although she attempts to delude herself at the first of this description by calling herself "amphibious," implying that she has the ability to cross class lines, by the end of the passage she has exposed an open wound. Her education, professional status, and lifestyle alienate her from others of her race, while the same attributes are given only a token nod by the majority culture.

The invisibility that the narrator suffers because of her ethnicity is compounded by the silence and absence that her gender role dictates. It is significant to the gender factor found in the story that Cisneros casts the narrator's "telling" as a stream-of-consciousness narrative. It is clear from the substance of Clemencia's musings that, although her actions mimic her thoughts, these thoughts have neither been spoken aloud

nor demonstrated to the principal actors in her life. At her father's deathbed, at the sight of his treatment, she remembers:

. . . and I wanted to yell, Stop, you stop that, he's my daddy. Goddamn you. Make him live. Daddy, don't. Not yet, not yet, not yet. And how I couldn't hold myself up, I couldn't hold myself up. Like if they'd beaten me, or pulled my insides out through my nostrils, like if they'd stuffed me with cinnamon and cloves, and I just stood there dry-eyed . . . (74)

Her emotions are hidden by her outward appearance because the open expression of her emotions would be considered "a scene" in the cold, sterile world of the American hospital. Her recalcitrance forbids her to show the "weakness" attributed to such displays of "unreasonable" behavior. The image of what such silence has done to her is delivered in the passage above. In the scene of mummification, her "gut" feelings are embalmed with the "cinnamon and cloves" of decorous public behavior. Clemencia equates this deceptive decorum with the demands of the majority culture when she describes the polite way that her lover's EuroAmerican wife answers her call in the middle of the night, and then obediently hands the phone to her husband when he's asked for. Clemencia says of the incident, "No Mexican woman would react like that. Excuse me, honey. It cracked me up" (77). This revelation is given only ruminative space, however; Clemencia would never express it to her lover with whom she is likewise silent. Addressing her lover in her thoughts, she says: "I keep it to myself like I do all the thoughts I think of you. . .," and, as if with perspicacity, "With you I'm useless with words. As if somehow I had to learn to speak all over again, as if the words I needed haven't been invented yet" (78). Clemencia, as the narrator, is silenced even to herself, as an actress in

silent film. Through the narration of her thoughts and memoirs, she is a mimic who expresses her unspeakable feelings in the exaggerated actions, a sort of hysteria, of her revelation.⁷ It is only through these actions and ruminations that the reader comes to know the conflicts and frustrations in her life.

According to Luce Irigaray's Feminist explanation of the Oedipal complex, women are relegated to silence and absence because, ironically, they are at the center of the family dance. All other members of the family are defined by their relationship with the mother, but she herself is left undefined. Lucia Guerra expands on the Marxist aspect of women's absence when she explains:

*. . . ella es poseedora de un cuerpo hecho objeto del Deseo, bajo las imposiciones patriarcales que protegen la propiedad legítima sobre los hijos, le está prohibido ser Sujeto de ese Deseo bajo la mirada plácida del modelo segrado de la Virgen María --figura asexuada por excelencia.
(141)*

Clemencia's mother has been the victim of such obliteration in both a cultural sense, through her first marriage with a Mexican, as well as in the described Oedipal sense.

Guerra Cunningham explains this obliteration of the feminine in Lacanian terms, referring to women's identity as a case of "No ser/Ser/Deber ser":

La mujer como individuo que en su rol primario de madre ha permanecido en el espacio marginal de la Cultura irónicamente es también la matriz de prolíferas construcciones culturales en su calidad de Otro. Un Otro creado por el Sujeto masculino como necesidad imperiosa para una economía que ideológicamente se sustenta a partir de lo Mismo. Poniendo de la manera irreverente los mecanismos del falologocentrismo, se podría afirmar que la materialidad y inmanencia atribuidas a la mujer responden a las estrategias de un poder masculino que necesita ubicar en su tablero las fichas del No-Ser para imponer el Ser (133)

Such a system renders any attempt at sustained elevation as hopeless since power in the patriarchy is passed down through the sons. While Clemencia and her sister long for the security of the house of their own father's house, they have been disinherited through their mother's second marriage:

Ximena would say, Clemencia, maybe we should go home. And I'd say, Shit! Because she knew as well as I did there was no home to go to. Not with that man she'd married. After Daddy died, it was like we didn't matter. . . . My half brothers living in that house that should've been ours, me and Ximena's. (73)

The lack established through the *No ser/Ser/Deber ser* status of the female insures that property and power can be reinvested into the patriarchal line even in the event of the female inheritance of it. It is an insurance against the loss of patriarchal power. The same principle of operation is true for the maintenance of majority power. Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano explains: ". . . the Chicana's experience as a woman is inextricable from her experience as a member of an oppressed working-class racial minority and a culture which is not the dominant culture" (140). As exemplified in the mother's marriage to a EuroAmerican, marginalization by gender and race/class doubly insures that power is reinvested in the majority culture as well.

It is through marriage and motherhood that a woman submits to extraction from the field as a subject. The hospital scene mirrors the assimilation that the Mexican American woman is expected to make:

And I remember the doctor scraping the phlegm out of my father's mouth with a white washcloth, and my daddy gagging I just stood there dry-eyed next to Ximena and my mother, Ximena between us because I

wouldn't let her stand next to me. Everyone repeating over and over the Ave Marias and Padre Nuestrros. The priest sprinkling holy water, *mundo sin fin, amén*. (74)

As the priest administers Last Holy Rites to Clemencia's Mexican father, she is separated from him by the doctor who, scraping phlegm from the father's mouth, is emblematic of the mechanics of displacement that take place in exile. The use of the *white* washcloth to clear the contents of her father's mouth represents the evacuation of their culture from them, the tenets of which is embodied in language that comes from the mouth. When Clemencia says, "But that's --water under the damn," expresses the cancellation of her identity as as it is expressed through idiom: "I can't even get the sayings right even though I was born in this country. We didn't say shit like that in our house" (73). In the order of their departure from traditional roles of womanhood, strongly revered in Hispanic culture, Clemencia, her sister, and her mother stand to the side witnessing the scene of the symbolic eradication of their Mexican heritage as represented by the dying figure of the father. Clemencia's sister, Ximena, stands between Clemencia's recalcitrance to the traditional feminine roles and the cultural and genderbased opportunism that their mother practices. The "X" that begins Ximena's name hardly disguises its implied association with "hymen."⁸ Her plight is that of many women caught in the flux of changing family values. Ximena is even more victim of her gender than her mother because she is trapped in the *barrio*, her husband having deserted her and their children. She is trapped in poverty because of her motherhood in an economic system that promotes women's dependency. Such is the victimization that Clemencia

seeks to escape in her declaration, "I'll *never* marry. Not any man. I've known men too intimately" (68). In that declaration, she expresses a polemic view opposite to the opportunistic role into which patriarchy forces women.

A movement by Mexican American women through a spectrum of various cultural and class identities is given image by Cisneros in the scene of Clemencia's father's Final Rites as well. In the image of the three women, one may see the patriarchal order of power as well as the dissipation of cultural inheritance. Both the financial and the cultural identity is visited upon the mother, who will supplicate to a male of the EuroAmerican majority class. Ximena, second in line, loses her father's legacy, by her mother's acts, to the majority culture. She, however, inherits her mother's traditional feminine role, and is enslaved in the developing gap between the two cultural systems. Clemencia, anguished over the loss of her father, in whom she identifies a cultural and social legacy, rebels against her mother, whom she sees as a traitor. The words that they all repeat after the priest reflect the order of the system under which women are disinherited as it identifies the church as perpetrators of the system. "Ave Maria" ("Hail Mary") reflects the token respect given to motherhood, praise that damns the feminine through the disguise and promotion of her *No ser/Ser/Deber ser* status. Ownership and control, however, is acknowledged in the Padre Nuestros ("Our Father"), the father's role in the image of the patriarchal Godhead. Cisneros' choice to leave the "Ave Maria" in Latin, while using the Spanish translation of "Pater Noster," accentuates the ideas of silence and control respectively through linguistic identification by the reader. It

simultaneously re-emphasizes Clemencia's anguish at the loss of the father with whom she wishes to identify.

In the erasure of her identification as a wife and a "Mexican," Clemencia has excluded any identification she might otherwise hold of herself through the cancellation of one culture by another and one class by another. Her musing, as exposed through the text of the narrative, is an attempt to find a definition for herself. Consciously, she brings herself only to nothingness, the point where she must deny community of any class, culture, or gender identification. Ironically, while the narrator's conscious attempt to define herself reveals her dissolution, the reflexive nature of the narrative reveals that the narrator, who is an artist, is attempting to "draw" an identity for herself. An early indication of this reflexive parallel to the surface narrative is in the narrator's revelation of her affair with her art teacher. In Clemencia's mother's admonition to her daughter, "never marry a Mexican," she has instructed her daughter to define herself in the EuroAmerican field by being identified with/by a EuroAmerican husband. It is appropriate to the story that Clemencia's lover's name is "Drew." Through him, Clemencia attempts to "draw" herself according to the standards of the middle-class, EuroAmerican majority culture. However, as her "drawing" teacher, Drew forces her to draw herself as La Malinche, a Mexican symbol of female betrayal.⁹ Referring to their early relationship, Clemencia says: "Drew, remember when you used to call me your Malinalli? It was a joke, a private game between us because you looked like a Cortez with that beard of yours. My skin dark against yours. Beautiful, you said. You said I

was beautiful, and when you said it, Drew, I was" (74). During their affair, Drew taught her to draw herself by his standards, which are EuroAmerican, upper-class, and male. Ironically, those standards echo the words of Clemencia's mother captured in the title of the story. Clemencia mocks his words at his later rejection of her: "Hadn't I understood . . . responsibilities. Besides, he could never marry me. You didn't think. . . ? Never marry a Mexican. Never marry a Mexican . . . No, of course not. I see. I see" (80). Like Cortés' view of Malinalli (*La Malinche's* Indian name), Drew's picture of Clemencia places her second to his "proper" wife, Megan, "a red-headed Barbie doll in a fur coat" (243). Like *La Malinche*, Clemencia is cast aside, without apology, when Drew decides to return to his own society, which dictates his "responsibilities." As mentioned above, Clemencia's encouragement of Drew to return to his wife in order to father a child by her is an indication that Clemencia, too, consciously has come to identify herself as a Malinche, as someone not having enough value in Drew's culture to be his legal consort or bear his heirs.

It is important at this point to remember that Clemencia elaborates on the fact she does not make her living by her art because, although the majority culture tokenize their appreciation for it by showing her off at parties, they do not buy it. She says: "People say, 'A painter? How nice,' and want to invite me to their parties, have me decorate the lawn like an exotic orchid for hire. But do they buy art?" (71). Instead, Clemencia earns a meager living as a substitute teacher and a translator. Her personal "marketability" as a

woman reflects this same tokenism in Drew's attitude toward her as others do toward her art. She tells Drew's son:

Before you were born. When you were a moth inside your mother's heart, I was your father's student, yes, just like you're mine now. And your father painted and painted me, because he said, I was his *doradita*, all golden and sunbaked, and that's what kind of woman he likes best, the ones brown as riversand, yes. And he took me under his wing and in his bed, this man, this teacher, your father. I was honored that he'd done me the favor. I was that young. (76)

Drew accepts her as an aesthetic object for his enjoyment and profit, but he is not willing to risk anything to possess her--his social status, his home, his income, nothing. This passage and many others reflect, however, that Clemencia's game by which she aims to acquire identity--that is, "paint" herself into North American culture, is by substitution and, finally, translation. Not having a husband of her own, she "borrows" other women's husbands, and substitutes as a wife and, in an Oedipal sense, as a mother. She says, contemptuously: "Borrowed. That's how I've had my men" (69). Addressing Drew in her thoughts, she says:

. . . . Your son. . . . Did you tell him, while his mother lay on his back laboring his birth, I lay in his mother's bed making love to you. . . . And that's not the last time I've slept with a man the night his wife is birthing a baby. . . . Why do I do that? It's always given me a bit of crazy joy to be able to kill those women like that, without their knowing it. To know I've had their husbands when they were anchored in blue hospital rooms, their guts yanked inside out, the baby suckling their breasts while their husband suckled mine." (74-77)

This chain of passages relates the history of Clemencia's substitution of herself for the wives of her EuroAmerican lovers. She substitutes their experience for hers as well. Her image of "their guts yanked inside out" parallels the image she gives of herself ("pulled

my insides out through my nostrils”) as she sees her father, the symbol of her Hispanic heritage, dying. She translates their mothers, their wives, the mothers of their children, into herself. By the Oedipal substitution of the son for the father, she also translates history through this substitution, making the “*doradita* . . . brown as the river sand,” the propagator of the race, and the “proper” wife in North American culture.

This substitution on the personal level of the story is accomplished over the approximately twenty-year span that Clemencia’s retrospective narration encompasses. Agreeing to end their affair, Clemencia spends a final weekend at Drew’s house while his wife is away. During this visit, Clemencia “seeds” Megan’s private belongings with Gummy Bears, protoplasmic-looking candies in the shape of a toy. Clemencia recounts:

I went over to where I’d left my backpack, and took out a bag of gummy bears I’d bought. And while [Drew] was banging pots, I went around the house and left a trail of them in places I was sure *she* would find them. One in her Lucite makeup organizer. One stuffed in each bottle of nail polish. I untwisted the expensive lipsticks to their full length and smushed a bear on top before recapping them. I even put a gummy bear in her diaphragm case in the very center of that luminescent rubber moon. (81)

This “seeding” ends with the suggested interference of some “Mexican voodoo,” which sets an “abracadabra” on the act, a winding up of the spell she has cast. This activity corresponds to Clemencia’s seeming generosity in persuading Drew to have a child with his wife. She substitutes her “protoplasm” for the “*calidad*” possessions of Draw’s wife, symbolically taking Megan’s place in Drew’s home.

By extending the La Malinche-Cortés relationship as the metaphor for the narrator’s identification of herself, the reader may understand that, symbolically, “the

boy” becomes the child that Malinche bore to Cortés, making Malinche known as the mother of the Mexican “race,” the *mestizo*.¹⁰ “The boy” whom Clemencia claims as her own son, is the result of her relinquishment of the affair with Drew. According to the “voodoo” Clemencia performed, she is “the boy’s” mother by substitution, and now “mothers” him because she is his confidant and his drawing teacher, in the same way as Drew, his father, was hers. He is also a “plant” in Drew’s and Megan’s household, like the gummy bears. The *mestizo*, as a cross between the European and the Indian, is a true “American,” in the modern sense of the word, as the product of a society that claims to value its “melting pot” origins. In a symbolic reversal of La Malinche-Cortés episode, Clemencia has seduced Drew so that he produces the child of their relationship. Clemencia therefore reverses the direction of “Americanization.” Purification of the race has taken a turn from mixing white blood in the native, to mixing native blood with the white. Instead of Europeanizing the Indian, Clemencia begins an Indianization of the European, thereby beginning a trend, at least symbolically, and probably unconsciously, to legitimize her own culture as acceptable, if not predominate, in the New World. Within this perspective, she paints the American according to her standard. Speaking of Drew, she says:

You’re nothing without me. I made you from spit and red dust. And I can snuff you between my finger and thumb if I want to. Blow you to kingdom come. You’re just a smudge of paint I chose to birth on canvas . . . I paint and repaint you as I see fit, even now . . . Making the world look at you from my eyes. And if that’s not power, what is? (75)

In the act of “seeding” herself into Drew’s line, she accomplishes identity through an adjustment to her own terms of acculturation, rather than attempting, as her mother has directed her, to adjust herself to the dominant culture’s unreachable conditions for assimilation.

The next step in Clemencia’s substitution is the translation of the field of her portrait, which is the cultural landscape in which the *mestizo* appears. Bernal Díaz records that upon the arrival of Doña Catalina Xuárez, Cortés’ European wife, Cortés arranged a marriage between Malinche and one of his own men (Cypress 38). By this act, he disowned his own child by Malinche by legitimizing his first marriage. In essence, this act took place on a personal level, but, as synecdoche, it constitutes the basis for the European usurpation of Mexican rule. To translate this event into the recreation of herself, Clemencia makes the final substitution at both a personal and a symbolic level. She recounts that Drew had brought her a set of nesting “babushka” dolls from Russia and so supposes that the set she finds on the desk during her gummy bear excursion must have been Drew’s identical gift to Megan. She says:

I did just what I did, uncapped the doll inside a doll inside a doll, until I got to the very center, the tiniest baby inside all the others, and this I replaced with a gummy bear. And then I put the dolls back just like I’d found them, one inside the other, inside the other. Except for the baby, which I put inside my pocket. (81-82)

The identical gifts from Drew, then, indicates that he gives equal value to both women on a personal level. It is only through the original usurpation that one type of woman has come to be preferred by the majority culture over the other. The Russian babushka dolls

are egg-shaped and nesting, so that the opening of one “gives birth” to the next. The innermost doll is called “the grandmother” of the set. As such, the set represents generations of women. By uncapping the dolls, Clemencia “unhatches” the ideal of American womanhood represented by Megan, the “type” of woman made legitimate as a wife by Cortés’ sanction of his first wife as legitimate. The symbolic substitution that Clemencia makes effects a reversal of the social and cultural metamorphosis that Europeanized the American culture. Clemencia begins the cultural evolution anew, preparing the rebirth of different ideal, by “planting” her own heritage, represented by the gummy bear, in place of the innermost doll. In doing so, Clemencia eliminates the European pride in “*sangre puro*” from the history of American culture, and translates it to a value for the mixed inheritance of her own kind, the *mestizo*. The substitution is made complete, and her antagonism vindicated, in the “voodoo” she performs next:

On the way home, on the bridge over the *arroyo* on Guadalupe street, I stopped the car, switched on the emergency blinkers, got out, and dropped the wooden toy into the muddy creek where winos piss and rats swim. The Barbie doll’s toy stewing in that muck. It gave me a feeling like nothing before or since. (82)

Clemencia casts Megan’s doll, representative of the future generations descended from European beginnings, into the muck. By doing so, she supplants generations of her own ancestors. Now it is the Europeans who “stew” in oppression that the *mestizo* has suffered as the object of social discrimination. With her own “ancestor” in the sanctified position of the legitimized mother, Clemencia, then, sleeps “like the dead” in anticipation of her own rebirth many generations later. Because it is she, her “type,” in the innermost

egg, and it is also she that will be reborn, the sleep is like that of a creature inside a cocoon. The passing of the generations between the supplanting and her rebirth in a different form is a metamorphosis, the stages of which are represented by the nesting "eggs" into which Clemencia has planted her form. The new creature, a Chicana, will emerge into an America where the mestizo is the dominant culture, and she will acquire the legacy of cultural and social prestige.

It is at the end of this "sleep" that Clemencia's substitution brings about a "translation" of her existence. Clemencia waits patiently for her rebirth until she can substitute Drew's son, now a teenager, for Drew himself as her lover. Clemencia's affair with the boy, an act through which she consciously seeks revenge on her lover for his rejection of her, symbolically constitutes incest in compliance with the Oedipal model. It is through the reversal of this model that Clemencia effects the means for rebirth. Freud's model is phallogentric, where the male seeks to recreate himself in his son. In pursuit of that end, he dominates a woman who is a substitute for his mother. In Cisneros' story, where the protagonist seeks to escape both social and gender-based oppression, the author substitutes a matricentric model, thereby reversing the gender-based dynamics of oppression. Clemencia, in Cisneros' revelation, becomes the Jocasta of the Oedipal model, who bears the daughters of her own son. In Clemencia's case, however, any offspring would be that of matriachal dominance. By having "drawn" herself in as both his ancestor and his mother, Clemencia has "drawn" the son--Drew's son--as Cortés' son, a *mestizo*. Clemencia's statement, "Oh, love, there I've gone and

done it" (83) is a reply to the admonition presented in the title of the story. According to the schema she has acted out through substitution and translation. Clemencia finds that she has, after all, married a Mexican. By taking the son into her bed in a symbolic replacement for his father, "Cortez," she gives birth to herself as an American who, because she is a *mestiza*, is dominant in a culture of her own propagation.

It is through substitution that Clemencia is able to restore the speech that she lost in exile--the loss that was given image when Clemencia watches the American doctor scrape the phlegm from her father's mouth. Before she realizes that she's "done it," (words that facetiously suggest both remorse or success), Clemencia bemoans her ephemeral existence:

Sometimes the sky is so big and I feel so little at night. That's the problem with being a cloud. The sky is so terribly big. Why is it worse at night, when I have such an urge to communicate and no language with which to form the words? Only colors. Pictures. And you know what I have to say isn't always pleasant. (83)

After the announcement of her disobedience, however, Clemencia discovers the new world she has created. She has transformed the world that she lives in by substituting new pictures for old ones. She substitutes colors, forms, and perspectives, but she always changes the picture to give clemency--thus her name-- to herself. In the former picture she had of herself--that which American society gave her--she was always La Malinche, a victim of elitism at all levels. In the new picture she has created for herself, however, she is a defined and central figure, and thus can afford to be charitable, rather than recalcitrant, in her outlook: "Human beings pass me on the street, and I want to reach

out and strum them as if they were guitars. Sometimes all humanity strikes me as lovely. I just want to reach out and stroke someone, and say There, there, it's alright, honey. There, there, there" (83). In the scheme of her re-birth, Clemencia's tone of anger and revenge is translated to acceptance, and thus she is able to relinquish Drew to the life he has chosen for himself. She pictures him "going back to sleep with that wife beside you . . . , oh" (83).

The narrative does not, however, indicate that Clemencia has a conscious conception of the means of this acceptance, which are the actions and feelings that she has recounted. Regardless of the character's lack of awareness of the allegorical nature of her actions, the story itself, in its reflexivity, serves as a canvas for the new world that the author is painting. Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano explains what seems to be Cisneros's purpose in the "painting" that the story comprises:

The love of Chicanas for themselves and each other is at the heart of Chicana writing, for without this love they could never make the courageous move to place Chicana subjectivity in the center of literary representation, or depict pivotal relationships among women past and present, or even obey the first audacious impulse to put pen to paper. Even as that act of necessity distances the Chicana writer from her oral tradition and not so literate sisters, the continuing commitment to the political situation of all Chicanas creates a community in which readers, critics and writers alike participate. (144)

Cisneros, by her story, presents a model for the metamorphosis and rebirth of the Chicana personae. It begins with a rejection of the cultural values that paint her as "La Malinche" and proceeds with a re-endowment of dignity to both the image of her past and of her present. She must see herself central to her own emancipation, recalcitrant to oppression,

and true to her own heart, even when the way is unclear. By this narrative, Cisneros paints a landscape of the Chicana experience and asks her sisters to find in it a portrait of themselves.

Notes

¹Several of Atwood's later novels, notably *Bodily Harm* (1981) and *Cat's Eye* (1988), heavily employ metamorphosis as a motif, as well.

²Sherrill Grace, in her "In Search of Demeter: The Lost, Silent Mother in *Surfacing*," (*Margaret Atwood Vision and Forms*, Kathryn Vanspankaren and Jan Garden Castro, eds. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988) identifies *Surfacing*, because of its emphasis on silencing and voice, as a retelling of the Demeter and Persephone myth. Josie P. Campbell, in her "The Woman as Hero in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*" (*Mosaic* 11:3, 1978) also identifies the narrator as a Kore (an alternate name for Persephone) figure. For the purposes of this study, I believe that the mother figure may be more appropriately compared to Aphrodite, and the narrator to Psyche. Such identification lends itself well to the events and characters concerned in the plot of *Surfacing*. Both Grace and Campbell place the narrator's quest for her mother or her mother's message as a central determinant for her success in a quest for self. I maintain, however, that her mother's message is necessary in the narrator's quest only because it reveals to the narrator the fallacy of her previous self conception, a ruse to her discovery of self. If the narrator is identified as Psyche and the mother as Aphrodite, then the narrator's search for a message from her mother is interpretable inside her quest for her *animus* rather than being central to the quest itself.

In the Psyche myth (according to Edith Hamilton, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, New York: Mentor, 1940), Psyche goes in search of Eros, son of Aphrodite. In her quest, she seeks out Aphrodite who, to deter her from finding Eros, sends her on several seemingly impossible tasks. The first is to sort out a heap of seeds, the second is to collect the golden fleece from fierce sheep by the riverbank, a third is to collect black water that flowed from the River Styx from an inaccessible falls. Through the intervention of nature, Psyche is able to accomplish all three tasks. Aphrodite then orders her to bring a box of beauty balm from Persephone in the Land of the Dead. Psyche is able to procure the balm, but, tempted to use some (perhaps hoping to make herself more appealing to Eros), she opens the box. The contents are poisonous and cause her to languish in the midst of her journey back to Aphrodite. Eros acts as Psyche's ambassador with the gods. As a result, Zeus calls an end to Aphrodite's intervention in the love affair between Psyche and Eros, her *animus*. Psyche is then made a goddess and allowed to marry Eros and bear his child, Pleasure (sometimes called "Bliss").

In a mirroring of Psyche's troubles with Aphrodite, the narrator in *Surfacing* finds a "heap" of memories in her mother's scrapbooks and picture album. The plot emerges out of her need to "sort through" these memories in order to find out who she really is. The mother's scrapbooks contain photos and the narrator's childhood art that represents her development under the "urbanized" tutelage of her mother—herself all decked out in her prom dress, looking like the typical teenage girl, the drawing of her

father which associates him with the sun, a picture of the family decked out much like the moose family in the nearby village. Like Joe and many women in the masculinized world, the narrator's mother had endowed the word "love" with a meaning for submission to masculine control. In this sense, the narrator's mother, like Aphrodite, advocates a "love" with patriarchal meaning. Sorting through the ruses presented by the miscommunication of this word "love" is what *Surfacing* is all about. The narrator's picking blueberries on the island is equivalent to Psyche's collecting the golden fleece on the brambles after the sheep have left for the fold. It is on that excursion that the narrator realizes the loss that urbanization brings to primitive people and settings. The narrator's discovery of the ghostly figure in Birch Lake is a mirroring of the Psyche's collecting water from the River Styx, the river of death. The concepts that women have of themselves in the masculinized world, a concept that the narrator's mother encouraged in her daughter, is represented in Anna, whom the narrator admits is much like herself when she was younger. Anna is always concerned that her husband will not (and he does not, it turns out) accept her without her makeup. Thus, Anna represents Persephone in the Land of the Dead. When the narrator had Anna's perceptions concerning desirability, she was also languishing in her search for herself. The mother's cyclical death and rebirth, like her movement between the city and the backwoods, reflect the living death of the kind of life that Anna lives under David's harsh dictates for "love." The role imposed on women in a masculinized society causes the languishing in the search for the feminine, a living death that the narrator has been subject to since the urbanization that her mother encouraged.

This languishing on the part of the narrator is brought to an end by the narrator's father, a figure portrayed in her childhood drawings and referred to by the narrator as a "god." Through his intervention, the narrator comes to terms with the contradictions that exist between her memories as constructed by the masculinized world and those of the primitive self that she discovers in the backwoods. It is thus that her father becomes the mediating Zeus of the Psyche myth. Because of his map and pictographs, the narrator is allowed to "come home" to the *animus* that is Self. It is in this marriage between the narrator and Self, her *animus*, that Aphrodite is recognized in the figure of the narrator's mother. When the narrator unites with Self, then the mother of Self becomes her mother as well. It is only in the transformation that is the result of her search that the narrator is reconciled with her mother. It could be said in accordance with Campbell's and Grace's analogies, that the mother may correspond with a Demeter figure in the narrator's memory, but it should be mentioned that this is during the daughter's "languish." She remembers her mother as being deathly still as she fed the birds, much as Demeter might have been in her daughter's absence. The narrator comments that both parents are not now as she has seen them, but are transformed, in some sense, as she has been.

As the narrator's lover and the father of her child they will share, Joe comes to be identified with Eros and, therefore, united in the identification of the narrator with her *animus*. He is the father of the child that the narrator regards as her "hope" for

happiness in a world in which she is unable to communicate. She calls Joe "a mediator" and "an ambassador" to the world that she is about to re-enter. She is hoping that Joe, like Eros, will act on her behalf in the world that, like the realm of the gods to Eros, is alien to her.

³Peter Quartermaine ("Surfacing: Strange Familiarity," *Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity*, Colin Nicholson, ed., New York: St. Martins, 1994.) reports that "Atwood has described *Surfacing* as a 'ghost story', making clear her own preference for ghost stories of the Henry James type, where the ghost seen is 'a fragment of one's own self which has split off', adding, "that is to me the most interesting kind . . . the tradition I'm working'" (127). Quartermaine's explanation of Atwood's technique is exemplified in the passage quoted: it is in the depth of her dive that the narrator finds herself imaged with the submerged ghosts of her past. (These ghosts can also be equated with Psyche's visit to the underworld. See note 2 above). Each ghost, however, equally represents her death of self. Her dive disengages her Self from the other dead figures of her memories and perceptions and restores the Self to life. Her surfacing is equivalent to her brother's resuscitation from his drowning incident, but with her salvation being brought about by her father. Like the aggregate ghosts in Dicken's "A Christmas Carole," the ghosts release Atwood's narrator from a living death that their memory impinge on her. Her father's pictographs are the key to the transitional power of his figure, and so his death becomes her legacy, providing the power for her transformation.

⁴Beyond Joe's potential as a mate and a possible ambassador to the outside world, however, the narrator has much less interest in a lasting association with him (see note 2 above). She says: "For us it's necessary, the intercession of words; and we will probably fail, sooner or later, more or less painfully. That's normal. . . ." (198). One should note that in the scheme of insect reproduction, the role of the male is short-lived. Once fertilization complete, the function of procreation remains solely with the female. The male is dispensable. Thus, the narrator sees her relationship with Joe to be temporary in her future of her "adult" phase.

⁵For additional criticism on *Woman Hollering Creek*, the reader is advised to see L. M. Lewis' "Ethnic and Gender Identity: Parallel Growth in Sandra Cisneros' *Woman Hollering Creek*" (*Short Story* 2:2, 1974) and Jeff Thompson's "'What Is Called Heaven': Identity in Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek*" (*Studies in Short Fiction* 31:3 (Summer), 1994).

⁶Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano explains that the problem of individuation for Chicana women is compounded by their social as well as their sexual definition. As a critic of Chicana literature, she explains the interconnected factors that contribute to the conflicts found in Chicana literature: "Perhaps the most important principle of Chicana feminist criticism is the realization that the Chicana's experience as a woman is

inextricable from her experience as a member of an oppressed working-class racial minority and a culture which is not the dominant culture. Her task is to show how in works by Chicanas, elements of gender, race, culture, and class coalesce" (140). Perhaps Yarbrow-Bejarano's statement may be generalized as indicative of the difficulty that Chicanas, whether they be critics, writers, readers, or even illiterate sisters, have in recognizing some image of themselves apart from the oppressive crossgrains of culture that make up their existence.

⁷Catherine Clement (is the resemblance of her name and Cisneros's narrator's a mere coincidence?), in her long essay "Sorceress and Hysteric," (*The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing. *Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 24. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota P., 1986.) explains hysteria as the language of the repressed feminine. It is perhaps for this reason that Clemencia, as she is reborn, says: "So. What do you think? Are you convinced now I'm as crazy as a tulip or a taxi? As vagrant as a cloud?" (83).

⁸The use of the "X" in place of a "J" in Ximena's name may signal the use of the name as a sort of shibboleth by the author. Clemencia states that she is a "translator" and the message of the story seems to indicate that the story itself is a shibboleth, intended to convey meaning to the Mexican American and/or Feminist reader that may not be readily apparent to the reader who does not understand, for example, the allusion to "La Malinche" as is suggested in the title and by Clemencia's relationship with Drew.

⁹La Malinche was the Indian slave woman presented to Cortés as a gift of friendship by the Aztec leader. She became instrumental in the negotiations between Cortés and various Indian tribes. These negotiations eventually led to the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs. For this reason, La Malinche has become a symbol of betrayal in Mexican consciousness. Sandra Messinger Cypess, in her *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1991.), says: "Although [La Malinche's] voice may have been silenced, her presence and functions are documented in the chronicles. For that reason she may be considered the first woman of Mexican Literature, just as she is considered the first mother of the Mexican nation and the Mexican Eve, symbol of national betrayal (2). Cypess' contention that La Malinche is "the first mother of Mexican nationality" is based on Alonso León de Garay's *Una aproximación a la psicología del mexicano*. Cypess characterizes La Malinche's image as representing the Desirable Whore/Terrible Mother archetype in the modern Mexican consciousness by saying: "La Malinche . . . embodies both negative national identity and sexuality in its most irrational form, a sexuality without regard to moral laws or cultural values. . . . one who conforms to her paradigm is labeled *malinchista*, the individual who sells out to the foreigner, who devalues national identity in favor of imported benefits" (7). Cypess records Malinal, Malintzin, Malinche, or Doña Marina as alternative versions of the name, La Malinche (2).

¹⁰As a sort of Mexican "Eve," one possible redeeming act on La Malinche's part was giving birth to Cortés' son. Cypess (*La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1991) translates Rosario Castellano's remark on the ambivalence of this event in the Mexican consciousness as: "Some call her a traitor, others consider her the foundress of our nationality, according to whatever perspective they choose to judge her from" (7). This son, Martín Cortés, represents the mixture of the European and Indian races that took place through the conquest. (It should be noted, however, that this "representation" may not be not historically based. Dr. Wendell Aycock of Texas Tech University has recently informed me that the first *mestizo* was born after a Spaniard was left in the Yucatan. He later greeted Cortés with his family, his firstborn apparently being the first *mestizo*.) In respect to her status as the consort of the "First" conquistador, i.e., Cortés, and the mother of his son, Cypess calls La Malinche a "root paradigm" and states of her significance to Mexican culture: "In popular mythology La Malinche serves as a synecdoche for all Indian women who lament the fate of their progeny born to the Spanish conquistadors" (7). La Malinche's treatment by Cortés is likewise paradigmatic as it relates to the concept of machismo. Cypess states: "The conquest was a crucial event in the formation of male-female relations. Succinctly described by Elu de Lañero, the traditional image influencing male-female relationships is derived from Cortés being served by La Malinche. In the way a Mexican man enjoys dominating a woman, wants service from her, and expects to impose his will and body on her and then dispose of her, he repeats the pattern Cortés established with La Malinche" (8).

CHAPTER V
PROCREATION

The narratives grouped in this chapter exhibit the entire life cycle of metamorphosis. In the process of metamorphosis, only the complete creature can reproduce another complete creature. In the chapter on emergence, the female questors escape from the cocoon in which they had been trapped by the masculine culture, but their success in the outer world is not assured. Ferré's niece escapes from marriage, but her success outside of marriage is not foretold, Atwood's narrator hopes she carries a child within her, and hopes that Joe will join her in her plan to remake their world into one that can sustain the "truly human." Clemencia realizes that she has remade the cultural landscape, but she does not attempt to walk as a Chicana in that landscape. In the narratives, the reader, like the questor, is left with the question of, "Will this really work?" Under patriarchy, as Viramonte's "The Moths" shows, the product of patriarchal lineage is flawed because part of the lineage of the female creature is repressed. It is the repression that brings about the truncated development of the feminine. An example from the insect world of such truncated development can be seen in the difference between the development of the worker bee, bred only for utilitarian purposes, and the queen bee, bred and nurtured for reproductive purposes. A true reproductive capacity is

not possible for the worker. She can only devote her life to the welfare of the colony. It is only the queen who can produce another queen—the complete bee.

Using the analogy of the bee colony above, it can be said that the questor/author in both Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Levinson's "The Cove," are fully confident that they have been completely reborn as a woman. In each case, the questor returns to the place from which she came to deliver the secret she has obtained that has made her a complete individual. In a reflexive sense, the questor's success in her return is the triumph of the author's efforts. In "The Cove" the tale that the narrator carries back to her own time with her is the fulfillment of the dream that she has had. The narrator returns equipped to finish the story of the feminine for others. In Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie returns with her own story of true love and a full life on the muck. She is ready to participate in the big picture of the community and to teach Phoebe to be ready as well through her story.

The tale that the author tells, then, completes of the narrator's quest. The cycle of the feminist artist is complete when she "procreates" in others, through the images she uses, the sense that she has of the feminine. The "word" allows her to proliferate her understanding in others. The scheme of Janie's search, a quest not only for personal autonomy but for artistic freedom, is a prototype for the feminine *Künstlerroman* fictions that use the metamorphosis motif to provide an image for Psyche's search. True to the confidence that Janie shows, Hurston's narrative is a prototype for feminist artists since her time. Levinson, too, is a prototypical feminist artist for Latina writers, who include

her own daughter, Luisa Valenzuela. As opposed to the previous grouping, these narratives offer more than a “maybe” for the survival of the feminine. They, instead, predict that the feminine will prevail. Each is marked by heavy use of imagery within the convention of the feminine quest that suggests insect metamorphosis that culminates in the propagation of a new generation. The imagery and language of these works have propagated later generations of feminine expression as women’s writing has amalgamated, synthesized, fused, and refined the connotations of the feminine as presented in these works.

Luisa Mercedes Levinson: “The Cove”

In the Garden there strayed
A beautiful maid
As fresh as the flowers of morn.
In the first hour of her life
She became a man’s wife
And was buried before she was born.
--Anonymous

Luisa Mercedes Levinson combines the conventions of the quest for the feminine with the conventions of a reflexive feminine *Küntslerroman* in her short story “The Cove.” The narrative is constituted by a tale which, like many quest romances, frames an allegory that provides to the questor some knowledge to assist her in her quest. The questor, the narrator of the framing tale, comes to a clearing inside the jungle to find the scene of a dead woman laced into a hammock with two dead men on the ground near her.

The questor is identified only as one “who for some motive of want, ventures to cross the jungle and the barren plains of ruddy earth” (114). The final line of the story reads: “The hammock, in space, like a bridge or yet a whispering dream, was rocking over death, when I, the poor wanderer, arrived” (120). These two are the only lines of the story which refer to the narrator, and they alone establish the frame story in which the larger narrative, the allegory, is embedded. The imagery in these two lines signal the archetypal significance as well as the structure of the tale. The wanderer, who is the questor of the framing story, regresses back through time in search of something she is missing and finds a bridge between the tale she relates and herself.

The imbedded tale tells of how the woman had come to the clearing with Don Alcibiades, the owner of the cove, who had enticed her with promises of travel and adventure. Instead of adventure, however, the woman never leaves the clearing at all. In fact, the only time she moves from her place in the hammock is when the *don* seizes her from it and carries her indoors. Within the story of her existence in the cove is also the story of her death. The owner tricks her and the hired hand, El Ciro, into believing that he is going off to market, leaving them alone together. In a manner typical of her indifference, the woman accepts El Ciro’s advances rather than shooting him with the gun that Don Alcibiades has given her, saying: “There’s one bullet left. Its enough for you” (115). When she does not defend his ownership of her, Don Alcibiades, who has been spying on the scene, returns to shoot El Ciro with his own gun. He then laces the woman up in the hammock with his rope intending to leave her to die there in the midst

of the encroaching jungle. As she reflects on the events that brought and kept her at the cove, however, a spark of hatred ignites in her a desire for retribution. She manages to turn herself within the hammock so that she can use the one bullet allowed her to shoot and kill her “benefactor.” As she dies, she manages to begin to unlace the rope that traps her in the hammock. It is this scene of death and a foiled victory that the narrator finds as she arrives at the cove.

It is important to say “she” in referring to the narrator, not because the gender of the narrator is mentioned in the story, but for two other reasons: First, since the first-person narrator does not specify her gender, the reader associates the persona of the narrator with the person of the writer. In spite of some unwritten rule of interpretation which holds that one should assume only what is written in the story, the association is natural and expected when the narrator is not defined soon enough for the reader to suppose any other thing. The “voice” of the narrator must be established quickly, and, in the absence of a defined narrator, the reader assigns it the voice of the author. Secondly, the inner story is related from the point-of-view of the woman in the tale, and it is obvious that the narrator tells the tale to establish relevance between the woman’s adventures and her own search. The link between the narrator’s search and the tale of the woman is established when the narrator defines the tale as a “bridge” and a “dream” for her. The narrator is defined, then, by the tale she tells uncontradicted by any text that would contradict what the reader is most likely to presume about her persona.

Furthermore, as will be seen, the appropriation of the writer's voice for the narrator is necessary to the reflexive nature of the narrative.

The bridge to which the narrator refers is a link between the present time of the framing reflexive narration and the embedded story's primeval setting. It is not the props of the story that mark the time as primeval since the surroundings and circumstances are more primitive and remote than they are ancient. Because the setting is remote and primitive, however, the situation of the inner story acquires a timelessness which surpasses the antiquity given an image in either classical or Judeo-Christian myth. And yet, the events that grow out of the story's primeval aura are based on those mythologies. Levinson has used situations and images from Western culture and has reconstructed them in a manner which allows the reader of her story to view the Fall of Man from a feminine perspective. In the sense that the reader is expected to be grounded by Western tradition, the story of "The Cove" bridges the gap between the predetermined views of the typical reader and the view of the feminine that Levinson proposes in her allegory. The inner story, then, allows the narrator-writer to retreat from the present time of the framing narration into a dimension unaffected by the imposition of archetypes selected by Western culture. To discover a different truth about herself, she must regress beyond consciousness and beyond the "truth" which has eclipsed her recognition of the missing part of herself. She finds what she is seeking through a re-manipulation, or a re-imaging, of consciousness from that which was prepackaged and imposed upon her in her own time.

By the inversion of the events and images found in the Judeo-Christian account of The Fall, Levinson proposes a myth which predicts, and thus makes real through language, a latent maturation of a feminine spirit. The account is mythological in the sense that myth packages facets of human consciousness in images that allow that consciousness to be examined. Nor Hall, in her *The Moon and the Virgin*, explains:

Just as dreams will often repeat themselves until their meaning is grasped, sometimes using new faces or names or times of day--but always in the attempt to circumscribe the same essential psychic fact--myths use a profusion of names and images to describe the essence of one god, goddess, or event in the history of human consciousness. Variations in surname and attributes of the deities and their descendants--the princesses and shepherds and seamstresses of folk literature--occur because no single tale can tell the whole story of these creatures who represent our own psychic complexity. The individual human psyche, or soul, clothes itself in countless layers of peculiar design. (XV)

Levinson's myth provides a variation of the images found in Judeo-Christian myth that compensate for any images that have been lost through the masculinization of culture. Imagistically, the story proposes that the feminine has lain dormant because, as myth has formerly explained and determined, the dominant masculine culture attempts to eradicate any challenge to the status quo which maintains it.

Levinson's choice of South American place names in the setting is appropriate to her myth of masculine domination since the conquest of the New World came at the pinnacle of the endeavor by Western man to cast himself in the role of Master-of-All-He-Surveys. The locus of Levinson's myth is an inversion of the paradisaical Eden surrounded by wilderness. Levinson's cove is the ruins of, at best, some poor imitation of Eden. It is an attempt to carve a sparse habitat out of the lush jungle--the situation a

parody of Adam's purported dominion over nature. It should be noted that the woman of the tale has Oriental features, a detail which suggests that, rather than being made from Adam's rib, her origins are foreign to Western "paradise." Her import to the cove, in fact, was from a brothel in Obera. If the tinged connotation of brothel activities is discounted as patriarchally imposed, one can see that the women who live and support themselves there are a society free of male domination.¹ The women of this society marketed their resources, and they protected their economy and independence by allowing the midwife to purge their wombs. Men trade *with* these women, but not *on* them. The woman of the story is tricked by the promise of adventure into relinquishing this protection, and is trapped inside the false Eden. She is "malinche"-d,² her autonomy usurped and her desires buried by the isolation imposed on her.

A comparative analysis of this inner story with the Biblical account of the Fall is important for the implications discovered therein. The comparison implies Levinson's projections for the future of the feminine that she hopes her narrative helps to effect. In her allegory, Don Alcibiades is the patron of this world that Levinson names "the cove," but, like God in the Garden, Don Alcibiades' benevolence is only as great as the subservience of its inhabitants to his own desires. Don Alcibiades makes promises to El Ciro that he will reward his hard work, setting up his servant to believe that the *patron* intends to place the cove's resources under his care. Don Alciabades then places the woman in charge of protecting his own interests by giving her a gun to shoot El Ciro if he falls to the temptation. By charging her in this manner, Don Alcibiades tests her

faithfulness to him, or, in a more real sense, his ownership of her. Throughout the account he has allowed, even encouraged, the woman's lethargy as long as she does not object to his own exploitation of her. By the propagation of these different expectations in them, both El Ciro and the woman have been "created" by Don Alcibiades because they have been conditioned by him to respond to his test in just the way that they do. In Alcibiades' absence, El Ciro claims his reward, the woman, and she does not object. The *don* witnesses the "fall" of his servants into a disobedience which is, was, and always would be inevitable under the prevailing conditions of the *patron's* governance.

Allegorically, Levinson has placed both God and Satan in the person of Don Alcibiades. He is both the creator and the tempter. The patriarchal system by which he operates his homestead makes its inhabitants doomed to his retribution. The only means for reprieve for the inhabitants is in the destruction of the god who wields the power that maintains the system. With El Ciro already killed, led astray by his belief that he would be allowed to share in his *patron's* dominion, it is left to the woman finally to resist. It is her feminine spirit, evoked from its dormant state by righteous indignation at Don Alcibiades' trick, coupled with the one bullet that he *himself* has given her, that begins the process by which Levinson proposes that the world may be re-created.

The re-creation is to be accomplished according to another myth, however. Just as Levinson's feminist story of the Fall is more atemporal than its Judeo-Christian alternative, so the quest narrative that embraces the allegory is anterior to it in terms of culture. The natural metamorphic imagery that Nor Hall assigns to Psyche's search is

applicable to the narrator-questor's experience through her discovery of her lost self in the prototypical woman in the cove. Psyche, named for a butterfly, goes in search of Eros, who represents, as Nor Hall puts it: ". . . her own blind, soaring spirit, a psychological element called *animus* in women, a masculine 'breath' that inhabits the body of a woman and comes and goes, with a capacity to both cripple and inspire" (21). Psyche's quest, which involves a visit to Persephone in the underworld before she is restored to Eros, is found in the quest of narrator-questor, who also regresses in her search to the mythic time and place of the cove. Levinson's searcher regresses to a mythical time which, in straddling both mythologies that inform Western archetypal imagery, becomes anterior to them both in its collectivity.

The image of primitivity that Levinson accomplishes in the image of the cove is further enhanced by the suggestion of its being only barely removed from the primordial. The cove is described as ruins of a one-time respectable settlement carved out of the jungle which surrounds it. The jungle is represented as a dangerous chaos, a mayhem where all is yet unformed. The nature of the jungle suggests Karl Jung's unconscious, which he describes as an experience devoid of form until it is imaged by the individual. He says:

From the unconscious there emanate determining influences which, independent of tradition, guarantee in every single individual a similarity and even the sameness of experience, and also the way it is represented imaginatively. One of the main proofs of this is the almost universal parallelism between mythological motifs, which on account of their quality as primordial images, I have called archetypes. (*The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* 58)

According to this explanation, an archetype is indistinguishable from the welter of all human experiences until it is caught up in an image. Levinson's narrative implies that the feminine is an archetype lost to the imagination because it has been buried beneath archetypal images generated by a masculinized society. To compensate for this loss, Levinson provides the image of the primordial woman of her allegory to the questor-narrator (and may I add, author) to be inserted into her mythic legacy. Levinson's formation of this image is organic to the reconceptualization of the feminine needed by a narrator from the modern world. Unable to relinquish completely the Judeo-Christian figure of Eve as woman, this questor has the need to see the primordial mother offer her, her sisters, and all humankind the promise of the eventual re-emergence of the feminine spirit lost in the development and dominion of Patriarchal culture.³

This promise is made by the imagery that suggests a metamorphosis of the feminine in the description of the primordial mother's experiences in the cove. One of the first descriptions of the woman suggests that she, as the feminine spirit, is newly-born. Her appearance is that of a nymph or caterpillar of an insect on a leaf:

A Paraguayan hammock hung suspended from the rafters on the porch. On it, a dark complexioned woman, short and round of limb, was stretched out and fanning herself with a rush fan. . . . She was wearing a thin transparent dress which distinctly revealed the prominent features of her body. The hammock rocked under the weight of this small solid body.
(114)

The imagery of metamorphosis is reinforced both literally and symbolically when the woman is tricked and ensnared by Don Alcibiades. After she is tricked into following

him to the cove, the woman's dependency on his control of the jungle's lush resources lulls her into a state of lethargic complacency. She forgets the past promises of Don Alcibiades within the insulating jungle. The story states of her leisure:

[El Ciro], in addition to driving the animals to the water trough, neutered them, butchered them from time to time, prepared the meals, and occasionally did the laundry. He also transferred the hammock from one porch to another in search of a little shade, with or without the woman in it. (115)

Don Alcibiades' first trickery has resulted in the woman's temporary lack of resistance to his claim on her, and, in this sense, she is ensnared by him. She becomes indifferent, as if in a state of dormancy. Symbolically, the hammock offers her the same leisure. The woman, lying always in the hammock, her every need provided, is imaged in the story as if she were an insect in the chrysalis stage of metamorphosis. The cocoon imagery of the woman is initiated in the passage above when El Ciro moves the hammock with the woman in it. The motif of metamorphosis is extended when El Ciro's view of the woman implies that the feminine, which her image represents, is beginning to emerge from its dormant state: "Crouching, as he always did, he viewed the woman out of the corner of his eye. "She stretched and then undid her blouse; it was as if the buttons were hurting her chest" (116). Note that the servant, El Ciro, is conscious of an inner vibrancy encapsulated by the woman's outer appearance, and he is attracted to that vibrancy. The attraction suggests that she is his *anima*. He is the Adam to her Eve in Judeo-Christian terms. This vibrancy and determination in the feminine is the attraction, the *anima*, that Eros found in his lover, Psyche, as well. Levinson continues the description of El Ciro's

attraction to her in terms combining both the living-sleep of metamorphosis and the literal meaning of Psyche's name:

Stretched out on the hammock, fanning herself, her face impassive, it was only her body that moved, undulating over the netting, multiplying its flutterings like thousands of brilliant underwater fish disputing among themselves in an unnatural environment, to no end; all a bit monstrous. (116)

The consummation of El Ciro's desire results in the death of the "sinful" couple, but before her death the woman becomes aware of the world into which she has been reborn: "The woman half parted her lips. A white corporeal peace spread over the ruddy earth where there were no birds: The woman's outcry startled her very self. A shot rang out and El Ciro, rigid with the last death rattle, fell over the rolling earth, beneath the hammock" (116). It is a world that denies fulfillment to its inhabitants. This realization is confirmed and her rebirth is arrested when the Patriarchal creator, Don Alcibiades, binds up her growing spirit in the hammock with his lasso, intending to leave her there to die in the sun.

It is important to note, however, that the spirit is no longer dormant, and it strains at the boundaries of its forced imprisonment:

She began to twist and turn, the sun first on her right shoulder and hip, then covering all of that side. She positioned herself face up like a dead one. The sun beat down on her heavy breasts right under the rope; a purple nipple protruded through a small square in the netting. Her black hair was disheveled and covered her face, the entire mass of hair barely agape to allow her expression to wither. A moan, barely perceptible and monotonous, accompanied the swaying of hips, like the cooing of a wild beast, if indeed a wild beast does coo; the sound emanated was a brow depressed by the hair falling over it. (116)

The spirit, anxious to emerge, first in desperation and then in a hope to fulfill her destiny, plans her own deceit: "If she knew how to call to him, entice him to come to her, he would pounce upon her, untie the knot and lasso and release the edges of the hammock. It would mean triumph for the woman; the female would have achieved dominance, life power and finally retributio" (119). When the patron approaches and taunts her, however, she rejects her plan to use her sexuality to gain only limited freedom, remembering his trickery and experiencing his treachery.

Ironically, it is Don Alcibiades' pride that brings an end to his domination. It is he who places the pistol, the means of liberation from him, in the hands of the woman. He had expected her to shoot El Ciro --to deny herself on his behalf. It is the same pride that prompts him to approach her and taunt her in her captivity, thinking perhaps that in this unnatural imprisonment, she is still the dormant creature she had been before. Inside the false cocoon, the desire for retribution is sparked by her memories, and memory is a cause for action. She opts instead for revenge: But when she comes to an awareness of what has been denied her, she uses the man's own weapon against him, not in any hope of saving herself, but in a last desperate attempt to reclaim her autonomy: "Her hatred was making its rightful claim in a tyranny born of ferocious majesty. It swelled within her, strained at her and she could no longer contain it" (119). The man is the source of his own affliction, delivering to the woman the means of his own death at her hands. The theft of power from the man is *rightful* according to Levinson, but the

Promethean theft is not without penalty. Her "sin" is a willful act, though of righteous indignation: "The revolver, now of no account and empty, remained in the hammock; she too remained in it. She had used the last bullet; she had produced the last sound that broke the murmurs, the boredom and the longing. For her it was the last sound on earth" (119). All the stolen power is spent in the struggle, with none left to pursue freedom for herself.

Levinson's myth not only embodies the history of the feminine, but predicts its future. Frequently within western culture, women have been forced into silence and absence, their true spirit truncated, their potential imprisoned and lost to cultural memory. As an allegory, Levinson's myth predicts the completion of the metamorphosis, foreshadowed when the rope which laces the hammock closed begins to unravel. It suggests that, through the arrival of the wanderer, the image of an indomitable feminine spirit can be reclaimed by the questor. The imprisonment of the feminine inhibits the development of the masculine as well, as is illustrated in the death of El Ciro, the "Adam" of Levinson's story. Since the feminine is the *anima* of the masculine, the masculine is truncated also. The eclipse of both the masculine and the feminine suggests that the unity that results from their consummation is a threat to the domination of the Patriarchal system. The recovery of the feminine makes possible the creation of a new world order based on wholeness rather than division.

Through her myth Levinson makes recoverable a femininity that was overpowered before it had attained the maturity which would have allowed it to

procreate. Instead, its image was destroyed, falling victim to the patriarchal system, before it was able to assert itself independently. Language is the turbine which, in sustaining the image, perpetuates power through its reinvestment in the mechanics of acquisition and control. The dynamic in language which allows the perpetuation is seated in the assignment of dichotomies. In a Patriarchal structure, the said "masculine" appropriates a quality for itself, thus establishing it as the norm or the ideal. This mechanism is self-maintaining through the masculine control of language, and, therefore, images. Western culture has eradicate the feminine from its consciousness because it renders the feminine inexpressible. Because it is inexpressible in language, the feminine is, therefore, *ahistorical*. Recovery has been made possible in this century, however, because of women's recent access to language through education. This access has permitted them a voice, which permits them Promethean theft of power through the use of language. Language as a reflection of the patriarchal agenda as well as a tool for its maintenance. Language as a weapon that insures control is given in Levinson's myth as the pistol that the woman uses to kill its owner, who, in turn, represents the self-perpetuating system of patriarchal control. It is language that allows for the image that Levinson creates for the feminine, and in her creation, suggests an appropriate archetype for the loss and recovery of the other part of humanity, the object of Psyche's search.

The desire for autonomy is the motivation for the defiance that results in both the fall and the triumph of the woman in Levinson's story. It is the same desire and spirit that the questor comes to recover. If the woman's "fall" marks the beginning of both her

punishment by oppression and her triumph over it, then the appearance of the wanderer-narrator is the fulfillment of her efforts--her final metamorphosis and a victory for the feminine. The story tells of the obliteration of the feminine by patriarchal dominance, and the result was the loss of Paradise to humankind. The narrative itself is the bridge that will tie the memory of that indomitable spirit that has been through the millennia, "a whispering dream" in the collective consciousness to an image that can make its influence tangible. The questor-writer is the "greater one" who will restore the feminine to the story of creation, and in doing so, reclaim what has been lost to humankind.

Zora Neale Hurston: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods. If a revival of the myths of these cults gives woman emotional satisfaction, it does so at the price of obscuring the real conditions of life. This is why they were invented in the first place. --Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*

The feminine that Djuna Barne's inserted into language in her *Nightwood* is given an image in the mythic mode of representation by Zora Neale Hurston in her monumental *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The archetypal representation of the myth of Psyche with the Persephone myth embedded in its center conforms to the metamorphosis model.⁴ The Persephone myth contains the imagery of a state of dormancy and entrapment, the state of arrested development that women's "homelife" has relegated to the feminine. The Psyche myth represents a feminine quest for self that brings about an escape from such entrapment. Janie, the main character of the novel, is both the Persephone and the

Psyche figure. Like Persephone, Janie escapes the entombment that is her plight for half of her life, and then, like Psyche in search of Eros, she finally unites with her animus. Janie is a liaison between the old order, where “de nigger woman is de mule uh de world,” (14) and a new one in which she finds the voice of both her gender and her race. Janie’s name, together with the experience of the novel that looks both at the past of the African American woman and her future as the experience, may suggest a connection with Janus, the goddess who looks both before and after in time. Hurston suggests through Janie’s quest that the union of anima-animus must be complete before the proliferation of the feminine voice can be possible. Hurston proposes through Janie’s experiences that the metamorphosis of the feminine from Persephone’s perpetual imprisonment to the fulfillment found in Psyche’s quest can only occur if the factor of difference is eradicated.⁵ The eradication makes possible the union of anima-animus in the birth of a new creature, represented in the classic image of Psyche, whose name means “butterfly.” It is only Psyche, fulfilled through her union with her animus, who is able to proliferate. The “voice” that Janie acquires in her quest is the only promise of the proliferation of the new creature that has emerged from Persephone’s tomb.

The story of Janie begins in the springtime when the pear tree blooms. Janie’s grandmother notices that the maturing girl has taken a liking to a local boy. In order to protect Janie from the harsh life from which she and Janie’s suffered, Nanny arranges a marriage between Janie and a local widower, Logan Killicks, who is hard working and owns his own land. The naïve Janie accepts the marriage, expecting love to come as a

matter of course. Instead she is isolated and lonely with no one to talk to while Killicks is in the field all day. When she becomes disillusioned with the marriage and disgusted with her husband, she is seduced into leaving with Jodie Starks, an ambitious blowhard whose speech is powerful. In the new town that he founds, Janie becomes Mrs. Mayor Starks and enjoys the talk of the community that takes place on the stage of her front porch. She is married to Joe for many years, but he always forbids her to participate in the front porch exchange, insisting that she be a centerpiece of his own prestige. At last, when he refuses to let her speak for herself when asked, she embarrasses him in front of the community. Because of the affront to his pride, he withers away and dies.

Janie continues to run their business after his death until she meets Tea Cake, a vivacious man who includes her as an equal. She follows him to the muck where she participates fully in the community there, usually on equal terms with him. On one occasion, however, he becomes jealous and attempts to restrict her. She is quick to put him in his place, but some damage is done to their relationship. Janie's devotion is restored to Teacake, however, when he defends her from a rabid dog that attacks her in a hurricane. Teacake eventually becomes rabid and Janie is forced to shoot him with his own gun to defend her own life. She is accused of his murder, but because of her testimony she is acquitted. At the end of the trial, she returns to the community founded by herself and Jodie, amid criticism of her independent ways, to tell her story to all who will listen.

The imagery of metamorphosis is found in the combination seed/insect imagery proscribed by the myths as the primary archetypal motifs employed by Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The opening of Janie's story finds her prone under the blooming pear tree, "soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. . . . So this was a marriage!" (10). In an image that parallels the pollination of the flowers by the bees to Janie's own coming of age, Hurston presents Janie's maturation as metamorphic: she is awakening to her own sexuality. Cyrena Pondrom, in her article "The Role of Myth in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," affirms that the relationship between the blooming pear tree and Janie's maturation marks her as a mythic figure:

[Janie's] nature is symbolized by the blooming pear tree, a powerful symbol of female fertility. . . . 'So Janie waited a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time. But when the pollen again gilded the sun and sifted down on the world she began to stand around the gate and expect things. What things? She didn't know exactly.' Janie here is deliberately presented as a primal and mythic figure. She measures time by the seasonal succession of blooming, growth (green time), harvest, and pollination (symbolically a cycle through death to rebirth), and she is so much at one with the fertile cycle of vegetation that she understands the very language of the seeds (themselves symbolic of a death that brings rebirth). (188-189)

Pondrom suggests that Persephone is one of the mythic images represented by Janie's relation to nature. Janie's first taste of love and her young figure poised at Nanny's gate looking toward the horizon suggest the quest of Psyche as well. It is at the gate where Janie kisses Johnny Taylor and that their images are reflected in the bee's pollination of the pear blossoms.

It is also at the gate where Janie's quest for fulfillment is postponed. As Nanny spies the awakening impulses of womanhood in the girl, she is startled into making hasty marriage arrangements for the girl. It is in marriage that the natural Psyche myth is replaced with that of Persephone. Persephone's symbolic death in winter and rebirth in the spring is cyclical and perpetual, the classical image of Stein's repeating rose. True to Stein's representation of her characters named Rose, Janie's first two marriages mirror the life-in-death role of women in Western culture, that role also represented archetypally in Persephone. In relation to the Persephone myth, Nanny serves as a Demeter figure. In the myth, Demeter attempts to free Persephone from her underground entombment through negotiations with Zeus. However, Zeus's conditions on setting Persephone free constitute a trap by which she seems to be responsible for her own imprisonment. The compromise that is reached between Demeter and the patriarch only insures a living death for both Persephone and her mother. Rather than being allowed to succumb to death, the enthrallment insures that they will only be free enough to produce for sake of and under the control of the established order. Wearing the mantle of Demeter as victim-enforcer of patriarchal dictates, Nanny desires to set her granddaughter free from the social and sexual oppression from which she, her daughter, and women in general suffer, but her means are limited to possibilities found within the economy of the patriarchal order. Nanny's ultimate desires are sacrificed in exchange for the promise of economic protection that adherence to patriarchal law promises to women. In marrying Janie to the

older but propertied Logan Killicks, Nanny entombs her in an insulating, though stifling, situation.

Like an ungerminated seed or a chrysalized larvae, Janie's potential for self realization lies dormant during her first two marriages. Because she is a black woman, Janie is silenced by both her social status and by her gender. Her emergence involves a change in social environment as well as a transformation in form. As a farmer and a father, Logan Killicks is a patriarchal figure. Mythologically, he is Hades, whose actions on his own behalf cost the earth and its inhabitants half of the plenty for which it was originally endowed. Under his domination, Janie is the seed which falls by the wayside. She is shut away from society and any stimulation that might allow her growth. As a result of Killicks' appropriation of her, Janie is disadvantaged doubly in the pursuit of fulfillment. First, like a seed which falls on hard ground, or a cocoon which does not receive the impetus that sunshine and warmth provide in bloomtime, Janie has no chance for germination. She remains inside the tomb of Logan's house, knowing a loss, yet too much in darkness to even know its substance.

Life is hopeless in such a situation, and Janie's state of hopelessness is expressed when Janie sees the wind carry the seeds away in the springtime: "She often spoke to falling seeds and said, 'I hope you fall on soft ground,' because she heard the seeds saying that to each other as they passed" (24). An image of Persephone in the Netherworld yearning for the freedom of a remembered time is evoked in the continuation of the passage: "The familiar people and things had failed her, so she hung

over the gate and looked up the road towards way off. She knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie's first dream was dead, so she became a woman" (24). The epiphany that her first dream was dead is equated with Janie's becoming a woman. *Becoming* marks a change in definition. That change in this passage is equated with death. This death is only the end of the old form, and between the death of Janie's innocence and her rebirth to womanhood is dissolution, the time in metamorphosis when the caterpillar and the butterfly are "one" (Shaviro 2). Dissolution is important to metamorphosis because it makes a new form possible. This hope for metamorphosis is embedded within the same passage: "She knew the world was a stallion rolling in a blue pasture of ether. She knew that God tore down the old world every evening and built a new one by sun-up. It was wonderful to see it take form with the sun and emerge from the gray dust of its making" (24). It is Janie's intuitive stirring, however, that makes her perceptive of the possibility of change. Like the seed being picked up by the wind, or like Persephone winding up the long path from the underworld, Janie is carried up the long road away from Logan Killick's farm by the windbag, Jodie Starks.

Though Janie's marriage to Jodie Starks remedies her isolation from society, her existence is still limited by his control over her. The quality of her life is reminiscent of Persephone's limited existence in the upper world. Intuitively, Janie knows that Jodie's marriage proposal will not free her, but she feels that it will give her a greater chance at the freedom she desires. Hurston says of Janie's initial response to Jodie's invitation: "Janie pulled back a long time because he [Jodie] did not represent sun-up and pollen and

blooming trees, but he spoke for the far horizon. He spoke for change and chance" (28).

As the words prophesy, Janie escapes with Jodie from social isolation, but she is still eclipsed from free interaction within her society by her mayor-husband's demands that she must be silent to be a proper "lady." Jodie proscribes her role with him when he courts her. He says: "A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you" (28).

While Killicks treated Janie as a Plutonium treasure, hidden away from light and humanity, Starks intends to make Janie an ornament of his own acquisition of wealth and power. In his own shining, he leaves no room for hers. At his death, Janie acknowledges the eclipse of her being in a patriarchal world when she tells Jodie: "Ah run off tuh keep house wid you in uh wonderful way. But you wasn't satisfied wid me de way Ah was. Naw! Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me" (82).

Janie's life first with Logan Killicks and then with Jodie Starks reflects the life of the feminine historically and archetypally. Visible at first as "the maiden," women are raptured, and then the seed of their identity shut away from the light, their exchange and rapt production being sanctioned and even promoted by Patriarchal law. Archetypally, Patriachal law finds image in Zeus' denial of Persephone's freedom. Like a larva or a seed, the feminine holds the potential, but not the opportunity, to fulfill its capacity within the promise of creation. The feminine remains dormant within social spheres where the power and wealth it brings do not illuminate the confines of the home, which is

the cocoon of the feminine. The dictates of patriarchal law cause Janie, as the “maiden,” to fall into a stark existence on Logan Killicks’ farm. She is like a seed that cannot control its own destiny, and she falls on ground that cannot nurture her existence, where becoming a “woman” is a pronouncement of living death. Still the seed, Janie is picked up in the tailwind created by Jodie Starks’ ambition, and placed, like “a pretty baby-doll” on the front porch of his more bountiful household. Like a doll, a lifeless representation of life, she is an ornament of Stark’s success and a scapegoat on which he projects his own shortcomings.

Janie’s move from Killicks’ household to Starks’ front porch, however, places her at the social and economical crossroads of her community, the “soft ground” where the seed of her spirit germinates. Historically, this move would mirror the change in social and economical ambiance that the Renaissance afforded men, and by extension, women. Stark’s Eatonville (“Eden” is implied) is the creation of a community where the families are free from the curse of their past enslavement. In its new beginning, it brings the men to autonomy and brings the women, because of their affiliation, one step closer to it (though they are still spoken of with the same respect that the men afford their mules). Janie’s imagination grows as she follows the lively banter of the men of the community. As Starks forbids her to participate in the community exchange, either formally or informally, she comes to realize the restrictive nature of her existence. The realization indicates the waking of the spirit that was lost when the maiden became a woman: Dolan Hubbard says of Janie’s growing spirit:

The imaginative freedom that the big-picture talkers have on the front porch contrasts with Janie's despair inside the store, where she listens with the dumb obedience of a mule. . . . The restricted space gnaws away at her soul. Squeezed out of the big picture, an appendage that derives her identity through her husband, Mrs. Mayor Starks finds herself ensnared in a choking kind of love; this is not what she envisioned under the pear tree. (172)

Janie realizes that, because she is not allowed a voice, she is still isolated, cocooned from the life of the community. She is not allowed to present her version of the mule story on the porch where "the people sat around on the porch and passed around pictures of their thoughts for the others to look at and see . . ." (48).

This passage presents language as the currency of culture. Just as Janie realizes that she, too, ought to have the opportunity to invest in the life that takes place on the front porch, so women have come to realize that language, writing, does not have to be in sole possession of men. Wresting the power that language bestows from the hands of those who have traditionally held it, however, has proven to be a difficult struggle. Women who speak out as women have been either shamed or ridiculed, the reaction depending on whether they spoke like a man (like society expects men to speak) or like women (like society expects women to speak, that is, in a manner which may be judged inferior in manner and style to the writing of men). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, this struggle is exemplified in the scene of Stark's inauguration as mayor. In it, Janie is asked to give "uh few words uh encouragement" to the crowd at the town meeting. Mayor Starks immediately curtails the possibility when he cuts in: "Thank yuh fuh yo'

compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (40-41).

The mere denial, however, stirs resentment in Janie because it makes her realize the possibilities that are denied to her:

Janie made her face laugh after a short pause, but it wasn't too easy. She had never thought of making a speech, and didn't know if she cared to make one at all. It must have been the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another that took the bloom off things. But anyway, she went down the road behind him that night feeling cold. (41)

In this instance, Janie is empowered by the community's recognition of her, but that power is usurped by her husband before she can claim it. His action binds her in her cocoon against her will just as she receives the call to emerge from it.

To this point in the narrative, Janie's actions are involuntary. She has been the seed carried along by others, but because of the germination that has taken place in the nurturing environment of the Mayor's front porch, she must either force her emergence or die trying. After Jodie's first denial, Janie tries to resist the urge to strain against her restrictions, an attempt to simply maintain the status quo by resisting the struggle, as a compromise between comfort and life:

The years took all the fight out of Janie's face. For a while she thought it was gone from her soul. No matter what Jody did, she said nothing. She had learned how to talk some and leave some. She was a rut in the road. Plenty of life beneath the surface but it was kept beaten down by the wheels. Sometimes she stuck out into the future, imagining her life different from what it was. But mostly she lived between her hat and her heels, with her emotional disturbances like shade patterns in the woods-- come and gone with the sun. She got nothing from Jody except what money could buy, and she was giving away what she didn't value. (72)

Janie's eventual victory over this denial is presented in terms of the neophyte emerging from its seedcoat. Words themselves, which Janie acquires and uses to her benefit, are the means of her empowerment and the weapon she uses against her husband, who would deny her the life that she seeks.

In imagery, it is Jodie, by bringing Janie onto his "porch" where she has learned the importance of language, who serves as the seed for her germination. Like the seed that contains the neophyte, he must die so that she can live. Janie begins to come into her own only when she cannot longer contain herself within the bond of his control over her. Years after the romance left their marriage, Jodie slaps Janie. The slap seems to awaken her:

Janie stood where he left her for a measured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jodie tumbled down and shattered. But looking at it, she saw it never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams. Just something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over. In a way she turned her back upon the image where it lay and looked further. She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where the petals used to be She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them. (67-68)

As Janie grows in her discontentment with Jodie and in contentment with her own imaginings, she notices that Jodie, like a withering seedcoat, begins to sag and shrink:

Joe wasn't so young as he used to be. There was already something dead about him. He didn't rear back in his knees any longer. He squatted over his ankles when he walked. That stillness at the back of his neck. His prosperous-looking belly that used to thrust out so pugnaciously and intimidate folks, sagged like a load suspended from his loins. It didn't seem to be a part of him anymore. Eyes a little absent too. (73)

As Jodie begins to feel his age, he projects his discontent upon Janie, telling her in public, “. . . You ain’t no young girl to be gettin’ all insulted ‘bout yo’ looks. You ain’t no young courtin’ gal. You’se uh ole woman, nearly forty” (75). Upon his ridicule of her in public, she turns his words back upon him in public as well, delivering a fatal blow to his male dignity. She retorts: “ You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but ‘taint nothin’ to it but yo’ big voice. Humph! Talkin’ ‘bout *me* lookin’ old! When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life” (75). Hurston comments Jodie’s accelerated deterioration due to Janie’s refusal to be a mirror to his male vanities: “Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish. . . . she had cast down his empty armor among men and they had laughed” (75). After losing his dignity in public, Jodie continues to deteriorate as Janie separates from him, his appearance described in terms of sagging bags and dripping candles. She delivers the death blow to him as she declares his fault in his own fate: “All dis bowin’ down, all dis disobedience under yo’ voice--dat ain’t whut Ah rushed off down de road tuh find out about you”(82). Such words echo the disobedience of Psyche when she sheds light on her lover who has “monstrously” insisted on her never really seeing who he is.⁶ In his death, Janie emerges from the obedience that has bound her inside his control, and, like Psyche, she finds the being that she left behind in the mirror where she had left her when she entered into the dormancy of marriage.

Through Janie’s renunciation of Jodie, Hurston identifies voice as a means of definition. At Jodie’s death, Janie “thought back and forth about what had happened in

the making of a voice out of a man" (83). It is Jodie's big voice, his ability to speak out and influence others, that brings him power. Janie's appropriation of voice is a Promethean theft of power from the Patriarchal system that Jodie and the porch community represent. The appropriation makes Janie a viable adversary, a circumstance that literally takes the wind out of him. Since his power is nothing but "wind," or voice, he cannot survive the attack. The imagery of Janie as the seedling, growing as she siphons power from Jodie, her source, marks her emergence as the sprouting of the seedling. The seed must die for new life to begin. Janie's emergence marks the end of a Persephone-like existence, as her husband's control over her life is broken. The opening of Chapter Nine, almost halfway through the novel, celebrates her reclamation to the world of the living. She is a reborn creature on her way to the fulfillment promised her before her marriage by the blooming pear tree by Nanny's gate.

These first nine chapters can just as well represent the nine months in which Psyche searches for her "other." Nine chapters later still, in Chapter Eighteen, the metamorphosis is repeated, but this time it is in terms of the emergence of the butterfly, the creature for whom Psyche is named. This emergence imagistically sets in motion a means of procreation of the power that Janie has claimed, and, thereby, a permanent release from masculine domination. In the chapters in between Chapters Nine and Eighteen, Janie, under her own will and power now, sets out on a quest of romance and fulfillment. Her "other" is found in the person of Tea Cake. Like carefree creatures they romp the Everglades together, celebrating their life and love with one another for two

years. They are separated from one another, however, when a hurricane--reminiscent of Psyche's chaos--separates them. The chaos also represents the dissolution, the primordial mass into which the larvae disintegrates within the chrysalis as a condition for reformation and emergence. In an image recognizable as Psyche's flight, the emergence of the butterfly from the cocoon, or the dicotyledon that pushes itself out of the ground, Janie is borne away from Tea Cake as she sails away on a piece of roofing.

Tea Cake is further lost to her in his reclamation by masculinity. The rabid dog who bites Tea Cake in his attempt to rescue Janie from the lake waters is representative of Cerberus. It is as if hell has come in the chaos of the hurricane to reclaim Janie under the Persephone myth. Though he saves Janie from the storm, Tea Cake succumbs to the madness of rabies. In his madness, his tendency toward masculine control, which had only been slightly evident before that time, is exaggerated until he threatens to take Janie's life. In a scene reminiscent of Jodie Stark's death, Janie kills Tea Cake with his own pistol to save herself from him. In both cases, Janie's self preservation is through a Promethean theft of masculine power. The difference in both cases is that Janie mourns the death of Tea Cake, whereas she has celebrated her freedom. Jodie had been her master, but she and Tea Cake had shared life and love side by side as equals, and in him she found fulfillment of herself. It is only when his masculinity began to come between them that the wholeness she has found with him is threatened. Imagistically, the physical death of Tea Cake restores the lost Eros to Psyche. Hurston shows how Tea Cake is

restored as Janie's *animus* as she returns to Eatonville at the end of her quest. As she remembers the events of her life, she imagines:

Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit on top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. (184)

Whereas Janie had been denied the prospect of fulfilling her life cycle under the domination of Jodie, that cycle is fulfilled in Tea Cake. In the storm, she told him: "If you kin see de light at daybreak, you don't keer if you die at dusk. It's so many people never seen de light at all. Ah wuz fumblin' round and God opened the door" (151). Janie's metamorphosis, denied her in her first two marriages, is completed in her union with Tea Cake, and her quest is complete.

Janie's return to Eatonville fulfills her obligation of procreation to humanity in the discipleship between herself and Phoeby that Hurston establishes in Chapter 2. Janie's narrative of her own life cycle, now bequeathed as a matriarchal legacy begins as Janie relates the first of her story in Chapter 2: "Phoeby's hungry listening helped Janie to tell her story. So she went on thinking back to her young years and explaining them to her friend in soft, easy phrases while all around the house, the night time put on flesh and blackness" (10).. In her quest, the bee has sucked the nectar of the blossom, and pollination is complete. The end of her adventure will yield the beginning of new life, and Hurston, through Janie, moralizes on the affect her the legacy of her story will have on her disciples: "Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go

tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves" 183). In telling her story to Phoeby, Janie creates the offspring that will benefit from her quest. Because of the Promethean theft of power, which she has stolen through the acquisition of the voice she uses to tell her story, the legacy that she passes on to her offspring is unflawed. Janie's version of the quest eradicates the captivity of Persephone that had for so long been an intrusion in and an interruption of the true myth. The Psyche archetype that replaces it in Hurston's narrative is a representation of humanity without sexual division. Psyche here is a universal archetype of a new order, one that Hurston hopes to propose through her novel. Of Janie's contentment, Hurston says: "She pulled in her horizon like a great fishnet. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see" (184). In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston takes the reader on a quest to the horizon and back again in hopes that humanity can reap the benefits of a full net.

Notes

¹M. Esther Harding (*Woman's Mysteries, Ancient and Modern*, New York: Bantam, 1973, p. 121) quotes Merlin Stone: "evidence from Sumer, Babylon, Canaan, Anatolia, Cyprus, Greece and even the Bible [revealing] that despite the fact the concept of marriage was known in the earliest written records, married women, as well as single, continued to live for periods of time within the temple complex and to follow the ancient sexual customs of the Goddess. The Bible itself reveals that these women were free to come and go as they pleased" (*When God Was a Woman*, Harvest, 1976, p.155).

²See Chapter 4, note 4.

³Relative to the reflexive quality of "The Cove" and the matriarchal legacy passed on to the narrator from her primordial mother, one should note that the author of "The Cove," Luisa Mercedes Levinson was the mother of her more well-known daughter, author Luisa Valenzuela.

⁴In "The Role of Myth in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," (*American Literature* 58:2, 185-186) Cyrena Pondrom relates the seed and vegetation imagery associated with Janie in the novel to Ishtar, a Babylonian fertility goddess, as well as Isis, the Egyptian goddess, and Aphrodite.

⁵Many French feminists, Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous among them, theorize that "difference" between the sexes, beyond mere physical manifestations, is only a perception -- that "difference" results from the systematic dichotomy that results from the hierarchical system that by which man "makes sense" of his world. In the feminist appropriation of Lacan's description of the "other," the feminine and the masculine both search for the part of their "bisexual" self that is forbidden them through this divvying up of human qualities between the sexes. The part of themselves for which they search is equivalent to Jung's *anima* and *animus*. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it is this dichotomous division that Janie seeks to eliminate in her quest for her *animus*.

⁶According to some versions of the Psyche myth, Psyche's sisters taunt her into disobedience to Eros' demand that Psyche never seek to look at him. The sisters suggest to Psyche that he may be a monster. It was indeed "monstrous" of him to demand such blind obedience of her, subjugating her to his whim.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

It is incredible, and I speak now without irony, that millions of human beings have not yet understood that current demands made by women are simply limited to requiring that a man stop thinking of a woman as a colony for him to exploit and that she become instead the country in which he lives. --Victoria Ocampo, 1936

The works examined in this volume represent only a sampling of the works by twentieth-century women in which a full or partial motif of metamorphosis can be discerned. While the narratives in this study represent a very sparse scattering of works over the span of this century, they were also selected to represent the writing of women in both continents of the Americas and to represent various social and ethnic groups. Numerous other well-known twentieth-century works could have been included; e. g. Isabel Allende's *House of Spirits* and *Eva Luna*, Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* and *Cat's Eye*, and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, as well as numerous short stories by lesser known writers. My purpose, however, is to introduce the metamorphosis motif as an interpretive instrument for critical analysis in narratives written by women. Sweeping conclusions concerning the nature and direction of female quest fiction and its use of the metamorphosis motif is hardly justified by such a limited study as I have made in this volume, but I would like to make some observations concerning the use of the metamorphosis that may inform future studies.

A survey of works that incorporate this motif shows that, generally, the motif is incomplete, and therefore less easily discerned, in works produced in the first half of this century (see works included in Chapters II and III of this study). As in a few of the works presented here, the metamorphosis motif may be eclipsed by stronger images but still be present. For example, the trapeze in *Nightwood*, because it represents the artist's attempt to break free from the traditions of masculinized writing, is representative of the awakening insect that struggles to free itself from the prison of the cocoon. In *Nightwood*, the bird-egg imagery is a manifestation of the metamorphosis motif. The hatching bird, like the emerging butterfly, has a physical separation, a shell, between itself and the outer world. It is born independent from its parents, and its survival outside the protective shell is dependent on the receptiveness of the environment into which it emerges. Stein's ever-imprisoned rose in the character of Melanctha encapsulates the same struggle as much on the part of the feminine as on the part of the artist. "Rose" is doomed always to return to its form in spite of its attempts to escape through the barrier of definition. In this facet, the concept of the rose is like the Barnes' trapeze that is anchored to a set convention, or like the insect whose cocoon proves to be inescapable.

That "Melanctha" and *Nightwood* are from the early part of the twentieth century suggests another point concerning the use of metamorphosis motif: that it is developing over time. Like the image of the feminine that the writers of these narratives are attempting to define, the motif itself is not fixed or complete in works of the first half of the century as a medium for communicating the idea of the emergence of the feminine

simply because emergence itself was a doubtful thing to the women writers of the early twentieth century. The motif is more complete (though only to the point of emergence, with the procreation stage being only hoped for) in the works examined here from the latter half of the century. This generalization about the image of emergence is especially relevant to works produced by women after 1970 (note the works included in Chapter IV). The explanation of this phenomenon is that feminist works by early twentieth-century authors such as Gilman, Stein, Bombal, Lispector, and Barnes, as well as the critical reception of those works, had succeeded only by the latter half of the century in creating a sustaining cultural atmosphere for the emergence of the idea of the feminine. Therefore, emergence was only considered a strong possibility during the latter half of the century. Interestingly, however, it was the earlier works that laid the foundation of subversive writing techniques on which later writers established more hopeful works.

Chapter V, however, includes two notable exceptions to the assumption that the metamorphosis motif is progressive in women's quest fiction according to the receptivity of the culture. The two works in Chapter V, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Levinson's "The Cove," exhibit a clear use of the metamorphosis motif, with the images of the cocoon and its rupture by the emerging creature clearly discernible. In attempting an explanation for this phenomenon, I must refer back to my argument in the introduction to this study that women are searching for an image that expresses the internal quest rather than the external quest typical of mythic hero. While female characters such as Antigone, Hester Prynne, and Alice are certainly central to their own

adventures, their quests mirror the typical male quest—where the hero adventures outwardly from a center dwelling place to make a discovery that enables him make a change upon his return. In this respect, the image of Psyche as an archetypal representation of the feminine quest moves in the wrong direction for the conception that modern feminist writers have of the quest for the feminine. Psyche's search is outside a closed space: she leaves her home, she visits Persephone, and then she finds her *animus* outside herself. Her metamorphosis is complete within the scope of the quest because it is an outer search that projects into the future conditions for the creation of the feminine rather than conditions contemporary to the writer.

The fact that the Psyche myth fails in Levinson's story, and that Janie is forced to kill off her *animus*, Tea Cake, in Hurston's novel are both indications of why later feminist writers often avoid images that suggest Psyche's search more directly. Neither the main character of "The Cove" nor Janie of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* experiences inner dissolution, a disorientation in self-concept necessary to the re-forming of the individual. Their quests are portrayed primarily as outer quests, such as that of Psyche. The metamorphosis motif as it is used in each of the two narratives support the outer quest, and any inward quest is assumed by the reader at best. The fact that the return by the questor in each story is not a reality for the time in which the narrative was written, and indicates that the pattern of the traditional male quest is not appropriate during this century, at least, to women writers' expression of their own search. Through their narratives, these women writers attempt to revise the mythologies of the father

culture to include at least a feminine, if not a universal, image of the quest that they portray in their narratives. M. Esther Harding expresses the necessity of the expression to western culture when she says that the rebirth and similar experiences:

. . . bring to conscious the lost values of the psyche, which lie so largely in the realm of Eros, and by this means the human being becomes more complete. In terms of the ancient religions it would be said that through participating at various stages of the mystery initiations man are born again and become a "twice-born" spirit. For when a man or woman submits to the laws or principles of his own being and gives up the personal orientation of the ego he gradually defines the limits of his own nature and the individuality crystallizes within him. (245-6)

Since the quests in both Hurston's and Levinson's narratives employ the male quest model (a spiraling outer search of the traditionally male questor) each central character must kill off the man that stands in the way of her equal access to such reification as Harding describes.

Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Levinson's "The Cove," then, can afford to exhibit the full cycle of metamorphosis because they are Utopian. The Psyche myth is the central motif, and images of metamorphosis are supportive of it. Both narratives have a futuristic focus because the procreation of the feminine voice that they propose was not possible at the time the narratives were written. If the survival of Eatonville is Utopian¹ in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's acquisition of an authoritative voice within the gender-biased political structure of the town is even more visionary. Climate for the success that both narratives predict are clearly in the future for the time periods in which they were created. The impact of both narratives on the receptivity of culture had to wait until there were more willing disciples to assume the

voice. A regression in time is not a part of the metamorphosis of the main characters in either Levinson's or Hurston's narrative, but such a regression does take place in Levinson on the part of the narrator. In that case, the narrator is a time traveler who regresses to the archetypal primitive in order to retrieve the essence lost to her in the death of the main character of the allegory. It is the narrator, and perhaps her culture in the future, that is the emerging feminine according to the motif used by Levinson. It is the Eve/Psyche figure, the woman of the cove, that forfeits autonomy. The final phase of the metamorphosis that the narratives of Hurston and Levinson propose was postponed until the cultural and literary atmosphere was viable for procreation of the voice they present through their narratives. In essence, the feminine proposed in these two works emerged only after the procreation they propose actually took place in the latter half of the century.

However, the concern of the more modern feminist writer is to portray the emerging feminine as a creature independent and capable, and, in her own right, willing to co-exist with others who recognize the same spirit in themselves regardless of their gender. The displacement of the Psyche myth through the use of the motif of metamorphosis is an attempt by women writers to depict an inward quest that is recognized by women as necessary to their continued development. This discovery is not necessarily only for them to make, but it is women who feel the most need for self-sufficiency and fulfillment through the discovery of that identity termed in this study as "the feminine." The women writers who use the metamorphosis motif sense that the

“maleness” of Eros as “other” must be eliminated in order for the genuine “other” to be found. This elimination is part of the procreative process for the feminine and a prerequisite for the questor’s return, a return to a natural order that these writers seem to assume existed before the onset of patriarchal domination.

It has been the focus of this work to determine if, and by what means, the female quest heroine effects a return from her search. Through tracing a developing motif of metamorphosis from a sampling of women’s writing in this century from both North and South America, this study suggests that, though the works express the discovery of the feminine (awakening) and effectively express of images which carry that discovery (emergence), a return is still in the future. In nature as well as primitive society, the society is, largely, matriarchal. Propagation and procreation are accomplished with very little assistance from the male of the species. The male is only adjunct to the legacy of the procreative process. As the narrator in *Surfacing* proposes, after mating is complete, maleness is dispensable. The implication of her proposition is that, apart from mating, the gender should not dictate the extent of personal autonomy afforded the individual. The contention that the motif is developing--the fullness its portrayal in particular works is dependent upon the cultural receptivity of feminine voice that the narrative represents—is suggested by the increasing emphasis on matriarchal bonding and a procreative intention expressed in the narratives. It is significant that the latest of the narratives do not exhibit the confidence in the accomplished success through procreation that the visionary works of Hurston and Levinson predict. However, the later narratives do express a hope and

confidence for that accomplishment in the future. As a fulfillment of that hope, the existence and increasing proliferation of the feminist quest narrative in the latter half of the century seem to validate the truth in Hurston's and Levinson's vision.

The use of the imagery suggesting metamorphosis in feminist quest fiction, then, is a motif that suggests an on-going discovery and propagation of the concept of the feminine. It is only through the expression of this concept that the image of the feminine can be imported into the culture. The advancement of the concept is a process that is dependent upon its own propagation and procreation in the world for survival and proliferation. Feminine quest fiction is a vehicle for the import of the feminine into the mainstream culture. A developing motif of metamorphosis that follows the models of self-awareness proposed in several feminist theories is making an appearance in the work of recent women writers. The use of the motif by writers separated by both distance and influence suggests an attempt by women writers to reject the "casting" of women's experience in the archetypal images prevalent in western culture. Like metamorphosis, the cultural evolution brought about through the expression of the feminine is one of continual new beginnings.

Notes

¹Although the founding of Eatonville in Hurston's novel is based on the founding of an actual all-Black community, that founding was experimental and Utopian as well.

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